



Vietnamese Perspectives on Vietnamese Migrants in Japan

Date: June 23rd, 14:00 - 16:00

Place: Sophia University, Yotsuya Campus,
Bldg. 10, Room 301

Please register from HERE: <https://forms.office.com/r/0C1RNj5Bwn>



Facing a similar problem with other Global North countries, Japan's aging population and labor shortage are serious threats to its economy. This has motivated the Japanese government to open its doors to accept more foreign migrant workers while remaining a seemingly homogenous country with restrictive immigration policies and mixed public sentiments. Although Vietnamese are the second-largest foreign population in Japan, little research has been done to understand the sentiments and attitudes of this ethnic group regarding how they perceive their life in Japan and migration decisions. With a hope to contribute to public and academic understanding of foreign migrant workers in Japan, this workshop will offer a multi-perspective view of the lived experiences of different Vietnamese migrant groups, how they are contributing to the Japanese economy, responding to life obstacles as well as negotiating different life trajectories to make settlement decisions. Viewing workers as individuals with agency, our workshop emphasizes that although their social identities as technical intern trainees, or full-time workers as well as gender identities might influence their life choices, these migrants are actively seeking solutions amidst adversities to negotiate the most desirable life pathway.

Program

Welcome to ICC

David Slater - Sophia University

Vietnamese Graduates of English-Taught Programs in Japan: Navigating Working and Dating Lives as Parts of the Educational “Niche”

Mai Chi Nguyen - Sophia University

Defining Dependency: Gender Roles of Vietnamese Families in the Japanese Economy

Phuong Anh Le - Waseda University

(Break)

Technical Intern Training Program: A Case Study of Vietnamese Technical Intern Trainees in 2019 - 2023

Bao Quyen Tran - Sophia University

Vietnamese Skilled Migrants’ Life in Japan: Their Strategies for Social Mobility and Identity Negotiation

Hong Vy Huynh Vu - Waseda University

Paper Abstracts and Scholar Bios

Vietnamese Graduates of English-Taught Programs in Japan: Navigating Working and Dating Lives as Parts of the Educational “Niche”

Mai Chi Nguyen - Sophia University

Mai Chi Nguyen is an M.A. student in the Graduate Program in Global Studies, Sophia University. Her research interests include educational mobility, gender, and sexuality and how they entangle with migration. Her current research focuses on the lived experiences of Vietnamese white-collar workers, especially those graduating from English-taught programs in Japan.

Vietnamese is currently the second largest group of international students in Japan. As the Japanese government makes multiple efforts to internationalize its educational environment, an increasing number of universities offer English-taught programs (ETPs), which makes Japan an even more attractive destination for higher education, especially for Vietnamese who can speak English, because these programs allow them to enjoy affordable higher education without the need for Japanese language training. Many of the graduates from these programs then proceed to work in Japan, leading to the rise of an educational “niche” who occupy distinct positions in the globalized workforce thanks to their English skills. This study, therefore, aims to examine how the institutionalization of English as a global language, evident

in English-taught programs, transcends educational settings to shape graduates' working and romantic lives. The institutionalization of English helps to shape English proficiency as desirable in both economic and sexual fields, thus influencing ETP students' lives in Japan even after they graduate. Exploring the lived experiences of Vietnamese female ETP graduates who are working in Japan, this study will reveal how English impacts their lives, and in turn, their future pathways, to understand the entanglement of educational mobility with other forms of mobility, specifically economic and sexual mobilities.

Defining Dependency: Gender Roles of Vietnamese Families in the Japanese Economy

Phuong Anh Le - Waseda University

Phuong Anh Le is a Ph.D. candidate in International Studies at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, and a research assistant at the Waseda Institute of Asian Migrations. Her research focuses on the social and economic practices of Vietnamese immigrants in Japan.

According to Japanese immigration law, the legally married spouse and legal children of a migrant worker are eligible for a dependent visa. They can apply for one in Japan or from outside the country and then come to Japan for a reunion. In my observation, this visa type is also appealing to Vietnamese international students who choose to get married to other Vietnamese immediately to apply for a dependent visa despite being eligible to do job hunting here. This often creates a family dynamic where one spouse gets a working visa, while the other adopts the dependent status. This study, therefore, aims to answer the following questions: Why do some Vietnamese students pursue a dependent visa after graduation instead of a working visa? How do they negotiate this dependence status in the context of transnational families? While most existing literature focuses on international marriage between foreign wives and native husbands, this study delves into the decision-making process of migrant workers and how they navigate and negotiate their gender roles in transnational families outside their home country—where men are usually perceived as the breadwinners. This comparative study of male-led and female-led families on the experiences of Vietnamese dependent visa holders in Japan also explores the link between post-secondary international student mobility and the labor market, as well as dependent visa holders' participation in the economy.

Technical Intern Training Program: A Case Study of Vietnamese Technical Intern Trainees in 2019 - 2023

Bao Quyen Tran - Sophia University

Bao Quyen Tran is an alumna of the Graduate Program in Global Studies, Sophia University. Her research interest lies in the changing patterns of inbound migration in contemporary Japanese society. For her M.A. dissertation, she focused on the current Vietnamese technical intern trainees, examining their experiences in the Technical Intern Training program through in-depth narratives.

This study is a continuation of my previous work that explores the lived experiences of Vietnamese technical intern trainees in Japan, a community which currently accounts for more than 51% of the total

number of technical intern trainees. The Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) brings young to middle-aged people from developing countries to Japan with a stated incentive to transfer skill, technology, and knowledge to the trainees' home countries. However, the acceptance of technical intern trainees has brought criticism for doing little more than covering the chronic labor shortage in blue-collar jobs, many of which Japanese people do not favor in recent years. Therefore, analysis on the trainee's trajectories after TITP serves as a critical benchmark to reconsider the program's actual objectives. Drawing from participant observation and in-depth interviews with 23 technical trainees, my research conducted in 2019 highlights the financial and non-financial difficulties faced by the trainees. Aligning with the earlier project, this research aims to give an updated overview of the above-mentioned informants' trajectories after a 4-year span. Among the 23 interviewees, this study centers on the narratives of those who are still residing in Japan under either technical intern trainee visa or other status, looking at the self-motives that shape their settlement decision-making as well as the different circumstances that permit their migration process.

Vietnamese Skilled Migrants' Life in Japan: Their Strategies for Social Mobility and Identity Negotiation

Hong Vy Huynh Vu - Waseda University

Hong Vy Huynh Vu is a Ph.D. candidate in International Studies at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University. She got her M.A. in Japanese Studies at Sophia University. Her current research focuses on the lived experiences of Vietnamese high-skilled migrants in Japan.

This paper examines Vietnamese high-skilled migrants' lived experience in Japan and their strategies for social mobility during their cross-cultural adaptation. Among these, many have attained the Engineer/Specialist in Humanities/International services visa, and are working at white-collar jobs, contributing significantly to the labor force. Indeed, although Japan has been known as a seemingly homogenous country, such high-skilled workers are considered as desired human resources and expected to stay long-term in Japan. Nevertheless, many Vietnamese high-skilled migrants admit a lack of sense of belonging living in Japan and find the country unappealing to settle down. Discourse on the increase in crimes related to Vietnamese technical intern trainees or language students has been frequently circulated by both countries' media, creating moral panic and stereotyping Vietnamese as being destitute and poorly educated. Such discourse deepens Vietnamese high-skilled migrants' pre-existent inferiority complex towards Japan. Many perceive negative social stigmas towards their ethnic community as a hindrance to their attempt to gain social acceptance in Japan. Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews with Vietnamese high-skilled migrants, this study examines the challenges they are facing in their work and life as ethnically Vietnamese and the identity negotiation strategies they apply to regain their sense of agency and self-worth.

Sophia University Institute of Comparative Culture: <https://www.icc-sophia.com/>

Access: <https://www.sophia.ac.jp/eng/aboutsophia/access/campus/>

Join the ICC Mailing list: <https://forms.office.com/r/NNgXg6sEmU>