

# SETTLING DOWN

THE STRUGGLES  
OF MIGRANT WORKERS  
TO ADAPT



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TO ADAPT

*Edited by*

**Benny Hari Juliawan, SJ**



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ASIA PACIFIC  
CONFERENCE

## **Settling Down**

### **The Struggles of Migrant Workers to Adapt**

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# Introduction

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The term migrant worker conveys a certain sense of mobility which often disguises the fact that many of them actually spend most of their time being grounded in one locality, either in the country of destination or in the home country when they return. In the countries of destination, a big number of migrant workers continuously extend their stay through either regular or irregular means. Their employment status may be precarious but their continuous presence in the country makes them practically members of the population, even if only temporarily, with all the consequences. Most migrant workers, however, will eventually return to their home countries. After being away for a long duration of time, going home is not as simple as commuting back from work in the office. It often entails labourious processes of economic, social and cultural reintegration.

Integrating migrant workers either in the destination or home countries is an important area of research. It offers a window into interactions between diverse groups of people in a complex migratory setting. Integration in host societies typically revolves around the issues of equality of treatment, access to public services, fair and

decent working and living conditions and social cohesion. Many countries adopt a different set of laws to regulate migrant workers which often provide fewer benefits than those afforded by standard labour laws. Furthermore, the migrants' nationality and immigration status make them prone to discrimination, abuse and racism. What are the institutional barriers for economic, social and cultural integration for migrants in the host country? How have these barriers shaped migrant communities in terms of employment, housing, access to public services and citizenship rights? What are the practical ways that civil society actors can support to improve integration? And how do migrant workers strategise to face difficulties, overcome obstacles and pursue their professional and personal aspirations in the communities where they stay and work?

The reintegration of returning migrants poses a different kind of issues. Family reunion is definitely a big concern in cases where family members have lived separately for an extended period of time. Families often have to pay the cost in the form of separation, infidelity, absent parenting and other forms of mental disorder associated with dislocation. Women in particular may face negative community attitudes when returning. They may have appropriated skills, lifestyles, values and worldviews of their host societies, which are not always in harmony with the more traditional values of their home towns and villages. Many people return in vulnerable situations: people living with a disability or other serious injury as a result of migration, people living with HIV/AIDS, victims of trafficking or other forms of exploitation and people who experience negative migration outcomes or experience involuntary early return (deportation). On top of this, returning migrants are likely to face unemployment or economic hardship with serious implications for their families. What does repatriation actually mean for migrant

workers? How do they adjust to the changing social, economic and cultural context? What are the available mechanisms to seek redress?

This book brings together stories and analyses of migrant workers, who struggle to settle down, from six different countries in Asia Pacific. This is the second book that has come out of the collaborative work of the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific Migration Network. The different experiences bring to the surface not only the hardship but also ingenuity of migrants and the hospitality of host societies. It is hoped that this book will help illumine policy makers as well as civil society groups in understanding this part of the migration story.

Benny Hari Juliawan, SJ  
Coordinator of JCAP Migration Network







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# Self-help Organisations as Interfaces for the Integration of Nepalese Migrants: A Case Study in Ota and Oizumi, Gunma Prefecture, Japan

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Masako Tanaka<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*The increased Nepalese population in Japan has accelerated their isolation from the host society, as the Nepalese spend their time only with their own nationals. A number of self-help organisations formed by Nepalese migrants have emerged as part of their effort to integrate in Japanese society. This study investigates the roles of such organisations and identifies their potentials in contributing towards integration. The study focuses on Ota city and Oizumi town in Gunma prefecture, where the number of Nepalese is rapidly increasing. This study finds that these organisations will do better in integrating migrants if they are acknowledged as analogous to Japanese NGOs and treated as partners of government agencies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *self-help organisation, Nepalese migrants, Japan, integration, Gunma Prefecture*

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The recent rapid growth in the number of Indo-Nepal restaurants has increased the visibility of Nepalese migrants in urban Japan. Such ethnic restaurants are interfaces between migrants and host communities. While not all, more than 60,000 Nepalese residing in Japan are involved in the restaurant business. Many others are “invisible”, working in sweatshops in the suburbs. These marginalised workers contribute towards booming exports by manufacturing automobiles in Gunma (Reuter, 2015), fulfil labour shortages in air conditioning production lines in Tochigi, and pack lunch boxes in Chiba. They are often exploited in these so-called 3D, dirty, dangerous, and demeaning workplaces. One example is the meat processing industry. How can consumers in the host society imagine the supply chains of their daily necessities and the lives of migrants working behind the scenes when no interface between migrants and the host community exists?

From the perspective of migrants, Nepalese immigrants had more opportunities to interact with Japanese people or other nationals in their workplaces and daily lives when fewer Nepalese lived in Japan. The scenario today has dramatically changed, because of the rapid influx of Nepalese migrants to the country. Now, they can enjoy their lives without communicating in Japanese. For example, they can find information about job hunting, housing, and education through various social media in Nepali. Ironically, the increased Nepalese population has accelerated their isolation from Japanese society, as the Nepalese spend their time only with their own nationals.

The rapid increase in the number of Nepalese migrants motivated non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the local government to prepare information in the Nepali language. However, the support they offer is under-utilised when and where Nepalese migrants are

not well organised and no active information channels exist, for instance, in the post-earthquake Kumamoto.<sup>2</sup>

In the US and Europe, organisations for migrants are recognised as interfaces between migrants and the host community and as stakeholders that play a key role in their integration (Krotz, 2003). However, little attention is focused on them in Japan. Therefore, this study highlights a self-help organisation (SHO)<sup>3</sup> formed by migrants.

The overall aim of the study is to examine the roles of the SHO formed by Nepalese migrants and its potential to contribute towards the integration of individual migrants. The study focuses on Ota city and Oizumi town (hereinafter Ota and Oizumi) in Gunma prefecture, where the number of Nepalese is rapidly increasing.

This paper comprises three steps. First, it illustrates the characteristics of Nepalese migrants in Ota and Oizumi using secondary data. Second, it identifies the roles of an SHO and discusses its potential and challenges. Third, it presents the status of the integration of core members of the SHO. Finally, the study concludes by providing recommendations to local authorities and other stakeholders on how to support SHOs to ensure the integration of migrants.

This paper is based on secondary and primary data. The primary data was collected through preliminary fieldwork in Ota and Oizumi from July to September 2016 and informal interactions with Nepalese migrants in the area beforehand. Key informant interviews were

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mr Nakashima, Kumustaka-Association for living together with migrants on 28 October 2016.

<sup>3</sup> SHO is defined as an organisation established to provide mutual help among members. SHOs formed by the Nepalese can be categorised as Ethnic Community-Based Organisations in a broader context; however, this article uses “ethnic” and “ethnicity” when referring to particular ethnic and caste groups among the Nepalese.

conducted with core members of the SHO *Nepali Saajha Samaaj Japan* (United Nepalese Community, Japan: UNCJ) and owners of ethnic businesses such as Indo-Nepali restaurants. Interviewees were carefully selected to reflect the diversity of Nepalese migrants in the area. Eight households were interviewed, including one headed by a female. In this paper, interviewees are either anonymous or their names have been changed.

## **The Nepalese in Japan**

### *Migration Trends*

The Nepalese comprise the sixth largest and fastest growing foreign migrant community in Japan. The population has dramatically increased almost 10 times over a decade from 6,856 at the end of 2006 to 60,689 at the end of June 2016. Compared to other large migrant groups from countries in East Asia, South-East Asia, and Latin America, the Nepalese are latecomers to Japan. However, their number is steadily increasing, while those of other groups are decreasing. The number of Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants increased in the 1980s, as visa waiver agreements enabled migrant labour, but decreased in the early 1990s when the agreement was discontinued. The increase in the number of Nepalese is a reverse trend to that for Brazilians and Peruvians, whose populations decreased as a consequence to the global economic crisis in the late 2000s. The number of Nepalese students in Japanese language schools has dramatically increased, while the number of students from China and Korea has decreased since the Great East Japan Disaster in 2011 (Sano and Tanaka, 2016: 20). Briefly, the Nepalese seem to be filling the gaps in both labour and student shortages in Japan.

Table 1 shows that of 54,775 Nepalese nationals registered at the end of 2015, the top three groups in Japan are students, dependent families, and skilled labour—mostly cooks in Indo-Nepal restaurants. These are followed by permanent resident status holders engaged in “designated activities”, who are mostly asylum seekers<sup>4</sup>. Regarding gender, 36,165 (66.02%) are men, while 18,611 (33.98%) are women.

**Table 1.**

Number and Ratio of Nepalese in Japan and Gunma by Residential Status in 2015

Types of residential status	Total in Japan		Gunma	
	Number	%	Number	%
Student	20,278	37.02	311	20.38
Dependent	12,896	23.54	284	18.61
Skilled labour	10,134	18.50	173	11.34
Permanent resident	3,372	6.16	75	4.91
Designated activities	3,223	5.88	416	27.26
Engineer, Specialist in humanities and international services	2,046	3.74	180	11.80
Business manager	865	1.58	17	1.11
Long-term resident	633	1.16	13	0.85
Spouse or child of Japanese national	549	1.00	18	1.18
Spouse or child of permanent resident	375	0.68	21	1.38
Technical intern training	247	0.45	13	0.85
Provisional stay	N.A.	-	3	0.20
Unknown	N.A.	-	2	0.13
Others	157	0.29	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,775</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,526</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Source:* Immigration Bureau website and unpublished data provided by the Human Rights, Gender Equality, and Multicultural Promotion Division, Department of Life, Culture and Sports, Gunma Prefectural Government

<sup>4</sup> Asylum seekers are allowed to work as full-time employees after obtaining the status of “designated activity” approximately six months after application. This system attracts migrants who are currently restricted to only 28 hours of work per week, such as students, and encourages them to exploit the system.

The increasing percentage of Nepalese in Japan in dependent categories reflects changes in the family structure of migrants from split households to dual-wage earning households. A split household is defined as “a migrant household maintaining two family branches separated by geographical space and a national border, while remaining connected to the flow of remittances and occasional return of migrant members” (Yamanaka, 2005: 338). Most Nepalese migrants in Gulf countries, both women and men, relocate to their destinations without accompanying spouses and maintain the split household style. However, in Japan, migrants categorised as skilled labour, business managers, or those with permanent status can invite dependent family members. Therefore, especially underpaid cooks in Indo-Nepal restaurants, invite their wives and children to “support” them while earning part-time wages in Japan. In some families, cooks’ incomes are lower than that earned by dependents. The integration of Nepalese migrants’ children in their destination countries has not yet been researched, but is particularly important in Japan, as highlighted in my forthcoming paper.

The pioneers Yamanaka and Minami have researched Nepalese migrants in Japan since the 1990s. They focus on the transnational migration of the Nepalese (Yamanaka 2000), their family relationships (Yamanaka, 2005; 2007a), and migration networks based on local ties and ethnic organisations (Minami, 2008; Yamanaka, 2007b). They do not focus on the integration of migrants. Likely, they did not expect the rapid increase, changing patterns, and dynamics of Nepalese migration to Japan, where some migrants remain as permanent residents.

This study attempts to distinguish itself from the previous studies mentioned above. It provides a prospective scenario of Nepalese integration in Japan, and focuses on pan-Nepalese



migrants' organisations in the country, not on groups based on caste and ethnicity. These points may provide recommendations for the integration of migrants to various stakeholders.

### *Characteristics of Nepalese Communities in Japan*

Kajita, Tanno, and Higuchi categorise migrants' communities according to two parameters, namely human capital and social capital, as shown in Table 2. Human capital implies skills and educational background, while social capital refers to the capacity to benefit from participating in social networks.

**Table 2.**  
Classification of Migrants' Communities according to Human and Social Capital

		Human capital	
		Less	More
Social capital	Less	A) Labour community	B) Ethnic enclave
	More	C) Disorganised community	D) New middle-class community

*Source:* Translated from Table 3-1 in Kajita, Tanno, and Higuchi (2005: 86)

They further analyse the characteristics of the four categories of communities from different aspects. Table 3 is a modified version of their analysis, to which "mobility" is added, which implies upward or downward mobility or assimilation. They provide example(s) of each community: Indo-China refugees in the US for A, the labour community; Cubans in the US for B, the ethnic enclave; Mexicans in the US and Brazilians in Japan for C, the disorganised community; and Indians in the US and Chinese newcomers in Japan for D, the new middle-class community. However, classifying an ethnic community in a particular category may detract from the diversity of the community and different behaviours according to the location and

combination of ethnic and host communities. This may misrepresent the characteristics of ethnic communities in various localities.

**Table 3.**  
Characteristics of Different Types of Migrant Communities

Aspect	A	B	C	D
	Labour Community	Ethnic Enclave	Disorganised Community	New Middle-Class Community
Presence within host community	Participation as a group	Organised as an interest group	Low level of participation	Assimilation in host communities
Economic situation	Working in the secondary labour market	Moving up within ethnic economy	Working in the secondary labour market	Working in the primary labour market
Language use	Monolingual in host community's languages	Maintain bilingualism	Semi-lingual	Monolingual in host community's language
Mobility	From upward mobility to assimilation	Upward mobility	Downward assimilation	Upward assimilation
Example among Nepalese migrants in Japan	Ota and Oizumi today	Shin-Okubo (Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo)	Ota and Oizumi in the past	Ojima (Koto-ku, Tokyo)

Source: Modified from Table 3-2 in Kajita, Tanno, and Higuchi (2005: 88)

According to this categorisation, the Nepalese community led by men engaged in ethnic businesses, for example, Nepali grocery shops and restaurants in Shin-Okubo in Tokyo, may be type B, the ethnic enclave (Higuchi, 2016). Many are core members of the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) in Japan and promote themselves as successful businessmen in Japanese society. The other Nepalese community in the Ojima area of Koto-ku in Tokyo

can be categorised as type D, a new middle-class community, which is dominated by Nepalese couples, husbands working for Japanese companies, and educated housewives. They prefer to stay in the area to send their children to the India International School in Ojima to maintain their English skills. Most of the men have direct contracts with their companies, meaning they are in the primary labour market and work under similar conditions to their Japanese colleagues. It is possible for some to buy houses in Tokyo, since they have access to housing loans.<sup>5</sup> While they are not monolingual in Japanese, as their children mostly study at the international school, their lifestyles are similar to the neighbouring Japanese. Therefore, they seem to be assimilated into the local host community.

Of these four categories, Nepalese migrants in Ota and Oizumi may be transitioning from C, a disorganised community to A, a labour community. Many are employed in the secondary labour market, where they work in manufacturing companies through labour brokerage firms for low wages, or as part-time workers directly employed by retail shops. Their migration seems to be “contradictory class mobility” (Parreñas, 2001), where downward movement is evident after migration. Some migrant couples leave their children behind in Nepal. When children do live with their parents in Japan, they are enrolled at local Japanese public schools. These children are more fluent in Japanese than in Nepali or their mother tongue ethnic languages. Therefore, they avoid becoming semi-lingual, where they are fluent in neither their mother tongue nor the host community’s language. This study attempts to demonstrate the above-mentioned transition from a disorganised to labour community by analysing the roles of an SHO in the area.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Ms S. in Koto-ku, in Tokyo on 12 August 2015.

### *Migrants' Organisations*

Social networks formed by migrants play an important role in migration (Castles and Miller, 1993). Networks can be categorised according to the period of formation and network location. The first is referred to as a pre-migration network formed before migration, while the second is a post-migration network formed after migration (Higuchi, 2010: 74-79). The former is based on ties with families, relatives, and friends at the place of origin. It is homogenous and has a high level of mutual support. However, its role may be limited to collecting resources at the departure stage. Until the early 2000s, most Nepalese immigrants depended on the social network-driven migration system through ethnic and “colonial” ties, the so-called “Gurkha connection” and “Thakali connection” as well as *Janajati*, which were non-Hindu migration networks in East Asia in the mid and late 1980s (Minami, 2008 and Yamanaka, 2007b). This system is likely still common for Nepalese in the Middle East or Malaysia, where most migrate as labour, and a few specific migrant categories in Japan. Kharel found that chain migration of Nepalese cooks with skilled labour visas from a village in the western hills of Nepal relied on a typical pre-migration network of families, relatives, and friends (Kharel, 2016: 179). However, not all cooks and owners follow similar channels if they do not have access to a reliable pre-migration network. Some candidates who can work as cooks fail to migrate to Japan, despite taking both language and cooking courses in Kathmandu.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, owners are frustrated when they are unable to recruit the appropriate people.<sup>7</sup>

The latter, post-migration networks at the destination, may play a significant role in the integration of migrants. The Nepalese

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mr T. in Nepalgunj on 25 February 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mr N., owner of a Nepali restaurant in Hyogo, on 30 January 2015.

migration system has changed over the last two decades. Migrants do not necessarily come to Japan as labour, even though their main aim is to earn money. Many of those with student visas use an informal pre-migration network to collect money although more rely on the formal system through an education consultancy in Nepal or obtain information through websites. Specifically, younger migrants born after 1990 tend to use consultancies, recruitment agencies, or language schools, not their own social networks in Nepal. These changes isolate newly arrived Nepalese youth from the social networks of the Nepalese already in Japan (Sano and Tanaka, 2016). Thus, from now on, this study highlights migrants' organisations as a post-migration network formed at the destination.

Nepalese migrants are often cynical, "There are too many *samaaj* (society) of migrants in Japan." This implies that everyone wants to lead their own association, and that there are many organisations with little work and no unity between them. In fact, many banners of Nepalese migrants' organisations are displayed on websites or at cultural festivals in Japan. The formation of migrants' organisations makes "invisible" migrants "visible".

There are five categories of migrants' organisations in Japan. The first is the branches of established organisations in Nepal including political parties. These include several local chapters of political parties, associations based on caste and ethnicity, and the NRNA. The NRNA is a registered organisation with the Government of Nepal, which has had a branch in Japan since 2004. Its board members are all Nepalese migrants and mostly businessmen; however, its primary roles are delivering messages externally for publicity and advocating migrants' rights for dual citizenship or improving conditions for investment in Nepal. Thus, its functions

differ from those of the SHO, which is primarily expected to provide mutual support to members.

The second type is a member-based association of particular groups, for example, the Nepalese Student's Association in Japan. This association covers a limited number of migrants with student status, approximately a few hundred. However, more than 20,000 migrants today have student status.

The third type is origin-based organisations such as *Galkot Samaaj*, which originated in the Baglung district, or *Bardiya Samaaj* formed by migrants from the Bardiya district. Members of these organisations were not necessarily connected before migration, but share common concerns regarding their places of origin. Such organisations are also often branches of origin-based organisations at the international level, and are established by migrants from major source districts of migration such as Baglung and Jhapa, not only districts in Nepal. Members of these organisations may be dispersed throughout Japan. While they have strong ties with their places of origin, the organisation may have the same ties at the destination.

The fourth type is associations of particular caste or ethnicity based such as *Thakali Sewa Samiti* (Thakali support committee) or the *Newa International Forum*. Some are branches of ethnic associations at the international level, while others are branches of ethnic associations in Nepal. These organisations organise rituals and communal gatherings to maintain the cultural identity of their own ethnic groups. Similar to the three organisations mentioned above, members of the same ethnic groups do not necessarily live in the same geographic area of Japan. However, members of these organisations tend to be mostly located in metropolitan areas, not in remote prefectures. The primary aim of these organisations is not

integration in the host community, although they share the function of providing mutual support to members.

The last category is SHOs in specific cities, prefectures, or regions in Japan, for example, Nepali *Samaaj* Toyokawa. These are pan-Nepalese and include all Nepalese migrants regardless of ethnicity and caste. They live in nearby areas, share common daily concerns such as the use of municipal services, and often engage in volunteer work for their members, other Nepalese, and citizens of the host community. One example is collecting donations for victims of natural disasters in Japan. A leader of the SHO in Toyokawa explained that he mobilised other Nepalese migrants to contribute towards a cleaning campaign for a local river to change the perception of the Nepalese in the location<sup>8</sup>. These organisations maintain close communication with the local government and host community compared to the other four organisation types. Thus, they can play a role in the integration of migrants by bridging the gap between migrants and host communities.

This type of Nepalese SHO has existed since the 1990s in Japan. Yamanaka identified two phases of community building by the Nepalese in Japan during her research from 1994 to 2004. The first phase was forming a pan-Nepalese association in the early 1990s. The Nepalese *Sahayog Sangha* (Nepalese Help Organisation) was formed with 700 to 900 Nepalese in Tokyo, with the aim to establish mutual help by collecting donations to provide medical support for Nepalese in need (Yamanaka, 2007b: 429). In 1995, Nepalese in the Tokai region established the Nepalese Welfare Society of Japan (*Nepal Sewa Samiti*), which aimed to include all Nepalese. The second phase was the establishment of branches of ethnic associations in

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mr Deepack K.C., founder of the Nepali *Samaaj* Toyokawa in Toyokawa, on 2 June 2016.

Japan in the late 1990s in response to the ethnic movement in Nepal. While pan-Nepalese associations still existed, Janajati leaders established ethnic associations. These changes sometimes divided the majority Janajati and minority Brahman-Chhetris in the Tokai Nepalese community (*ibid.* 437). Later, prolonged stays in Japan led to the assimilation of many Nepalese settlers into Japanese society, and these people no longer seek “bounded solidarity”. The Nepalese community is fragmented, and group solidarity eroded in Tokai where the Nepalese have resided for more than two decades. In this case, the Nepalese community in Tokai is currently C, a disorganised community, while a few middle-class migrants have assimilated into Japanese society. This study examines whether a pan-Nepalese SHO in Gunma plays the same roles as previous SHOs in the Tokai and Nepalese communities in Gunma, in a similar situation to that in Tokai.

### **Nepalese in Ota and Oizumi, Gunma**

Of 54,775 Nepalese nationals at the end of 2015, 1,595 lived in Gunma prefecture, the ninth largest Nepalese community in Japan after Tokyo, Fukuoka, Aichi, Chiba, Kanagawa, Saitama, Tochigi, and Okinawa districts. In Gunma, the Nepalese were listed in the top ten of the largest groups of foreign nationals in 2013, ranking seventh in 2014 and 2015 after Brazil, China, the Philippines, Peru, Vietnam, and the Republic of Korea and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

At the end of 2015, of 35 cities and towns in Gunma prefecture, 1,526 Nepalese nationals were registered in 25 cities and towns. Among them, 1,024 (67.1%) were men, while 502 (32.9%) women. More than half of the Nepalese (852) are in the Eastern region, an industrial area adjoining Saitama and Tochigi. This study focuses



on the top two, namely Oizumi and Ota, home to almost half of the Nepalese population in Gunma in 2015.

Table 1 provides the numbers and ratios of registered Nepalese in Japan and Gunma prefecture. The ratio of different residential statuses in Gunma differs from the total in Japan. “Student” status is not the largest group, likely because of fewer Japanese language schools in Gunma. The largest group of Nepalese 416 (27.26%) hold the status of “designated activities”, and most likely are asylum seekers.

In the 1990s, when there were few Nepalese in Japan, Nepalese migrants with temporary visitor, trainee, or amateur sports player status visas moved to Ota and Oizumi from other parts of Japan, not only the Kanto region, following the advice of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Iranian, or other foreigners through post-migration networks. Halal food shops served as resourceful information hubs for migrants looking for work. It was easy to find work once in the locality, where they were recruited by brokers while frequenting convenience stores or nearby train stations. The local administration issued the “alien card” for over-stayers, although their cards included the term “*Zairyu-shikaku Nashi*” (without residential status).

Few Nepalese migrants began their lives in Japan in Ota and Oizumi. Today, most in this area were students, trainees, or underpaid workers holding different legal statuses who moved from other parts of Japan to Ota and Oizumi after consultation with brokers through post-migration networks or finding information through web-based social media. Newly arrived migrants usually stay with other Nepalese and start working through labour brokerage firms called *Hakengaisha*. Some brokerage firms never ask about residential status, and migrants cannot negotiate wage, working conditions, or even written contracts if they are undocumented and in the waiting

period after submitting an application for asylum. In this area, migrants who initially entered Japan as cooks on skilled labour visas can also work in factories, where they earn a higher wage than in Indo-Nepal restaurants.

In the mid-2000s, the immigration office deported Nepalese and many other undocumented foreign workers. Furthermore, the number of Nepalese in Ota and Oizumi decreased in 2009 as a consequence to the global economic recession, although as shown in Table 4, the number increased again in 2011.

**Table 4.**  
Number of Nepalese in Ota and Oizumi

City/Town	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Ota	121	101	81	81	94	104	136	203
Oizumi	30	27	46	82	165	207	243	426
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>629</b>

*Note:* Figures for Ota are as at the end of March, and figures for Oizumi are as at the end of each year.

*Source:* Unpublished data provided by Ota City and Oizumi town

Some survivors obtained permanent residential status through different channels such as by marrying a Japanese national or other permanent residential status holders—usually Brazilian and Filipino—or by applying for permanent status through petitions collected from 1,200 Japanese neighbours, a rare success case. Some migrants with school-aged children decided to settle permanently, and bought houses in the area. These permanent settlers became core members of the SHO in the area.

## Self-Help Organisations in Ota and Oizumi

### *Background*

In 1997, most Nepalese were over-stayers who formed an organisation in Ota and Oizumi called *Nepali Samaaj* (Nepalese Community).

Various events were held on the occasions of *Teej* and *Dashain*, Nepali annual festivals, and members collected donations to support vulnerable Nepalese people suffering from severe diseases or those injured in accidents. However, the organisation could not continue its activities as most members left by themselves or were deported by the immigration office in Nepal after the global economic recession in 2007.

A few survivors of the recession began reorganising themselves to help each other regardless of ethnicity, caste, place of origin, and political affiliation. The United Nepalese Community, Japan (UNCJ), was formed in 2013 after consultations with fellow migrants.

In September 2016, UNCJ comprised approximately 80 members mostly located in Gunma and a few in the adjoining Saitama and Tochigi prefectures. The organisation is led by a committee of 30 migrants including 5 women. Including settlers who have lived longest in Japan (25 years), committee members come from Hindu dominant castes and *Janajati* and are aged from their late 20s to 50s. With a few exceptions, their legal statuses are permanent residents, dependents, business managers, or engineers. A few completed tertiary education either in Nepal or Japan, and many are fluent in Japanese. The person in charge in Oizumi town acknowledged the work by core members of the UNCJ, which made it easy for the local administration to disseminate messages to the Nepalese community<sup>9</sup>.

Leaders of the UNCJ experienced hardship as undocumented workers in the past, although they are now settled in Japan with their families and with relatively stable income sources. They try to share their experiences on how to survive in Japan with others.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr Hattori, Chief of the International Collaboration Section in Oizumi Town, on 4 July 2016.

Some of them possibly expected to recover from their experiences of disgrace, stigmatisation, and discrimination as undocumented workers by being committee members today. However, the UNCJ has limited human resources with which to run the organisation and guide newcomer members.

### *Roles of the Self-help Organisation*

Through membership fees and member donations, the UNCJ organises cultural celebrations based on the Nepalese calendar and recreational activities, barbecues, and day trips to facilitate interaction among members. In addition to the work conducted for its own members, it often collects donations from members for survivors of natural disasters in Japan and Nepal, Nepalese migrants living in other places needing medication, and the families of migrants who lost their lives through suicide or accidents in Japan. These contributions and volunteer activities are often reported in the local newspaper, which increases their visibility. The organisation also collaborates with local administrations, Gunma Prefectural Government, and the offices of Ota city and Oizumi town. For example, alongside other foreign nationals, members of the UNCJ participated in disaster preparedness training held in Oizumi in July 2016 and sold curry at food stalls in other various public events.

As a pan-Nepalese and community-based organisation, the primary roles of the UNCJ are to reorganise migrants in the area and assist others. Its secondary role is to gain recognition from other Nepalese communities and the host society in Japan. The third role is to be an interface between local administrations and Nepalese migrants. These processes all contribute towards increasing the social capital of the community in Ota and Oizumi.

However, the UNCJ still has scope for further development. The first two roles are not new, and were focused on by other organisations in the past and Nepalese SHOs in the 1990s. While these roles are essential steps towards integration, their impact may be occasional and limited to such occasions. If the UNCJ aims to promote the integration of its members, the third role should be emphasised and strengthened. UNCJ's current leaders attend various meetings organised by local administrations and respond to requests by their offices, for example by translating official documents into Nepali. However, their motives remain reactive, and do not strategically address a particular agenda. This is attributed to the lack of a needs assessment of members. Currently, there is no sectorial collaboration with service providers such as schools and hospitals, and no systematic collaboration with SHOs for other nationals or NGOs in Gunma prefecture. Recently, some members were connected to a local Japanese NGO that trains foreign residents as medical interpreters. These external connections to other stakeholders are a new challenge for the UNCJ.

The SHO activities mentioned above are not found in new middle-class Nepalese migrant communities in Tokyo or other urban areas, because migrants in such places have other channels from which to obtain support for integration. Furthermore, they may not be interested in expending their time and energy engaging with SHOs. In Ota and Oizumi, the UNCJ can potentially work with other stakeholders, not only with Nepalese migrants. However, its sustainability is questionable, as the organisation relies only on membership fees and donations to function.

## Integration of Nepalese Migrants

There is neither a policy for integration nor indicators to measure levels of integration of migrants in Japan. The vague concept “*Tabunka Kyosei*” (multicultural co-existence) is widely used by the Japanese government and civil society. The concept is limited to the cultural sphere, and avoids addressing socio-economic equality such as through equal access to the social security system, labour rights, or the right to vote. It is far from the globally understood integration policies of other countries, which focus on migrants’ rights and equality at the outcome level. For instance, the OECD and EU developed measurement indicators of integration by comparing the outcomes or gaps between immigrants to native-born citizens (OECD/EU 2015). The appropriate indicators highlight the following eight areas:

1. Labour market outcomes: measured through the un/employment rate, long-term unemployment rate
2. Job quality: measured through types of contracts, over-qualification rate, share of self-employment
3. Adult’s cognitive skills and training: measured through literacy skills, participation in job-related training
4. Household income: measured through the poverty rate
5. Housing: measured through the home ownership rate, share of overcrowded dwellings
6. Health status and health care: measured through share of people reporting unaddressed medical needs
7. Civic engagement: measured through the naturalisation rate, voter participation rate
8. Social cohesion: measured through the share of immigrants who feel discriminated against, share of people who think that their area is a good place for migrants to live.

While these measurement indicators analyse the level of integration of migrants at the national level—not individual level—some can be keywords for understanding the integration of individual migrants. This section introduces the stories of core members of the UNCJ with reference to the above-mentioned indicators. All names are pseudonyms.

There are four types of Nepalese in the area. The most visible group is ethnic business owners who sustain their lives through their own businesses, Indo-Nepali restaurants, or halal food shops. Most are employees in the secondary labour market, working for manufacturing companies or retail stores through labour brokerage firms or part-time contracts. Although the number is small, a few are employed in the first labour market, working under similar conditions to their Japanese peers after completing higher education in Japan. The last category is Nepalese married to Japanese nationals. Their integration process differs from that of the other three groups. Examples of the first two groups are described below.

### *Ethnic Business Owners*

As same in metropolitan areas, it is not difficult to find the signboards of Indo-Nepal restaurants in Ota and Oizumi. In September 2016, 26 Nepalese cooks were working for 14 restaurants including five owned by Japanese, Pakistani, and Indian people. The oldest has operated in Ota since the late 1990s. Most of these restaurants' customers are Japanese, and in Ota, ownership does not frequently change. Interestingly, former cooks mostly run Indo-Nepalese restaurants in Oizumi, and ownership has recently been transferred to the current owners. Almost all the restaurants employ only one cook, and customers are mostly Nepalese. This restaurant business is a transitional step for (former) cooks towards obtaining permanent

residential status. Consequently, most of these restaurants do not attract Japanese customers.

Bikram is an exception. He began working as a cook, before becoming the owner of an Indian restaurant in Oizumi.<sup>10</sup> He learnt to cook in India, where he started working without having completed his schooling in Nepal. After working for three years as an Indian cuisine cook in Russia, he grabbed an opportunity to relocate to Japan in 1992. He started working as a cook in an Indian restaurant in the heart of Tokyo, moving downtown to live with his wife and a new-born son. They moved to Gunma in 1996, and started their own business in 2009. The restaurant is managed by Bikram and his wife, and employs two Nepalese cooks. It is a popular meeting place for both Nepalese and Japanese locals. The couple, especially Bikram's wife Sita, is fluent in Japanese, and they have many regular customers from the Japanese host community. They are now settled in Ota, where their five children—two sons and three daughters aged from 5 to 24 years—go to school. The eldest son had a difficult time at school, because he was bullied. At first, his teachers were not helpful and reluctant to teach him, “You will ultimately return to your country. Is it necessary that we teach you?” These statements disappointed the family; however, all their children attended Japanese public schools, as there were no other options. The family was supported by their neighbours and regular customers. Today, Sita mingles with many *mama-tomos*, fellow moms whose children study with her sons and daughters.

The family developed a network through the restaurant business and their child-rearing experiences. Today, their restaurant is a junction of Nepalese migrants and Japanese customers. As residents

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Mr S., owner of an Indian restaurant and his wife in Oizumi, 4 July and 22 September 2016.



of the same locality, they share information on issues such as hospitals and school tuition. The couple's 20-year struggles became an asset not only for the family, but also for their community.

### *Contributing towards the Host Community*

Ethnic business owners and factory workers are still visible in their workplaces and interact with Japanese customers or colleagues. However, there are also unsafe workplaces, where there are less opportunities to meet Japanese people; for example, a scrap vehicle garage, which is a typical 3D workplace. Amrit is a lucky survivor. He overstayed by 17 years, but managed to obtain permanent residential status by submitting an application with the petitions of 1,200 local Japanese people, whose children attended the same school as his son<sup>11</sup>. Working for small companies that dismantled cars in Gunma since 1992, he did not often interact with Japanese people at his work place, but developed close relationships with his neighbours by shopping on behalf of the elderly, participating in the neighbourhood association *chonai-kai*, and sharing duties at funerals and annual events in his locality. His wife, who works at a Japanese restaurant, has many Japanese colleagues, and they spend their days off together. Amrit and his family members felt they were protected by their host community, although they often felt unsafe because they overstayed their status for such an extended period. They do not plan to return to Nepal. Instead, they bought a house in Ota to settle permanently. For him, helping Japanese neighbours was key to his own integration.

Amrit helped many fellow Nepalese migrants before establishing the UNCLJ. His wife recalled having eight to nine

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mr B., and his family members in Ota, 5 August 2016.

unemployed people in their home. He sometimes provided them with cash if they needed to return to Nepal or for medical care. Through the formation of the UNCJ, he wanted to change this type of informal support into a more formal support system accessible by the Nepalese.

### *Surviving the Global Recession in the Secondary Labour Market*

Most Nepalese are factory workers with risky contracts. For example, they earn daily wages or secured employment through labour brokerage firms with dubious legal status. There are two reasons they cannot escape the trap. One is that they cannot find other opportunities, because of the language barrier or lack of resources to start their own businesses. Another reason is attributed to their legal status. They believe that they cannot claim their labour rights as undocumented workers. In principle, labour rights are protected regardless of residential status. But it is almost impossible for them to claim their rights since they are afraid of deportation because of overstaying or not having yet obtained work clearance. However, some survived the global economic recession in 2008, and struggled to progress.

Chandra has been in Japan for 14 years after migrating as a language school student with a dream to complete his higher education in Japan<sup>12</sup>. Half a year later, he moved to Gunma from Saitama to find a job, as he could not pay his tuition with the JPY 850 he earned per hour at his part-time job at a petrol pump. Following the advice of an ex-school friend, he worked at a meat-processing factory as a daily-wage labourer to repay the loan he used to pay tuition fee of the languages school. Working alongside Japanese, Chinese, and

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Mr M. in Ota on 4 July, 6 August and 22 September 2016.

Nepalese people in difficult conditions, he discovered that his salary was almost half of that earned by his Japanese co-workers, and less than the other Nepalese, because of his physical structure. His daily wage was JPY 8,000, 1,000 lower than that earned by his colleagues. The Japanese workers earned JPY 15,000. However, as he did not have a written contract, he could not claim fair earnings.

Searching for better opportunities, he worked at a plastic manufacturing company in Oizumi for three years from 2004 to 2007. He earned JPY 1,100 per hour, which was more than at the meat-processing factory. His new work was also less of a physical burden, but did involve night shifts. He did not have a problem at the workplace, despite the fact that his student visa had expired. He was satisfied with the working relations with his Japanese bosses, and felt advantaged compared to his Indonesian and Brazilian co-workers, as he had become fluent in Japanese. However, he could not benefit from industrial accident compensation when he was injured, and was not entitled to overtime increments or any allowances to which the Japanese staff had access. At the end of 2006, he negotiated to become a permanent member of staff—*seishain*. However, his after-tax income decreased, because of deductions such as the social security cost, insurance, and pension. Furthermore, he was still not entitled to overtime compensation and allowances. He consulted with the Labour Standards Supervision Office, *kantokusho*, but withdrew his claim, as he did not want his company to be punished. He decided to look for another job rather than seek justice.

He first approached a labour brokerage firm, *hakenkaisha*, in 2007, and found a job at a larger plastic manufacturing company. Taking advantage of his work experience in the same sector and his fluent Japanese, he earned JPY 1,200 per hour. As the only non-Latino foreign worker, he enjoyed learning Portuguese from his

Brazilian colleagues. However, this joyful work did not last long, because of the economic recession in 2008. Approximately half the foreign staff was laid off, and many Brazilian colleagues left Japan. He felt fortunate, despite being forced to take leave 15 days a month. Gradual economic recovery increased his salary in 2011. However, he was not satisfied with the discriminatory contract that still did not entitle him to any allowances.

In December 2015, he got the opportunity to work for Subaru, the largest automobile factory in Ota, where he earned an increased wage of JPY 1,350 per hour. He was proud to work for the top company, although his contract was still through *haken gaisha*. However, as a consequence to a car accident in 2016, he was not able to continue working on the assembly line.

Recalling his 14 years in Japan, he was proud to have overcome the difficult periods with his language skills and sincere efforts to win the trust of his Japanese bosses, as well as developing good relationships with both Japanese and foreign colleagues. At the same time, he felt exploited by the manufacturing companies and *haken gaisha* throughout his time in Japan. “I am merely a labourer, even though I have already worked in Japan for 14 years. I was not able to develop my career as expected by my peers in Nepal. Frankly, I no longer want to stay in Japan. However, I cannot return to Nepal with no achievements. I do not know where to be integrated.” His statement reflects his struggles for integration in Japan and re-integration in Nepal.

While recuperating after the accident, he decided to take the Japanese language proficiency test and learned skills for care work through a free training course provided by the Japan International Cooperation Centre. In addition, he actively participated in various training programs to learn more about immigration rules,

labour laws, social safety nets, and medical interpretation to make recommendations to other migrants.

He considers himself an integrated migrant, as he was able to continue working despite not being satisfied with the way he was treated. Recently, he realised that he did not enjoy his rights as a taxpayer and had never tried using municipal services such as the library or safety net. After 14 years in Japan, he got an opportunity to learn cognitive skills and started learning the Japanese language again. For him, Japan was initially a place to earn money. However, he now has a different view and understands “integration” in a broader context. This transformed mind-set motivates him to help other migrants.

## **Conclusion**

The study identified three major roles of the SHO UNCJ in the integration of migrants. The first role is re-organising migrants in Ota and Oizumi to develop social capital among members. The second is increasing recognition by the host society through volunteer work and donations. The third is becoming an interface between local administrations and Nepalese migrants, which enables migrants to utilise the social services and systems available in Japan. These three roles guide the integration of individual migrants. In the beginning, they helped members of their community; however, their services have gradually extended beyond their own community. Ultimately, migrants can exercise their right as taxpayers to utilise available resources in the host community.

UNCJ has the potential to extend its connections to different line agencies such as hospitals, schools, and other NGOs working in Gunma and beyond according to the needs of members. However, the current volunteer-based organisational strategy limits delivery

of expected services to members and expansion of external connections. The UN CJ maintains close communication with local administrations and the prefectural government of Ota city, Oizumi town, and Gunma. However, its collaboration is limited to on-demand occasions and events, not as a strategic partner in the integration of migrants.

The individual stories of the core members of the UN CJ demonstrate several barriers during their integration, such as lack of institutional support at school, risky work contracts, and discrimination. They mostly overcame these problems through their efforts and relationships with their Japanese neighbours and friends. Currently, they are dedicated to working for other migrants based on their assets—not financial but social capital—developed through their struggles. The cases presented should be understood as “rare success cases”, because the subjects survived for more than ten years and now work to serve others. There may be several “unsuccessful cases” of those who left Japan destitute and without having achieved much. To examine the real need for integration, we must pay attention to the few success cases and other untold stories of those who remain invisible.

Experiences in other countries proved the importance of migrants’ organisations in the integration process. In Japan, it is time to acknowledge the SHOs formed by migrants and institutionalise support for migrants by SHOs when local administration and Japanese NGOs cannot provide this support. Partnerships between government agencies and SHOs formed by migrants are possible if SHOs are acknowledged as analogous to Japanese NGOs. It is recommended that SHOs determine how other NGOs work with government agencies. At the same time, government agencies must perceive SHOs formed by migrants as partners. Such partnerships

will enhance the capacity of SHOs, extend outreach to migrants at grassroots level, and may ultimately change the government's support system for migrants and the integration policy.

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# “Our Health is not Their Concern” The Health Experiences of Migrant Workers in Taiwan

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## ABSTRACT

*This qualitative study illustrates how social infrastructures and institutional arrangements shape migrant workers' health in the receiving country, Taiwan. Relying upon focus groups and interviews with migrant workers, this article describes the liminal status of migrant workers and how it shapes their working conditions, employment relations, and health experiences. Further, the authors illustrate how a focus on immediate economic interests prevents both employers and migrant workers from prioritizing migrants' health. Based on the research findings, the authors argue that the state should enact policies that entitle migrant workers to more complete membership in the context of transnational migration.*

**KEYWORDS:** *migrant workers, health, liminal status, Taiwan, qualitative interviews*

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The force of globalization not only contributes to the flows of capital and goods but also facilitates the circulation of people. Worldwide, approximately 232 million migrants, of whom 150.3 million are migrant workers, live in countries in which they do not hold citizenship. More than 85 percent of migrant workers live in high income and upper-middle income countries (ILO, 2015).

Research on migrant workers has investigated how the experiences of migration influence individuals' lives, including health (Bollini & Siem, 1995; Braveman, Egerter and Williams, 2011). The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1948). This definition moves beyond the bio-medical lens of physical health and draws our attention to the social dimension of health. Michael Marmot (2005) proposes the concept of social determinants of health to argue that individual health is a social issue. This concept recognises the social context in which people are born, grow up, work, and age. Social infrastructures and institutional arrangements shape and influence individual health. Migration itself is a social determinant of migrants' health (Davies, Basten and Frattini, 2009).

Research to date on the health of migrants has been incomplete in various ways. Mainstream public health studies usually adopt the perspective of disease management and pandemic control, treating mobile migrants as a potential threat to population health (Gellert, 1993; Gushulak and MacPherson, 2004; Gushulak and MacPherson, 2006; Sergeyeve, et al., 2015). The approach of infectious disease epidemiology focuses on the association between migrants and the spread of pandemic. It not only blames individuals for their illness or diseases, but also pays little attention to the health conditions and wellbeing of migrants. Other studies focus on how working

environment and safety determine health outcomes (Carangan, Tham and Seow, 2004; Salvatore et al., 2013; Schenker, 2010; Wu et al., 1997). Studies focusing on occupational health pay more attention to the risk factors related to work sites, such as safety training, inadequate safety equipment, and lack of formal work contracts. Workers from less developed countries perform jobs in more developed countries, which are dirty, difficult, and dangerous, reflecting institutionally and socially constructed constraints in both sending and receiving countries (Huang and Yeoh, 2003). However, these studies fail to fully address the influences of their vulnerable position. They have not analysed the liminality of migrant workers or illustrated how their lived experiences are subject to the broader social infrastructures and institutional arrangements.

In this study, we adopt the concept of structural violence (Galtung, 1969) to illustrate how migrant workers' marginality in the labour market and host society constantly shapes their health experiences. Galtung (1975: 173) defines structural violence as "the indirect violence built into repressive social orders creating enormous differences between potential and actual human self-realization." Many scholars have extended the concept to analyse the influences of socially structured inequality on individuals' intimate experiences. The medical anthropologist Paul Farmer (2004) relies on ethnographic observations to illuminate the causal linkages between macro-forces and the distinct patterns of particular social groups or individuals. Their collective experiences of social suffering embody the systemic constitution of inequalities which are shaped by political-economic processes, social structures, and cultural ideologies (Benson et al., 2008).

In this essay we apply the concept of structural violence to illuminate the intimate suffering of migrant workers in their daily

lives. We gathered data by conducting focus group discussions and qualitative interviews. The remainder of this essay proceeds as follows. First, we provide the context of migrant workers and the relevant policies in Taiwan, including the country's health regulations. Second, we describe this study's design and methods. Then we examine the liminal status of migrant workers and how it shapes their working conditions, employment relations, and health experiences. Forth, we illustrate why employers and migrant workers do not prioritize migrants' health, as both focus on their immediate economic interests. To conclude this essay, we argue that migrant workers deserve health care and protections. Based on the research findings, we outline a possible direction for policy changes in Taiwan, which provide further implications for other receiving countries.

### **Migrant Workers in Taiwan**

During the economic booms of the 1980s and 1990s, employment opportunities for short-term contract workers in Asia expanded rapidly (Kim, 1994; Piper and Ball, 2001). Industrial countries, such as Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and Korea sought cheaper labour to support economic development, and thus they became major labour-importing countries (Martin, 1992; Skeldon, 1992). In 1990, as a result of labour shortage, the Taiwanese government began to import migrant workers for national construction projects and traditional manufacturing industries, which require cheap labour to remain competitive in the market. Since 1992, in order to tackle the issue of care "deficits," the Taiwanese government has allowed the arrival of domestic and care workers as part of a short-term contract labour force to shoulder the responsibilities of caring for the elderly, the disabled, the sick, and young children. Taiwan hosted 151,989

migrant workers in 1993. The state considers these migrant workers as a solution to health care problems within its population but not as a group that might have health needs of its own.

By December 2016, 624,768 migrant workers were living and working in Taiwan. Of these, about 62 per cent worked in industrial sectors, including manufacturing, construction and fishing, while the rest worked as care workers and domestic workers. Women made up 56 per cent of all migrant workers. More than 99 per cent of the female migrant workers fill virtually all of the care and domestic worker positions (Ministry of Labour, 2017).

The Ministry of Labour is in charge of migrant labour issues at the central government level. The local labour bureaus are responsible for implementing policy and regulations. The main labour immigration policy consists of the *Employment Service Act* and *Regulations on the Permission and Administration of the Employment of Foreign Workers*. The government treats migrant workers and white-collar foreigners distinctly under the law.

Migrant workers not categorized as white-collar must submit to a health check upon their arrival in Taiwan, even if they bring a health certificate issued in their home country. They must repeat this health check three times during the term of their three-year work visas. The check items consist of a chest X-ray, syphilis testing, Hepatitis B testing, an intestinal worm stool-test, and a mental status evaluation. Up until November 2002, female workers had to submit to a pregnancy test and until February 2015 all workers had to submit to an HIV test. Protests by migrant worker advocacy groups led to the abolition of these two requirements, but debates about them continue, with Taiwanese employers and recruiting agencies seeking their reinstatement as a way of protecting their own interest. Workers deemed infected with the diseases receive treatment and

if not cured, they may be deported. The health check effectively screens migrant workers' health for a national security reason while paying little consideration to the wellbeing of the workers (Tseng & Wang, 2013).

Taiwan enacted its National Health Insurance (NHI) in 1995. Its citizens along with the other residents are mandated to NHI with a small pay. The implementation of NHI aims to improve the access to health care as well as to decrease health inequalities among individuals and different social groups. Migrant workers are also entitled to NHI during their working period in Taiwan. It seems that the entitlement to NHI could protect migrant workers' right to health care. However, it has failed to diminish the barriers, which affect migrant workers' health.

## **Research Design and Methods**

We conducted a pilot study consisting of two five-person focus groups with migrant workers to ensure that the questions we asked in the main study would be comprehensible to research participants. We revised some questions after the pilot study. Most focus group participants were mainly institutional or live-in care workers or manufacturing workers. The data collected through the focus groups are included in the analysis. The main study consisted of 25 individual interviews with migrant workers, including live-in care workers, fishing workers, and those working in manufacturing sectors. We included migrant workers from different occupational sectors to examine how working environments determine their health experiences. In comparison to their fellow migrants, manufacturing workers in general receive higher education, which renders them better resourced to negotiate with employers or other barriers that occur in the context of migration.



We recruited the research participants for both phases of the study through our own social networks and with the help of Rerum Novarum Center for Migrants. The migrant fishing workers gather at cafes in the harbour area, and we recruited participants informally at these establishments.

Two translators assisted with the participant recruitment and data gathering. Both work professionally as translators for governmental and business sectors. One is fluent in Vietnamese, and the other is fluent in Indonesian. Some participants have worked in Taiwan for a long time and are fluent in Mandarin. We performed 14 interviews in fluent Mandarin and one English interview with a Filipina worker. Additionally, we interviewed employers, the physicians serving in the clinics where migrant workers usually seek medication, the staff of migrant advocacy groups, and two migrant spouses who worked for recruiting agencies.

We explained the study's goal to research participants before each interview began. We obtained informed consent for participation and, for many, to record their interview. For those interviewees who were not comfortable with the recorder, we took notes during interviews and later developed them into detailed transcriptions.

### **Liminality of Migrant Workers' Status**

Taiwanese migrant labor policies have no path to citizenship. The state argues that, because of its limited territory, Taiwan cannot accommodate immigrants. Therefore, the government does not allow migrant workers to bring their families with them or to marry in Taiwan, even to other migrant workers. Taiwan lacks birthright citizenship, so babies born to migrant workers are not Taiwanese citizens. Migrant workers can only take jobs with employers who have applied for the right to hire them. They cannot even change

employers without the approval of the Taiwanese government. Therefore, migrant workers' legal status is bound to their employment with specific employers. This regulation contributes to migrant workers' dependency on their Taiwanese employers and aggravates the unequal power relations between these two parties. This section describes this and other policies that shape migrant workers' working conditions and health.

### ***Long Working Hours and Heavy Work Loads***

Labor regulations under Taiwan's Labor Standards Law make an exception for live-in care workers. Private contracts dictate the working conditions of these workers without government regulation. Our interviews suggest that even migrant workers outside of this exception, which includes fishing workers, industrial workers and care workers employed in institutions, experience violations of the law.

Fishing workers experience particularly long hours. One local fisherman in his early sixties who employs many migrant workers told us that he had not had a day off in years apart from the time a typhoon hit Taiwan. Migrant fishermen cannot negotiate with their employers because the state may not permit them to find a new job. An Indonesian worker named Ah-Li sighed heavily as he told us, "We have to work even under the heavy rains. The only exception was the typhoon days." Ah-Li lived and worked on an inshore fishing boat. He usually started his day around four o'clock in the morning when the boat was leaving the port for work. He returned more than nine hours later, between one and two o'clock in the afternoon. Then he helped sell the catch for several hours. Around six in the evening he helped pack up the leftovers. He took a shower, changed his clothes, cooked food and had dinner, went to sleep, and

dreamed of his family back home. He followed this schedule seven days a week. His hours were by no means uncommon and we found that even a dire need might not disrupt long hours. An interviewee from Indonesia, Toto, had an urgent medical appointment planned one evening, but he cancelled it at the last minute because of bad weather. He was the only migrant worker amongst his co-workers. He had to stay on the boat and be in charge of keeping the ship safe.

Ramniat has worked as a fisherman in Taiwan for 11 years, and he described similar experiences to Ah-Li's. His current employer was a pelagic fishing ship that routinely went to sea for four months. Ramniat said that he was used to having no sleep for 24 hours or more at a time. "The fishing net was very big. It took at least 11 hours to haul it. If the fishhooks were cut off in the process of hauling the net, we were unable to sleep. It's time consuming to detect and find the fishhooks in the sea." When a pelagic fishing ship returns to the port, it usually takes two weeks to few months to launch again. Migrant fishermen's employers typically have other duties for them in the interim, such as repairing the boats or fishing nets. Some told us their employers had required them to perform domestic duties in the meantime. The employers require them to obtain permission to leave the harbour area; otherwise they are always on call.

Migrant live-in care workers may actually work 24 hours a day. While a governmental survey of employers (Ministry of Labor, 2015) puts the average working hours of live-in care workers at 10.2 hours and states that 36.2 percent of them did not have days off or overtime pay, our interviews suggest these are understatements. For example, Keyla, an Indonesian migrant worker (31 years old) had worked as a live-in care worker in Taiwan for almost 11 years, as

soon as she graduated from high school. She had for years taken care of an elderly couple. As she described,

I had no days off. I provided round-the-clock care to [my female employer]. I could not leave her alone. We slept in the same bed. I could not have enough rest until she passed away.... We were very close. When she was hospitalised, I accompanied her in the hospital. When she was sick, I was sick too. [Her family] wanted to hire another care worker who could stay in the hospital with her [so Keyla could stay with her male employer], but she rejected that. She begged me [to go with her].

It is not uncommon for live-in care workers to have two employers who are married to one another. Siti, an Indonesian worker, was in charge of the daily life of an elderly couple in their early eighties. Her contract, which she signed before coming to Taiwan, indicated she would work 365 days a year. She never went out alone by herself. She described relying on her employer, his wife, or her friend, a migrant worker next door, to purchase necessities for her.

While it was not uncommon for a live-in care worker's contract to stipulate the number of working days in the year, most did not stipulate working hours. Annie, who had worked in Taiwan for almost six years, said, "I did not have explicit working hours. We did not have the regulation for that. I had to provide help whenever [my employers or their family] needed. If they did not go to sleep, I did not dare to sleep." Annie was 25 when she first came to Taiwan from Indonesia. The woman she took care of was frequently restless at night. Wati described a similar experience. She said that she hardly had enough rest since coming to Taiwan from Indonesia. She lived alone with an elderly couple and their adult children seldom visited them, so she got no relief.

I slept with the grandmother and grandfather in the same room. Their daily schedules were very different. The grandmother usually woke

up at two or three a.m. while the grandfather was sleeping soundly. If I did not satisfy her request immediately, she would make noises by knocking on the wall. I used to sleep few hours per day. I was used to it.

Most live-in care workers described sleeping with their care recipients in the same room, and sharing a bed, as Keyla did, was common. Amanna described her life when she cared for an elderly woman for six months,

I was very nervous all the time. I felt that I was always in the status of being ready to work. I never dared to sit down or relax. I always stood up for my employer to call me. The grandmother [a term of respect for older women] I took care of was quite old. She liked to walk forth and back in the house. I followed her closely and was careful of her. It was very dangerous if she fell down.

Amanna, who had immigrated from Indonesia, worked as a babysitter when she was back home. She emphasised that caring for the elderly was extremely different from caring for the baby. Her unfamiliarity with the elderly made her stressed out. The government stipulates that migrant care workers hired by individual families have to live with their care recipients. This specific arrangement makes it easier for employers to require long hours. It also makes them vulnerable to physical and other kinds of abuse (Cheng, 2003; Liang, 2014). Even without abuse, as Annie said,

We were not family but we had to live together.... If I did not think of the salaries, I would run away. I tended to feel uncomfortable when I lived with [my employer and his family]. I always had to obey them.

Migrant workers' hours and lack of days off have a serious impact on their health and wellbeing. Occupational medicine research has established this across occupations (Mobed, Gold and Schenker, 1992; Dinat and Peberdy, 2007; Malhotra et al., 2013), but especially among live-in care workers and fishing workers. The

migrant workers we interviewed often used the adjective “tired” to describe themselves.

### *Power Dynamics of the Employment Relations*

Taiwan’s policies on migrant labour place migrant workers in a liminal space where their employers manage and surveil their lives (Cheng, 2003). Many employers describe care workers as family members, but this seems to compound their control. Keyla said,

I did not dare to tell [my employer] that I was tired. Sometimes I wanted to tell [my employers] that it was unreasonable for me to carry out all the work [they demanded of me] ... They always said “you were part of our family.” But what did they mean by being a family member?

Similarly, Ah-Li’s employer emphasised that she and her husband, the captain of the ship where he worked, treated Ah-Li as their son. Ah-Li told us, “The captain’s wife was nice to me. But I knew that I had to obey them and worked very hard. I was always very careful. I could not afford to make any mistake when I worked.”

Many interviewees emphasised that they had benign employers, yet they understood the power dynamics between themselves and their employers and seldom disobeyed their employers’ preferences. Annie was an exception. She joined the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan (ATKI-Taiwan), in spite of her employer’s disapproval. She told us that Taiwan’s government should regulate working hours. Her employer was unhappy about her participation, but did not forbid her or fire her. Yet in many ways Annie remained docile.

The expectation of submissiveness had deep roots. Annie had been trained at a recruiting centre in Indonesia before applying for a job in Taiwan. She pointed out that the main goal of the training

courses was to transform every unique individual into a docile and obedient worker.

When I was in the training centre, I could not have a different opinion from the agency. No matter what I would like to do, I had to finish the work assigned. Otherwise, I would not have been qualified to work overseas. [In Taiwan] the situation was the same. I had to listen to my boss or quit the job.

Listening to their employers implied staying silent about health issues. Annie said she was frequently unhappy.

We met Liha at the office of a non-governmental organisation that helped migrant workers who were having disputes with their employers. Liha had many silent moments during our interview. Later we realised that her employer had mistreated her. She said to us that she often wondered, “Why did they treat me like this? We were only here to work and make money. We did not have any other extravagant hope.”

### *The Impact of Language Barriers*

Surip was beginning the third year of his second contract as a fisherman in Taiwan when we had a talk. He had come from Indonesia and at first did not speak Mandarin. As he said,

Before I came to Taiwan, my broker gave me a brochure on Mandarin learning. But it was useless. I needed to speak Mandarin to do my job. If I could speak Mandarin, I might not feel stressed out at work. I could communicate well with my employer. I did not need to worry that I would make the mistake because of the language.

When we met Surip, his Mandarin was still limited to a few words and short sentences. Fishing requires teamwork, which requires communication. Workers must follow their leader’s instructions. The language barriers result in great pressures at work.

Care workers like Siti also described language barriers as an issue, saying that she frequently irritated the elderly woman she cared for because she did not understand her. Siti had been in Taiwan for eight months when we interviewed her and her Mandarin ability was very limited. Sandi's first employment was in the southern part of Taiwan until the person she looked after died. Her employer, the daughter-in-law of the charge, assigned her lots of work and shouted at her frequently. She said that she had always had a regular menstrual cycle before, but her menses stopped for five months under that employer. While for Siti and Sandi, the impact of the language barrier was uniformly negative, Toto, who was the only foreigner on the fishing boat where he worked, said that his employer's verbal abuse was less unpleasant because "At least I did not understand what he shouted." It demonstrates the strategy used by Toto to comfort himself under the tough environment.

For migrant workers in the manufacturing sector, the language issue also matters. Wen was in his early twenties and had worked as an operator at a printing factory for more than two years. He graduated from college and then took the job in a local cable company in Vietnam before immigrating to Taiwan. He recalled how nervous he was in the first year of his work,

I could not speak any Mandarin at that time, not to mention reading Chinese characters. I did not know how to read the instruction on the machine or on the wall. I had to depend on my Vietnamese co-worker, but he had his own work to do. I was afraid of many things. I worried that I could not catch the work path on the assembly line. I worried that I would make mistakes. I worried that I would get injured because of my unfamiliarity with the machine ... I had a stomach-ache for more than a month in my second month after arrival. When I could not endure the pain, my co-worker brought me to the emergency room. I was diagnosed with a stomach ulcer. The physician said that I was too stressed out.



As illustrated by Wen's experiences, previous research has demonstrated that language barriers can result not only in work disturbances, but it also has the potential to harm migrant workers' health (Kartam, Flood and Koushki, 2000; Pransky et al., 2002). Ah-Li and Toto injured their fingers because of the improper operation of machines on the boats where they worked. Ching, a Vietnamese worker, mistook hydrochloric acid in his working site and burned his arm. Although Ching graduated from college in Vietnam he could not read Chinese characters.

Wati could communicate with her employer and her charges, but she did not think she could communicate with a doctor, and she had experienced symptoms of depression. She found herself fearing the dark. Her heart raced at night, and she could not even get the meagre sleep allotted to her. She told the daughter of the elderly couple she cared for, and found the response dismissive. "I knew that she was not interested in bringing me to see a doctor," said Wati, who would not have been comfortable going to a doctor alone, even if she could get the time off to do so because of language and cultural differences. Her employer would have had to find a temporary replacement for her during such a visit, and would likely have had to pay for it. Thus Wati suffered in silence under a condition that is very common among migrant care workers (Chin, 1997; Silvey, 2004; Pande, 2013).

The fisherman Ramniat was promoted by his employer to a leadership role on the boat he worked. Nevertheless, he felt disappointed in his Mandarin ability as he said,

I wish that my Mandarin could be improved. I did not highly depend on Mandarin to communicate with the captain during work. We had worked together for a long time that I was familiar with the way of he worked. But I still wish that I could speak better Mandarin so that

I could talk with him either for work or for daily chats. Additionally, I would know more Taiwanese and could talk with them.

Ramniat, along with other migrant workers were quite isolated in both working sites and Taiwanese society. The language barriers not only create difficulties in communication at their workplaces but also confine them to the marginal space outside the mainstream society.

### **A Healthy Body as a Workable Body**

Migrant workers usually choose to endure harsh working conditions and illness because of their economic needs and hope for a promising future. In addition, unequal power relations between themselves and their employers guide their actions and behaviours. Within these contexts, they do not prioritise their health. Employers often regard migrant workers as usable labour rather than individuals with reproductive and emotional needs (Lindio-McGovern, 2003). They fail to recognise that migrant workers are human beings situated in a specific social and historical context. In this section, we explain why and how the logic of capitalism reduces migrant workers' individual value to their productivity. It affects both workers' and employers' perception of workers' body and health.

#### ***Work for a Better Life***

Keyla recalled her decision to work overseas, "If I did not come to Taiwan, I might have got married at that time. I was the oldest in my family. At that time, I wanted to share my mother's financial burden and help my younger siblings get a better education." Structural adjustment programmes in Indonesia made work for people like Keyla scarce (Moghadam, 2007). It was not easy to find a decent

job in Indonesia and they were forced to seek better opportunities overseas.

While Keyla had no children, most female migrant workers we interviewed were mothers separated from their children. Many of them mentioned that they were determined to work in foreign countries because they aimed to provide their children with a promising future. Siti, for example, had a seven-year-old daughter,

I learned from my friend's experience. She worked in Taiwan to save a huge amount of money. She was a success now. She owned a business and had the ability to provide her family with a good life. My girl is still little now. It was the time I could leave her back home under the care of my mother and younger sister. I have to work hard to save money. Later I can return home to accompany her and prevent her from getting spoiled. I also have a dream. I hope that I will be able to take care of my mother and my child in the future.

May was 30 years old. She left her family in Indonesia and worked as a live-in care worker in Taiwan eight years ago. She said,

The grandmother had a bad temper. But I understood that it was her personality. I had to endure her. I did not have a choice ... I would cry in the beginning. She beat me every day. She also bit me or squeezed me ... I could not stop crying. In the beginning, I was afraid of speaking [to the grandmother's adult child, her employer] about the grandmother's situation. I told my employer that I felt helpless. I was thinking of running away but I could not. I had two children. If I did not [make money], they could not continue their education. My poor children! I had to cheer up no matter how the situation was.

Male migrant workers who were married expressed similar commitments to supporting their families back home. Ah-Li, for example, told us, "As you can see, my work is not easy. Living on the boat was hard [he smiled, but it seemed bitter]. My family, my wife, and my children were praying for me every day. They prayed

for my safety and good health.” On one hand, the emotional ties with the families back home give migrant workers the spiritual support to sustain them in foreign lands; on the other hand, these ties constrain their agency. No matter how their employers treat them, they have to endure.

### ***“Our Health is not Their Concern”: Disposable Workers***

Puji, an Indonesian worker who had been a live-in care worker but worked in a factory when we spoke, described the situation migrant workers face,

Some of my friends, they did not have money [to see a physician]. Often, neither their brokers nor their employers would care for them. The employers thought that you were here to work. The elderly needed someone to take care of. If [a migrant worker] was sick, what could the employer do? Should he [her] take care of you [my friend]? [My] broker would regard [me] as trouble.

According to Puji, brokers and employers felt that a sick worker should not have come to Taiwan. Terry told us that when she was sick she still had to work with no exception. She felt that her employer regarded her as a machine, not a human being.

The Taiwanese government claims that migrant workers provide temporary and supplementary labour rather than substituting for local workers. This policy assumes that workers are free individuals without reproductive and emotional needs (Acker, 1990). It supports an approach in which the government and employers aim to extract maximum labour. They fail to recognise the embodied nature of work.

Toto had harmed his finger because he was not familiar with the machine he had to use on the fishing boat. He recalled his employer’s reaction to his injury with anger:

I did not feel that he cared about my injury at all. It was indifference for him. He just gave me the fee for taking taxi to the clinic. He did not do anything. One of my co-workers knew that I was afraid of going to the clinic alone. He accompanied me to see the doctor.

Other than this one incident, Toto had never asked his employer for help to obtain healthcare. Every time, when he needed to seek for medication, he depended on the kindness of his co-workers. Siti was 36 years old and had been working overseas since she was 18. She said,

I told my employer that I had a backache after enduring the pain for a while. But she said that it was normal because of the cold and humid weather during the winter time. She did not mention anything about seeing a doctor. She just suggested that I need to have more rest.

Siti felt that her employer was too busy to bother. She decided to keep silent until she could not endure the pain anymore. She told us that every day when she took a shower, she used hot water to relieve her pain.

Both employers and recruiting agencies adopt the standard of a workable body to value migrant workers. Yanni, a migrant spouse from Indonesia who used to work as a translator for recruiting agencies, shared the sorrowful story of a live-in care worker she met in the course of this work.

She found that she had breast cancer during the regular physical examination [and determined she would have to stop working]. She asked her employer not to suspend the contract so she could stay in Taiwan for the follow-up treatment. She could not afford the cost of medication back in Indonesia. But her employer rejected her proposal and contended that she was hired to take care of the elderly. They felt no responsibility to care for her.

Employers treat migrant workers as disposable labour. Workers generally recognise that their value is based on their productivity. They must maintain a workable body or be replaced.

Migrant workers usually continue working even when they are ill. They note that employers will be unhappy about their requests for sick leaves. The migrant fisherman Ah-Li smiled bitterly as he described his experience, “The boat I worked on was very small. We only had four people, including the captain. We had our own position when we casted and hauled in the net. When I felt ill or had the flu, I usually continued the work. As you saw, did I have the any other choice?” Live-in migrant care workers also have no relief. May saw a doctor for a serious lower back pain possibly because she needed to carry around the grandmother she cared for. She depended on shots of anodyne in order to work.

Many live-in migrant care workers suffered from a chronic pain. They had no way to recover as their charges continually required them to repeat the operations that had injured them. Wati explained, “I was healthy. I did not have time to be sick.”

Migrant workers not only worry that sick leaves will displease their employers. They also worry about the loss of salary and the cost of medication. The Vietnamese worker Fan worked in a lathe factory. He fell and injured his knee. A physician told him that he needed to have a surgery but he refused. “The knee of my right leg felt painful when I climbed upstairs. The physician told me that only surgery could cure the knee’s problem. He said that I had to stay in the hospital for a few days for the recovery. I had neither the time nor the money for that.”

Migrant workers are entitled to National Health Insurance in Taiwan, but they struggle even to pay the co-pay on prescription medication. Many migrant workers are reluctant to see a doctor,

anticipating that they will not be able to afford the care the doctor prescribes. Migrant workers earn lower salaries than most native workers do, and must pay recruiting agency fees (so-called “loan”) and local broker’s service fees. Toto said he had testicular pain that had been unresolved by the local clinic. We suggested that he see a doctor in the larger hospital, but he expressed concerns about the cost.

The usability of labour is the most important standard for valuing the employability of migrant workers. It is influenced by the logic of capitalism, which applies the market principle to consider the value of individuals. Within this context, we fail to see workers as individuals in their specific social contexts. As a result, workers’ health is not a priority of employment relations.

## **Conclusion**

Neither migrant workers nor their employers treat workers’ health as a significant concern. This essay analyses the lives of migrant workers who are situated within particular social and political-economic contexts that constrain their agency. The findings draw our attention to social infrastructures and institutional arrangements, including state policies and regulations, liminality of migratory status, power relations between workers and employers, and the logics of capitalist productions, complementing earlier works on occupational hazards.

This essay contends that the state still plays a critical role in the context of globalisation and transnational migration. To date, it has focused on regulating migrant workers rather than providing them with legal protections. This has left migrant workers highly vulnerable. We argue that migrant workers have been denied their rights to health. The state should adopt policies that entitle migrant

workers to more complete healthcare. Truly protecting workers' rights will require a rethinking of the logic of capitalist productions that devalue migrant workers as disposable labour.

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# From Being the Object to Becoming the Subject: South Korea's Migrant Workers Movements

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## ABSTRACT

*Migrant workers in Korea largely remain marginalised because the country's immigration policy does not allow integration. Amidst discriminations and contradictions, various civil society organisations and migrant workers groups have tried to address this situation. These efforts bring back a certain degree of dignity to the migrants. This research tries to analyse Korea's policies for migrant workers from the point of view of social exclusion and changes that are taking place in Korean society. Focusing on migrants' voluntary voices and actions, it will highlight recent trends and a crucial point.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Korea, migrant workers, social movements, NGOs, Christian organizations*

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In September 2016, the World Taekwondo and Food festival was held for migrants who lived in Seoul, Korea. It centred on performing Taekwondo (Korean traditional martial art) as its main item. This sport is very popular internationally so many foreigners, especially migrant groups who had learned it in community centres, took part in the festival. Also, diverse married female migrant groups sold their traditional dishes to the crowd to introduce their own food and culture. Participating in it, I could find various people regardless of their age, skin colour and nationality when selling Pho with Vietnamese ladies. Now, the number of migrants in Korea is over 2 million people.

Migration is a global phenomenon. The total number of immigrants in the world has reached 214 million (Lee and Kim, 2011). South Korea (henceforth Korea) was an emigration country till the 1970s. Industrialisation in Korea started from the beginning of 1960s, and had to overcome economic crises. Many Koreans moved to a number of countries looking for a new life and escaping from poverty.<sup>2</sup> Holding the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympics, Korea was finally known globally and transformed into an immigration country. Since Korea established diplomatic relations with China in 1992, a considerable number of un-skilled Chinese workers and/or women have moved over to Korea for work and marriage with Koreans. In terms of policy, the Korean government encourages international marriages especially in rural areas. Many women from Asian countries arrived rapidly through brokers and agencies (Kim, 2008). According to the Ministry of

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<sup>2</sup> In the late Joseon Dynasty, a fair number of Joseon people left for Russia and China. A lot of Koreans moved to Japan in the colonial period. About 30,000 people moved to America after the 1965 Reform of Immigration Law. In the 1970s, many nurses and miners went to Germany and huge amount of construction workers worked in the Middle East (Park, 2005: 89-90).

Migration in 2014 the number of migrants living in Korea including the unofficial ones was 617,145 (The Ministry of Migration, 2014). A decade before the total number of migrants living in Korea was only slightly more than half that figure at 367,158 (The Ministry of Labour, 2003).

In 1994, the Korean government adopted the Industrial Trainee System (ITS) which managed migrant workers as trainees whose rights as workers were not fully protected (Han, 2003: 165). This scheme was often remarked as a “temporary solution” because many companies exaggerated the terms in their recruitment drive with advertisement to bring in more trainees, promising high commissions. Abused by unscrupulous enterprises and brokerage agencies, the problems with the policy were soon exposed. In 1995, migrant workers, NGOs and religious groups demonstrated against the ITS and the government. It attracted a lot of attention and triggered changes of the system (Han, 2015).

These institutional limitations were scraped following the enactment of the Employment Permit System (EPS) in 2004. As soon as the EPS was adopted, legal protections for migrant workers are guaranteed and many services are made available. Under this scheme migrant workers can get their visa only when they are hired by business owners. They can get three years of working visa and extend their stay only once. They cannot bring their families. The reason is that the Korean government wants to prevent future social security costs if migrant workers have citizenship or permanent resident status. In the end, it is an extremely selective and exclusionary scheme and soon its limitations are exposed, especially in its practices.

Mostly, migrant workers remain marginalised in Korean society because the country’s immigration policy does not allow integration.

Amidst discriminations and contradiction in consciousness, civil society organisations and migrant workers themselves have been trying to address this situation. This research tries to analyse Korea's policies for migrant workers from the point of view of social exclusion and changes that are taking place in Korean society. Focusing on migrants' voluntary voices and actions, it will highlight recent trends and a crucial point.

### **Social Exclusion: Unseen Shackles**

Immigration policies are generally categorised as immigration control and integration. According to the existing laws, the Employment of Foreign Workers Act (2004) is to facilitate control while the enactment of the Basic Act regarding the Treatment of Resident Foreigners (2007) and the Multicultural Family Support Law (2008) are for promoting integration. The logic of social inclusion and exclusion forms the foundation of these divided purposes. Social exclusion is highly noticeable and prevents migrants from enjoying political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Social inclusion is mainly about providing them with services related to labour, education and welfare. Table 1 explains social exclusion and inclusion as proposed by Verma.

**Table 1.**  
Social Exclusion & Social Inclusion

Exclusion	Inclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denial of political rights</li> <li>• Discrimination in labour markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political participation</li> <li>• Equal opportunity in labour markets (three rights of workers)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disadvantaged groups (grade approach)</li> <li>• Disturbing social interaction</li> <li>• Human rights violation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing rights and social benefits (insurance)</li> <li>• Strengthening social interaction</li> <li>• Abolition of discrimination (Policies for protecting human rights)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination in educational benefit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal opportunity for education</li> </ul>

Source: Verma, 2002

Of all migrants, migrant workers receive the harshest treatments and they will most likely leave the country following the exclusion policy. Korean media describe them as poor people from developing countries and create an image which is an object of empathy (Han, 2003: 181-184). As explained above, migrant workers are not treated equally and most importantly, they are socially excluded.

### ***Institutional Barriers***

It is impossible for migrant workers to stay for a long term due to the semi sedentary principle of the EPS.<sup>3</sup> There are few policies to protect social rights of migrants under the EPS. Social integration policy or multicultural family supporting policy are being optimised. Conducted by the Ministry of Justice in 2009, the Social Integration Programme for Immigrants provides a Korean language course and basic knowledge to make them understand life in Korea. Migrant workers are eligible for this support.

<sup>3</sup> “They are no more than visiting workers and will leave anyway at certain period.” (Choi, 2012).

Finally, on August 17, 2004, the Korean government started to implement the EPS to replace the ITS. The EPS in principle gives a work visa to authorised migrants and protects their human rights by treating them equally with locals in terms of both payment and working hour. The EPS allows authorised migrant workers to stay officially in Korea<sup>4</sup> for three years, with an option of extending the stay for two more years with a limited chance; overall migrants can stay for up to five years maximum. The problem is that under this scheme the authorisation for work must come from local business owners and it forbids migrants to come with their families. Furthermore, this policy cannot guarantee their right for welfare in Korea. The Korean government only cares about labour efficiency and migrant workers are considered as a group of people who provide labour and then will leave.

There is still a provision to embrace migrant workers socially. Thanks to the EPS, migrant workers are guaranteed of protection by the Minimum Wages Act, the Labour Standards Act and the three primary rights of workers. Residential support, special insurance and emergency medical services are offered to them. The Ministry of Employment and Labour monitors the residence and employment status of migrant workers regularly and runs counselling organisations. In addition, the Support Centre for Foreign Workers' provides professional advices and services (Choi and Kim, 2011).

### ***Multiple Hierarchisation***

In the studies on migration processes, the economic theory of the neoclassical school is a dominant paradigm. The general theory says

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<sup>4</sup> Korean government contracted MOU with some countries to permit the labour migration through bilateral agreements (Kim, 2009: 3-4).



that population density changes from high income to low income level. It is also known as the push-pull theory. People usually select migration for the reasons of “pull factors” such as better living standards, job opportunities, political freedom, etc. and “push factors” such as lack of jobs, land availability, lack of political freedom, etc. However, as types of immigration become diverse, specific migration experiences challenge existing theories. Scholars such as Sassen (1988) criticises that earlier migration theories do not explain actual movement and cannot predict future mobility. Another theory that can complement limitations of mainstream theory is the dual labour market theory (or labour market segment theory). Dual labour market theory divides the labour market into two structures in terms of race, gender and institutional factors. Developed countries have structural needs for high-skilled workers and low-skilled manual workers so the absorbed labour gets differentiated (Piore, 1979). Korea’s labour market can be considered polarised like most global cities (Castles Miller, 2005).

The government opened the labour market to foreigners without fully considering the impacts it may have had on the local economy especially domestic low-wage workers. The wage level of local low-skilled workers has declined and the dual structure of the labour market has deepened. It is true that because of demographic factors like the low birth rate and the aging population, foreign workers are required. Currently, domestic markets lack workforce for the first industry area and manufacturing industry<sup>5</sup>. Mostly, low-paid workers come with the E-9 visa through the EPS. Since 2000 there has been a slight increase in research & technology-related professions and entertainment & sports-related professions. The

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<sup>5</sup> These are the so-called 3D (difficulty, dirty and dangerous) jobs (Kim, A. E., 2009).

number of skilled professionals and foreign language teachers has increased rapidly, resulting in an increase of highly skilled technical workers (Lim and Song, 2010: 281). As shown in Table 2, E-9 Visa holders reached 279,047 and made up almost half of the total foreign workers in 2016.

**Table 2.**  
Status of Foreign Workforce by Immigration and Visa Division

	Status	Person
<b>PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE</b>	Short-term employee (C-4)	1,293
	Professor (E-1)	2,632
	Foreign language instructor (E-2)	15,735
	Researcher (E-3)	3,132
	Technical instructor/technician (E-4)	189
	Professional (E-5)	622
	Artist and athlete (E-6)	4,706
	Foreign national of special ability (E-7)	21,129
	<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>49,438</b>
<b>UN-SKILLED WORKFORCE</b>	Non-professional (E-9)	279,047
	Maritime crew (E-10)	15,307
	Work and visit (H-2)	266,850
	<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>561,204</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>610,642</b>

Source: Immigration Service Statistics Monthly Report (September 2016)

While the migration flow of high-income workers is often considered as the “upper circuit”, the migration of low-skilled workers is characterised by the “survival circuit” (Jung, 2008). It shows differences not only in the types of occupations but also in the nationalities of migrants, the residential areas in Korea, and the legal status. While professional migrant workers are mainly from

developed countries and reside in large cities such as Seoul and Gyeonggi (the province around Seoul), low-wage workers have mainly migrated from developing countries and lived in small towns where industrial districts and manufacturing industries are located (Lim and Song, 2010: 283-288).

Korean migrant policies operate under the basic framework of homogenous nationalism. It tends to respond discriminatorily towards migrants. Defectors running from North Korea are people in Korea only, not refugee. *Chaeoe dongpo*<sup>6</sup> or overseas Koreans are considered Korean thanks to the principle of *jus sanguinis*. In Table 3, Kang and Lee (2011) show how Koreans feel a sense of psychological distance about different groups in society. Koreans think highly of political national identity consciously but keep strong ethnic identity emotionally (Cho and Ko, 2013: 321-323).

**Table 3.**  
A Sense of Psychological Distance about groups in the Korean Society  
(in percentage points)

Division	Perfectly others	Almost others	Almost Korean	Korean
North Korean Defectors	5.5	23.2	44.2	27.2
Overseas Koreans who stay in other countries	10.0	43.9	31.9	14.2
Overseas Koreans who stay in Korea	8.1	46.6	36.0	9.2
Migrant Workers	13.1	48.3	31.1	7.5
International Marriage Immigrants	5.5	24.0	45.7	24.8

Source: Kang and Lee (2011, 16)

<sup>6</sup> Overseas Koreans who had Korea's citizenship in the past and their descendants or Korean citizens who live abroad for getting the citizenship (Skrentny, Chan, Fox and Kim, 2007: 800).

Lee and Kim (2011) distinguish six types of migrant: North Korean defector, married migrant, overseas Korean, migrant worker, overseas Chinese and refugee. A principle of discriminatory exclusion operates in Korean society and government based on each group's ethnic homogeneity and efficiency as workforce.<sup>7</sup> Migrant groups are no exception; their ethnic identity and perceived productivity determine their place in the government policy on migration. The so-called "ethnic priority" looks like this in the order of descending significance: "Local Worker → Overseas Korean Worker → Migrant Worker → Illegal Sojourner".

Hierarchical conflicts are getting worse within the labour market. Overseas Koreans show their anger on being treated like foreigners and migration workers. The more foreign workers arrive, the more anxious local workers feel about job security. Unique mono-ethnic nationalism and racism brings about "hierarchical nationhood" (Seol and Skrentyny, 2007). Especially, discriminations and prejudices help to label migrant workers as foreigners and potential criminals (Shin, 2012), which could lead to racial violent and/or xenophobia.

## **Changes in Korean Society**

### *Christian Organisations*

Religious organisations have supported migrant workers since the early influx of immigration. A survey of 90 migrant organisations by the Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development (CISJD) in 2000 revealed that the majority of those organisations, 79 to be exact, were religious in character (Seol, 2001). Most of all,

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<sup>7</sup> Each group is supported by different service policy with benefits in 5 different dimensions (stable rights, approach to labour market, welfare and/or political rights and migrant policy).

Christian churches helped improve the respect for migrant workers' status and rights. Christianity teaches that all are God's people and created in the image of God, and that includes strangers (Seo, 2014: 505-506). The universalistic mission makes them equal (Park, 2013).

Firstly, the Catholic church moved actively. Founded in 1992, the Foreign Worker Labour Counselling Office of the Seoul Archdiocese (FWLCO) provided counselling services. The Korean Catholic church tried to promote the Foreign Worker Protection Law<sup>8</sup> in 1997. In 2003, a pastoral office for migrant workers was set up in the Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea (CBCK). It tried to form a network with several connected groups (Park, 2005: 91-92). The Society of Jesus founded a centre for migrant workers named "Yiutsari" in Gimpo city, a suburb of Seoul.

Protestant churches started to support migrant workers in 1992. Their involvement was for humanitarian reasons. At first, missionary unions and specialised ministries worked together. In the 2000s, general regional churches made a new department for them and created diverse activities. Some churches established foundations to run coffee shops and social enterprises (Jang and Jeong, 2015: 189-200).

Most migrant workers believe in Buddhism, Islam or non-Christian religions. The Protestant churches of Korea treat them in two ways: mission work and human rights. The churches play two roles for migrant workers: 1) support for social settlement 2) support for religious activities (Jang and Jeong, 2015). They provide counselling and social services and advocate for their rights because

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<sup>8</sup> It includes the following provisions: 1) abolition of the ITS; 2) implementation of the EPS; 3) provision of social welfare benefits for migrant workers; 3) the granting of amnesty to all immigrant including nonregistered groups (Lim, 2003: 440).

migrant workers suffer from low wages, sweatshop working conditions and rights violation. Also, they provide Korean language courses, worship services and manage programmes like cultural festivals and communal activities. (Park, 2013). Migrant workers tend to prefer religious organisations and churches because they help them link with existing networks and adapt to Korean society (Eom, 2010). Some churches work on worships and self-help meetings in the languages of migrants.

The leadership of clergy-activists succeeds to manage this movement. They raise funds and exchange information about migrant workers through the religious networks. Foreign priests and missionaries can communicate with foreign workers so it is easier to support their communities. Well-organised international networks and conferences are very effective means for solving problems around them (Kim, 2011a: 1653-56).

### ***Social Inclusion by NGOs***

The Ministry of Employment and Labour oversees the employment of migrant workers and the Ministry of Justice manages the qualification for staying. As part of the former, the Support Centre for Foreign Workers, helps non-professional workers (E-9) (Park, 2013). Organisations for migrants mainly help the interaction between government agencies and NGOs.

Some NGOs play an important role in guaranteeing rights of migrant workers (Kim, D., 2011b). Many church-based activists led Korea's pro-democracy movements in the 1970s and 1980s under the influence of *minjung* theology. At present there are many NGO leaders in the pro-migrant organisations (Kim, D., 2011a: 1650-55).

These organisations were regularised in the 1990s. The Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ) was a prominent civic group. In 1994 some migrant workers from Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines, and Ethiopia staged a sit-in protest in front of the headquarters of the CCEJ. It lasted for 29 days to protect their human rights. The CCEJ supported them actively and had an important role in the demonstration after a year (Lim, 2003: 434-437).

Korean NGOs formed a coalition at a national scale to promote their social and working rights with the 1995's protest. The organisation was called the Joint Committee for Migrant Workers in Korea (JCMK) and contributed to setting the framework of the EPS in place of the ITS. In 2003, it split into itself and the Network for Migrants' Rights (NMR) (Kim, 2011a: 1652). Church-based NGOs do their works by motivating activists through altruistic acts under the leadership of clergy-activist, but this strategy sometimes creates a hierarchical religious relationship. Today, many directors of Korean NGOs are experienced activists who were active in social movements for democracy under the authoritarian regime in 1970s and 1980s. These characteristics often become sources of misunderstanding with young activists and foreign activists (Kim, 2011a: 1661-2).

Since 2001, a number of counselling centres have been set up for female migrant workers, who are a minority among foreign workers (Kim, 2009). At the same time, however, the sentiment against multicultural groups especially migrant workers increased in the 2000s. The economic crisis caused by neoliberalism amplified the fear and anxiety in Korea. The voices against migrant workers insisted on reverse discriminations in social welfare policies and promoted hatred. Jun's research focuses on this right-wing populist discourse and issues a warning of its violence (Jun, 2015).

Korean civil society needs to abolish this deep-rooted aversion and discriminations for some years ahead.

## **Voluntary Movements and Cooperation**

### *Active Voice of Migrant Workers*

The demonstration in January 1995 in front of the Myeongdong Catholic Cathedral was a turning point, which put migrant workers' issues under the spotlight. 13 Nepalese trainees staged a protest spontaneously and were joined by other foreign workers. Activists of the Nepalese Consulting Committee (NCC) staged a hunger strike and then migrant labour movements were mobilised and organised. They published slogans like this: "Don't beat us!", "Don't take my passport!", "We are men, not beasts" (Jun, 2015: 247).

The EPS guarantees better labour and social rights as compared to the previous regime but it does not cover unregistered workers. Migrant workers who stay in Seoul and its surrounding areas founded an independent labour union, Migrants' Trade Union (MTU), to promote their rights and protect against a wholesale arrest and deportation of undocumented workers (Han, 2015).<sup>9</sup> Migrant worker movements need to change the perception. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) did not treat issues concerning migrant workers directly and the union leaders handed over the problems to other organisations which offer social welfare services. Nevertheless, some of them were aware of the energy and significance of foreign workers. In 2010, KCTU hired immigrant

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<sup>9</sup> Even if workers of MTU cannot stay permanently and have difficulties being trained systematically, they go into sit-in strikes actively to protect themselves. When paternalistic attitudes facing migrant workers often block them, they try to become autonomous (Jung, 2012: 82-84).



activists and planned organisational cooperation with migrant workers' empowerment.<sup>10</sup>

### *Diverse Communities*

Communities of migrant workers play significant roles in intensifying their social bond and integration (Shin, 2012). There are many enclaves and migrant communities in Korea. Migrant worker communities are located mainly in industrial areas and local provinces. Religious organisations support their ethnic communities through activities, workshops or social services.

Many overseas Chinese established big communities in industrial areas of Seoul. There are a lot of Chinese restaurants and grocery shops that look like villages in China. Most of migrant workers from China stay in these communities because they can get information easily and socialise with other workers (Kim, 2009).

Ansan is a famous city near Seoul which houses a lot of migrant workers. There are transnational religious organisations such as the mega Protestant churches for foreign missionaries and mosques. Since the establishment of the Islamic centre in 2002, Bangladeshis and other Muslim migrant workers have congregated in Ansan (Koo, 2015: 24-25). A Korean pastor named Chunung Park has run a centre for foreign workers since 1999 and tried to build a multicultural community of migrant workers which is named "Borderless village" (Oh and Jung, 2006). In 2007 the Korean government designated May 20 each year as "Together Day" and since then the local government of Ansan and local NGOs have held many festivals for immigrants. In such events migrant groups,

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<sup>10</sup> It signed an MOU with the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) (Jung, 2012).

foreign students and mixed marriage couples show off their dances, songs and other ethnic performances.<sup>11</sup>

Technetronic Korean Society (a technically advanced society) makes it possible to construct cyber communities through internet technologies and mobile phones, thanks to public free wi-fi services in the country. Many migrant workers use their mobile phones to communicate with each other and exchange information. In the research of Lee and Kim (2013), migrant workers are reported to use diverse smartphone applications such as Kakato Talk messenger (Korean famous mobile messenger), Skype, Facebook, Youtube, etc. Same ethnic groups often cooperate in solidarity. Some cyber communities have off-line meetings as well. They make strong bond in their cyber communities and then debate political and social issues which are related to their human rights and adapting to Korean society (Lee and Kim, 2013).

In accordance with periodic and societal changes, migrant worker communities diversify their characteristics of membership and programmes. These communities help them to function and live stable lives. However, because of the prejudices of some local people, who suspect them as potential criminals or illegal and threatening groups, these locals remain vigilant against communities of immigrants (Jun, 2015). The study about their communities should consider diverse issues and methods.

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<sup>11</sup> Immigrants from the Philippines, Japan and Cambodia danced their traditional and fusion dance on 17 May 2009. Most performers were international marriage migrants (79.3%). In this research, migrant workers were marginalized in local multicultural festivals (Kang, 2009).

## Conclusion

Over the past two decades, immigration has been increasing rapidly and consequently Korean society is gradually changing into a multicultural society. However, “multiculturalism” mentioned in migration theories does not exist strictly in Korea. There is no single and exact answer to the question “Who are Koreans? Or what is Korean culture?” Koreans still have a strong national identity based on the three principles: territorial inheritance, pure blood, and monolingualism. This ideology separates indigenous people from migrants. And it enables selective inclusion and violent differentiation (Oh, 2009).

Female marriage immigrants and their children are regarded as Korean and citizens. Conversely, migrant workers are treated as transient workers who stay in Korean society, not as citizens. Although the EPS improved migrants’ rights and offers social services, it has many problems that some activists campaign for a change into the WPS (Work Permit System). There are still many barriers. The civil society and religious organisations have been supporting migrant workers for a long time under the changing circumstances of institutional limitations and social exclusions. Simultaneously, labour unions and networks of migrant workers are well organised than before.

There are double logics of social exclusion and inclusion in policies. Also, Korean ethnic nationalism and neoliberal discourses have brought multiple hierarchical classes that produce discriminations and disgust against other groups. It is time to reflect on the real identity which is invisible, breaking out of unsubstantial multicultural policies. Korean society needs to consider a vision of the future which will enable a true social integration (Kang,

2009). The studies about migrant workers such as this will be key to understand changes of Korean society.

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# Financial Literacy and Economic Decision-Making by Returning Overseas Migrants: Exploratory Case Studies of Negotiation within Filipino Households

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## ABSTRACT

*This case study research looks at how four returning overseas Filipino workers in an urban community in the Philippines negotiate their economic roles while reintegrating into their households. The Family Financial Socialisation Conceptual Model was used to analyse the cases, data for which were drawn from key informant interviews using doodling and an object-centred interview guide. Overseas migration reveals a transnationally managed household finances. When returnees come home, they negotiate their relevance as household economic agents in various ways. But as these cases reveal, family dynamics lead to household money management situations in which returnees negotiate trust in handling money through dialogues with family members.*

**KEYWORDS:** *family financial socialisation, return migration, household economic decision-making, remittances, Philippines*

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Return migration is part of the migration cycle but is often overlooked (Chabe-Ferre, Machado and Wahba, 2016). Migration is an economic decision aimed at maximising potential returns from earning exponential incomes elsewhere. But returning to the community of origin can be a product of either success or failure of a person's migration experience (Cassarino, 2004). In the context of international migration, return migration is not just a voluntary act but a proof of readiness—which may be the link between return migration and its development potential (Cassarino, 2004).

Return migration is also a process of mobilising the tangible resources the migrant has/had accumulated elsewhere. This process may take some time (Cassarino, 2004), depending on the individual household's life cycle (e.g., children still studying, gearing for retirement, etc.). Thus, the levels of preparedness and patterns of resource mobilisation differ for various returning migrants (Cassarino, 2004).

This is where financial literacy comes in. Some observe that ample levels of financial literacy will enable a person to plan for the future (World Bank, 2015). In the case of the overseas migrant, planning for the migrant's and the family's long-term economic future begins prior to migrating abroad. But some studies (Brahmana and Brahmana, 2016) show that many migrant workers did not improve their income levels—and (poor) financial planning is one suspected reason for this failure. Overseas migrants coming from low economic backgrounds may be in such a state “due to their unawareness of fundamental economic concepts driving economic well-being during their working period” (Brahmana and Brahmana, 2016).

Whatever happens to the return migrant—whether economically or socially— during reintegration is an empirical question (Chabe-Ferret, Machado and Wahba, 2016). Of interest is the return to the immediate family, and linking reintegration with household financial management. During the migration experience, migrants and migrant households have their own household money management strategies (Gudmunson and Danes, 2011). These strategies depend on who earns more, whether primary and secondary breadwinners contribute to the pooled household income, or who makes household economic decisions, or even what family-level discourses occur on members' economic roles (Gudmunson and Danes, 2011). We can assume that overseas migrant workers are primary breadwinners. The gender of primary income earner also matters when making or negotiating economic decisions (Ang and Opiniano, 2016a, 2016b).

But how will household economic dynamics play out when the overseas migrant returns? Family and kin relations are crucial for return migration and reintegration (Fleischer, 2008). The family is the immediate universe of the migrant worker's reintegration; immediately, economic roles are being negotiated, and that negotiation depends on the return migrant's preparedness for return (Cassarino, 2004) and her/his level of financial aptitude (Brahmana and Brahmana, 2016).

The Philippines has long benefited from overseas Filipinos' billion-dollar remittances which are visible inputs to the country's sustained macro-economic progress since 2009. Development experts prefer a migration that is born out of choice rather than forced on the migrants by economic need. But migrant returnees have good and bad migration experiences. Migrant advocates have clamoured not just for preparing migrants for eventual return, but also for improved levels of financial aptitude so that migrants abroad

would make sound economic decisions (including those for return migration).

Sensing the role of financial literacy as a factor for maximising (return) migration's development potential (Brahmana and Brahmana, 2016), this research aims to contextualise the analysis at the migrant household level. Given the returnee's level of financial aptitude, this qualitative research intends to describe family-level dynamics when returnees negotiate their role in the household-level economic decision-making. At this time, the reintegrating returnee had finished, or may be finishing, an overseas migration experience while still contributing to the household economy.

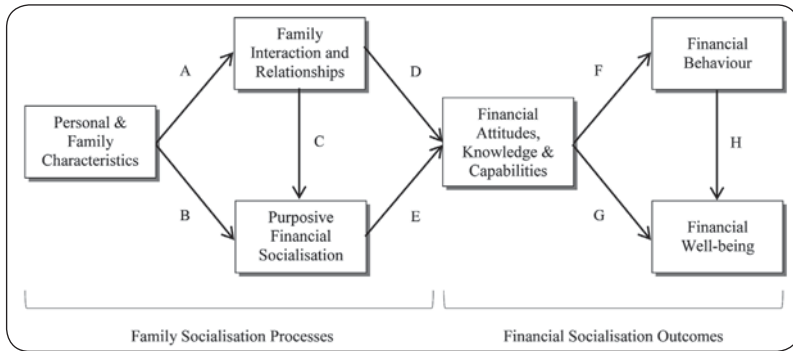
The following are the research questions: 1) What are the overseas migration profiles and experiences of the returnee? How did the migrant prepare for returning to his/her homeland and household? 2) What was the economic goal of the former overseas migrant? 3) What is the level of financial aptitude of the returnee? 4) How were household economic decisions and roles made, assigned and negotiated while the migrant was abroad and when she/he physically returned to the household? 5) How did the returnee negotiate the use of her/his accumulated economic resources abroad in her/his reintegration with the immediate household?

## **Theoretical Background**

### ***Theoretical Framework***

This paper is theoretically anchored on a relatively new framework on family finance, the Family Financial Socialisation. This multi-disciplinary framework of Sharon Danes and Clinton Gudmunson (2011) accounts for personal finance's importance in family socialisation processes. The framework recognises the family

as the primary socialisation agent about finances; the individual backgrounds of family members, as well as the interactions of the members, influence individual and family financial behaviour and well-being. This framework [see Figure 1] has eight pathways (Danes and Gudmunson, 2011; Danes and Yang, 2014):



**Figure 1.**

Family Financial Socialisation Conceptual Model  
(Gudmunson and Danes, 2011)

The first two pathways show the relationships between personal and family characteristics (gender, age family characteristics) with family interaction and relationships (pathway *A*) and with purposive financial socialisation (pathway *B*). These pathways ask why personal and family characteristics are linked to financial outcomes. These first two paths also hypothesise that personal and family characteristics are predictors that can influence family interaction and relationships and purposive financial socialisation.

The third pathway, *C*, shows the relationship between family interaction and relationships (implicit socialisation intention) and purposive financial socialisation (explicit intention). For example, interactions between parents and children are venues to teach acceptable financial skills. A husband and a wife, reared up from

different family backgrounds, blend and make decisions about conjugal resources – and thus, outcomes of such family financial relationships may differ too. We can thus hypothesise that there can be a positive relationship between family interactions and relationships and purposive financial socialisation.

The fourth and fifth pathways show the links between family interactions and relationships and financial attitudes, knowledge and capabilities (pathway *D*) and between purposive financial socialisation and financial attitudes, knowledge and capabilities (pathway *E*). In these two pathways, the place of the family within financial socialisation can be complex because of the nature of a family's dynamics. Variables on family interactions and relationships that can be analysed include usage of time, the state of family members' relationships, communication patterns, decision making, and the management of family conflicts. These variables then may lead to differing family financial outcomes. As for purposive financial socialisation, this can occur bi-directionally and through family relationships (e.g., spouse-spouse, spouse-child, sibling-sibling, mother-son, father-daughter, etc.). We can thus hypothesise that family interactions influence financial attitude development, knowledge transfer and financial capability development (*D*). Meanwhile, purposive financial socialisation occurs bi-directionally in its influence on financial attitude development, knowledge transfer and financial capability development (*E*).

The sixth and seventh pathways reveal links between financial attitudes, knowledge and capabilities and financial behaviour (pathway *F*) and financial well-being (*G*). Note that financial attitudes, knowledge and capabilities are intermediary outcomes for financial socialisation, and these are “socially imbued attitudes adapted over time” especially since individuals carry certain attitudes, knowledge

and capabilities with them (Gudmunson and Danes, 2011). Financial outcomes then reflect patterns of action over time (Danes and Yang, 2014). Meanwhile, financial well-being is what has been usually studied: objective and subjective variables that are usually outcomes (e.g., level of savings, risk appetite, net worth, etc.). We can thus hypothesise that financial attitudes, knowledge and capabilities influence both financial behaviour and financial well-being.

The eighth and final pathway (*H*) links financial behaviour and financial well-being. Their relationship can either be enhancing or constraining. Financial behaviour talks about observable financial outcomes, i.e., the patterns of action over time (e.g., earning, saving, spending, borrowing). We can hypothesise that financial behaviour impacts financial well-being, obviously either positively or negatively.

The framework of Gudmunson and Danes (2011) simply states that how family members talk and act about finance (financial socialisation) is important in a family context. It can help explain, for example, indirect relationships between and among family members as possible explanations for family members' financial capabilities. Socialisation can even be a mediating process in determining or predicting financial outcomes. For example, if family relationships are weak, conflictual or problematic, the situation may lead to financial behaviours that do not improve financial well-being. Thus, aspiring for a good quality family relationship may positively influence financial attitudes (Gudmunson and Danes, 2011).

### ***Literature Review***

This paper attempts to situate family financial socialisation in the international migration literature, focusing on return migration but not setting aside migrants' previous overseas experiences. Here we

trace the roots of migration as a household decision, then bring forth adjacent and directly-relevant discussions on household finance, migration and the family, financial literacy, then finally link return migration to family finance.

*Migration as a household finance strategy.* Oded Stark and David Bloom's new economics of labour migration (NELM) theory can guide us on how migration decisions are made. Migration is a household decision since migration can help the household minimise financial risks, including temporary financial difficulties. Migration is also a family action in which family members pool risks, raise incomes and provide liquidity, insulate the household from economic risks, and possibly raise some resources for investment and insurance given a liquid household (Stark and Bloom, 1985).

Migration therefore is a strategy for household finance (Clemens and Ogden, 2014). Interestingly, Clemens and Ogden (2014) differentiate between remittances as *windfall* and as *return on investment* for the migrant household. As *windfall*, guide questions are: Will families depend on remittances? What sacrifices do families make so they can participate in migration? What are needed to ease families' dependency on remittances? As *return on investment*, the queries cover the following: will families be able to earn more decently without remittances? What do families sacrifice when they cannot migrate? What limits the amount being remitted by migrants to their families (Clemens and Ogden, 2014)?

*Migration and household finance.* Such questions on remittances and the migrant household lead us to look at migration from the lens of family finance. Some previous qualitative studies on overseas migrants and migrant households looked at areas such as: the managing and sustaining of transnational family relationships; the vulnerabilities and sacrifices endured by the overseas migrant;



the social costs of migration on the families and family members left behind, as well as some outcomes of these social costs; and remittance sending, managing, and usage (Battistella and Conaco, 1998; Asis, 2002; Asis, Huang and Yeoh, 2004; Carandang, Sison and Carandang, 2008; Ang and Opiniano, 2016a, 2016b). Gender roles have become prominent in these studies, including role designations on family rearing and money management (Asis, 2002; Asis, Huang and Yeoh, 2004; Carandang, Sison and Carandang, 2008).

The economic dimension of migration had been one element of a multi-faceted study of the impacts of migration on the family. For example, in the Philippines, Asis (2002) finds that families' economic vulnerabilities pushed some migrant women to work abroad due to the family's aspirations (not just the migrant's individual aspirations). Migration's feminisation has also exposed women migrants' family-rearing roles, including managing remittance incomes vis-à-vis nurturing family ties while abroad (like, the wives abroad as "co-partners" or as the family "treasurer"), or acknowledged women migrants' economic roles (Asis, 2002). Some studies even conjectured that school performance of children with and without migrants revealed better performance from the former (Asis and Ruiz-Marave, 2013).

Some cultural nuances on family finance, not just for migrants and migrant households, are also noted. Studying some rural-based Filipino farmers and fisherfolk, Eder (2006) reveals how the kinship and family system influences household economic decision making; gender roles and dynamics also matter in negotiating and implementing household economic plans (e.g., women bargaining with men on economic decisions; women as playing lead roles in household income diversification).

Quantitative studies have been done on overseas migrants and household finance (for example, Yang, 2008; Seshan, 2014; Seshan and Yang, 2014). Noticeably, financial literacy studies related to overseas migration and remittances look at the *outcomes* of peoples' and households' financial behaviours. The quantitative findings of the mixed methods studies of Ang and Opiniano (2016a, 2016b) find that only a few migrants and migrant households invest in their rural birthplaces. Their levels of financial aptitude also reveal that they claim to know and to be skilled at finance but their household finance actions show otherwise.

*Return migration.* While said to be either an intermediate or a final phase in the migration cycle, return migration is among the least studied themes in migration research. The family's role in return migration and in the migrants' reintegration (and possibly re-emigration), as well as the impact of these events on the family, are under-researched (Fleischer, 2008). How have kith and kin been helpful to the returnee or not? One has to consider also the types of return, whether from a successful or unsuccessful migration experience, or whether the return was planned or not.

Some studies on return migration specific to some nationalities look into retrenched migrant workers and the limited reach of government services for returnees (Spitzer and Piper, 2014), the social and cultural effects on returnees in home communities (Yu, 2015), the life trajectories of some returning migrants (Farrell, Kaireyte, Nienaber, McDonagh and Mahon, 2014), and the financial pressures that domestically and internationally trafficked women face while reintegrating (Tsai, 2017). Another topic of study has been whether the migration and the return migration experiences have helped improve return migrants economically. In Sri Lanka, nearly eight out of ten respondents of a survey were not able to improve

their economic situation and reintegrate socially (Jayaratne, Perera, Gunasekera and Arunatilakme, 2004). Similar findings are found among Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia (N=548): they have a “very low level” of financial literacy that significantly affected their financial planning (Brahmana and Brahmana 2016).

The Sri Lankan and Indonesian studies are good starting points to assess the outcomes of returnees’ reintegration. Then again, these are outcomes-oriented studies. This paper, anchored on the Family Financial Socialisation model, is an attempt to reveal the *processes* in how household finances are managed during and after the overseas migration experience. The *exploratory* look at migration and return migration from the lens of Family Financial Socialisation is the contribution of this research.

## **Methods and Design**

This *qualitative case study* featuring four case households with returned migrant workers seeks to answer the question how purposive family financial socialisation occurs within the households, and how the returnee negotiates his or her role in household economic decision-making efforts.

### ***Study Site***

The *barangay* (village) where this study was conducted is found in a city within the Philippines’ National Capital Region. The community lies between two posh subdivisions and is close to various establishments, among them a water filtration facility and a shopping mall. The village is a typical urban poor community. In the community are organisations that provide social and economic services to residents, like a multi-purpose cooperative, day care

centres, a shelter for abused children, and a natural family planning programme run by the parish church.

### *Profile of Respondents*

Three of the four respondents interviewed [*see Table 1*] are female. Two respondents worked for over-20 years abroad and three respondents worked in the Middle East. Their occupations as overseas workers vary. Three returned in 2014 while the most recent returnee came back in November 2016. Respondents 2 and 4 earned high monthly salaries (at Philippine peso values) while Respondents 1 and 3 earned more modest amounts as they were engaged in household services. Respondents 1 and 3 used to send almost all their incomes to their families in the Philippines.

Respondents<sup>3</sup> were also asked their estimated monthly budgets [*see Table 2*]. Food is the leading expense<sup>4</sup>. Respondent 3 spent the least amount monthly (P2,803.33). Respondents 2 and 4 have children who, like them, are now working abroad and contribute to household income. This situation reflects how overseas migration is passed on to the next generation within the immediate household.

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<sup>3</sup> Originally, the spouse of the returning migrant worker was to be interviewed. But one respondent's spouse refused to be interviewed. Besides, since two respondents are widowed and respondents' children were not available at the time of the field interviews (January 17-18 and February 3-4, 2017), the researchers decided to interview the returning migrant worker only.

<sup>4</sup> One respondent also feeds relatives who live with them in a compound (showing a Filipino trait of showing hospitality to extended relatives who come to one's home [Asis, 2002]).

**Table 1.**  
Respondents' Profiles

	R1	R2	R3	R4
<i>Demographics</i>				
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male
Age	31	53	32	65
Civil status	Married	Married	Widowed	Widowed
No. of children	2	6	1	3
Respondent's level of education	No answer	College	High School	No answer
<i>Overseas labour migration</i>				
Country of destination where the respondent worked (most recent)	Malaysia	United Arab Emirates	Kuwait	Saudi Arabia
No. of years employed abroad	2	27	3	22
Work of spouse while respondent was abroad	Maintenance crew	Engineer	Airport crew	Housewife
Work of migrant worker abroad	Domestic worker	Chef	Caregiver	Welder
Monthly salary for the said work (at current exchange rates)	RM850 (P9,510.89)	AED6,000 (P80,983.89)	KD70 (P11,351.40)	SR4,000 (P52,822.00)
Estimated monthly remittance while working abroad	P10,000	P20,000	P9,000-plus	P27,500
Other migrants in the family?	None	One child	None	Two children
Year respondent returned home	2014	2016	2014	2014

\* Legend: RM – Malaysian Ringgit; AED – UAE Dinar; KD – Kuwaiti Dinar; SR – Saudi Riyal.

### *Data Measures and Data Collection Procedure*

A respondent's profile sheet and interview guide were designed, the latter employing an object-centred interview method (in Taylor and Lynch, 2016). The respondents' socio-demographic data and information about their overseas labour migration experiences were culled using the respondent's profile sheet. Meanwhile, play money was used for respondents to answer their estimated monthly household budgets.

The interview guide contained questions gauging the respondents' levels of financial aptitude. The first part asked respondents to draw their overseas migration financial goals for the family. The respondent was given a doodling exercise sheet, the "Dream Map<sup>5</sup>," that made respondents chart their economic goals as a ladder of progression. Following that exercise were financial literacy questions used in three rounds of a Philippine research project, called the Remittance Investment Climate Analysis in Rural Hometowns (RICART) (Ang and Opiniano, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). This contained a set of objective questions and test statements<sup>6</sup> that sought to determine respondents' financial behaviour. Asking these to respondents aimed to find out their financial aptitude and behaviours and later link these with their family situations.

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<sup>5</sup> The "Dream Map" exercise sheet came from the locally-published material *Financial Planner (Remittance Investment Advocacy Program)*, developed by the nonprofit group Atikha, Inc. and the International Organization for Migration (for reference, see page 8 of this file: <http://www.bsp.gov.ph/downloads/FinancialPlanner.pdf>). This was answered in the context of the time when she/he was about to go overseas, and when she/he was still abroad.

<sup>6</sup> When these financial literacy questions were used in the three rounds of RICART, surveying overseas migrants and migrant households from four rural communities, it was found that: a) they claim they know basic financial concepts; b) they need no help in managing their finances; and c) their answers related to financial concepts and financial practices contradict what they claim to know (as evidenced by few correct answers on basic finance concepts and their answers on simulation items).

**Table 2.**  
 Estimated Monthly Household Budgets and Incomes,  
 including Savings from Previous Overseas Work and Other Income Sources  
 (US\$1=PhP49.2)

Expense items	R1	R2	R3	R4
Insurance payment/s	220.00 (Social Security)	200.00 (Overseas Workers Welfare Admin.)	--	--
Investments	--	--	--	--
Loan	1,000.00	--	--	--
Transportation	2,000.00	--	600.00	--
Education	800.00	1,375.00	0.00	0.00
Leisure	500.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	2,000.00
Alcohol, cigarettes	200.00	--	--	120.00
Food	3,500.00	60,000.00*	600.00	12,400.00
Clothing	416.67	--	58.33	--
Rent	--	--	--	--
Communication	300.00	1,500.00	400.00	80.00
Utilities – Water	500.00	500.00	250.00	133.00
Utilities – Electricity	1,000.00	1,900.00	500.00	400.00
Interest payments for utilities	2,000.00	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total estimated monthly budget	10,636.67	66,475.00	2,808.33	15,133.00
Total income (migrant worker and spouse)	14,000.00	Refused to give exact amount, but respondent said it reached a million pesos	No answer	600,000.00

Expense items	R1	R2	R3	R4
Other income sources	20,000.00 (occasional income from bazaar and fashion accessories)	No answer	150,000.00 (includes savings from cooperative)	36,000.00 (from migrant children) plus 9,883.00 (pension) for a total of 45,883.00

*\* Respondent says since they live in a compound, their household also provides the meal expenses for the households — all extended relatives (“kamag-anak ko silang lahat”)— in the said compound.*

The researchers then asked the respondents questions covering the following: a) Household economic decision-making; b) Roles of family members in household finance; c) Negotiation of economic decisions between the returnee and the other household members; and d) Use of economic resources in the returnee’s reintegration.

The researchers took note of respondents’ important words and phrases, said in Filipino. That way, a discursive approach is provided to address the limitations of surveys and qualitative interviews in the study of household finance, focusing on cognition and not on the actions and interactions of household members (Sonnenberg, 2008). Thus, significant statements respondents provided attempted to capture “the significance of the interactional quality of domestic negotiation” by “paying attention to everyday discursive practices” between and among household members (Sonnenberg, 2008).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

As expected, money and household finance is a sensitive topic for the respondents. Some respondents refused to divulge (total) specific amounts in response to certain questions. One respondent even cried while narrating her story, as she was reminded by the finance-related questions of the family situation (e.g., marital issues). Research instruments and their contents were approved by senior research



associates of the non-profit John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues (JJCICSI) prior to actual fieldwork. Respondents were also made to sign an informed consent form before the interview. Respondents, and even the study site, were given code names so as to protect respondents' identities.

### *Mode of Analysis*

The Family Financial Socialisation Conceptual Model (Gudmunson and Danes, 2011) served as the lens to analyse research findings. Since this research uses a case study method, within-case and across-case analysis was employed, enabling the researchers to capture an individual's unique experience as well as experiences that are common to all cases (Ayres, Kasvanaugh and Knafl, 2003).

The seven elements of the Family Financial Socialisation Model (Gudmunson and Danes, 2011) were used as variables to look at the four respondents' stories. Respondents also gave some answers linking some of these elements of the Family Financial Socialisation Model, revealing the link between the family situation and the family financial condition.

## **Findings<sup>7</sup>**

### *Summary of Respondents' Cases and Financial Goals Given Overseas Migration*

Respondent 1, a mother of two, was a former domestic worker in Malaysia. Married to a maintenance crew staff (on casual employment) of a local water utilities firm, R1 admitted there were

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<sup>7</sup> Filipino quotes mentioned in this paper were translated into English. Notable phrases or words answered by respondents are first mentioned in Filipino then translated into English.

current marital trust issues: the husband once had an extramarital affair. While overseas, the respondent's mother-in-law took care of her children. Even if overseas, R1 made the family budget; the mother-in-law and the husband were instructed where to spend the money.

Respondent 2, a chef, has six children and lives in a compound beside relatives and extended family members. R2's husband was with her in the United Arab Emirates. Among the four respondents, R2 sent the biggest estimated monthly remittances. The first three children are nursing graduates, with the eldest working in Singapore. Two of the respondent's six children depend on the eldest sister's remittances, especially the sixth and youngest child who has a family of her own. R2 also sent money to her niece—a commitment she made to the niece's parents—which became a source of jealousy for R2's youngest child.

The third respondent, 32, is widowed early (husband died in August 2016). This former overseas caregiver based in Kuwait is lucky the husband worked as an airport crew member at home and had the savings habit. The husband also supported his mother and two siblings. The remittances sent by the respondent were almost all her reported income in Kuwait.

The final respondent (R4) is a senior citizen and is widowed too (wife died in 2002). This former welder worked in Saudi Arabia for 22 years and earned quite a hefty sum monthly. R4 also once worked in Iraq for over a year, returned to the Philippines in 1994 and then left for Saudi Arabia in 1999 until he returned in 2014.

All four respondents were asked to draw their financial goals dream map [*see appendix for a sample dream map*]. Previously, doodles had been used in phenomenological research as a potent means to identify collective interpretation from respondents (de

Guzman et al. 2007). Since respondents are all returning migrants, doing this guided doodling exercise also helped respondents recall their economic goals prior to their first overseas migration.

It can be gleaned from respondents' doodles that having savings was a common goal (for two respondents, even up to the end). Some also dreamt of having their own business. Some had their children's schooling as the goal. For another respondent, as early as the first year of her migration, her goal was to keep the family intact (*buo ang pamilya*). There were other goals such as setting aside incomes (*magtabi*) or refraining from borrowing (*pigilang umutang*).

### ***Family Interaction and Relationships***

All four respondent households had to adjust—as transnational families—in family-rearing practices. At the time of the interviews, the households of the respondents claimed to have neither marital nor family disputes.

There are differing family-rearing arrangements. R1's mother-in-law took care of the respondent's two children. A husband left-behind headed the household—taking on the role of mother [*nanay*] and father [*tatay*]. R4's wife, when she was still alive, managed the household. R1 admitted vulnerabilities about her marital union.

Extended family members played family rearing roles and benefited from the remittances of some respondents. R1's mother-in-law took care of the children, while R3's mother-in-law lived with the household. R3 is one of three siblings in her own family who financed a niece's schooling. R4's household was managed by the wife. Of interest is R2 who used to send a bulk of the remittances (P60,000 monthly) for the daily meals of the immediate family and of extended family members.

Extended family members can be a source of discomfort for the migrant household, as admitted by R3. Before migrating, R3 and her husband talked about living separately from his mother, but it was not feasible then. R3 did not want any misunderstanding with her mother-in-law. The situation drove R3 to go abroad.

You cannot set aside that thought (the mother-in-law). There's even wonder: Why do we need to shoulder everything for them? That is why I was firm in leaving, so that I can proudly say that I earned this income.

Amid the issues R1 had with her husband, she claimed to show her children, even during trying situations, that everything was fine and they remained “intact” as a family (“A united family is part of our family goals. All families surely want that. No matter the trials that come our way, of course the family must be complete. That is my only wish.”).

The three other respondents claimed to have stable relationships with their spouses. This is why the spouse was designated as the household head and the manager of the remittances being sent to the household (R3's husband is an “active listener”; R4's deceased wife and the respondent himself valued clear communication [*malinaw na komunikasyon*] with the wife on money matters). Says R4,

I told my wife then: you spend for what is necessary. You and your wife must have clear communication when it comes to family finances. “This is how much we will spend for this.” “We will be spending for this.” I will then tell her, “This is how much I will get on payday. This is how much I will send you.”

Respondents also ascribed roles to children. R2's six children had been given life lessons by their parents. R4's children, even without being told, exercised expected family roles and responsibilities. This is so since the family had been practicing these “automatic” roles

while the children were growing up. For example, R4 said the eldest child “is expected” to take the role of their parents in the future, not to mention expected to help him in major family decisions. In contrast, R1, wanted her children to study and they were not given any family finance roles.

### ***Purposive Financial Socialisation***

The previous transnational economic arrangements of respondents’ families provided various modes of family financial management. The transnational arrangements also provided moments when either the migrant or the spouse left behind had formal and informal financial encounters with children, as well as with extended relatives. As respondents grew older and families’ life cycle stages changed, the roles on household finance adjusted as well.

R3 said expected family roles were a “tradition” that had been passed on. When R3’s wife died, the eldest child managed the household and frequently received and managed the remittances. When the eldest got married and had children, the youngest child took on the eldest child’s role.

Gender roles can be seen from the respondents’ stories. Women in the household, like the mother-in-law (R1) or the eldest daughter in the family (R4), played important family rearing roles in the migrant worker’s absence. The husband of R3 played the role of “house-husband.” For R4, the eldest daughter was trusted because she was prudent with money (*masinop sa pera*). It was also noticed in some of the cases that male household members had challenges in handling money—like R1’s husband and R4’s son.

My son is not always at home. He comes home at night. So my daughter is more prudent. Once my son complained to me, “The sister is too frugal with our money.” She does not want to withdraw money

from the bank ... Yes, my daughter calls me in Saudi Arabia and tells me what she needs. She handles my bank account and is an authorised signatory. (R4)

It is interesting to look at the roles assigned to respondents and their family members. R1 handled the household budget and entrusted the disbursement of expenses to her mother-in-law. R2, like R1, also handled the budget and called her husband through Skype to discuss these budgets. R3's now-deceased husband used to handle the budget. R4's now-deceased wife and their eldest child (daughter) handled the budgets.

It proved challenging for R1 to handle the household budget, and the alleged extra-marital affairs of the husband (as well as previous episodes of gambling) may have affected R1's decision not to entrust the household budget to the spouse. She even lamented the difficulty of physical separation that impacted on handling the budget efficiently.

My husband had no say in the household budget. That is because I was the one handling the budget. What he just tells me is "You take care of that [budgeting]." Even when I was abroad, I was the one still making the household budget... That is why it is difficult to be away from the family because my husband was relying on me. Being away from the family is very hard. My problem is the situation here in the Philippines. You send money but my children's tuition wasn't paid, and my child—then in kindergarten—cried to me.

Like R1, R2 tried to keep her cool when family budget instructions were not followed by her child and her niece.

I just hand out instructions. But I get irked when they do not follow instructions. If my child or niece did not follow instructions, they did not know what to do with the money. Sometimes I will ask, "Oh, have you used the money for this purpose? Or have you given your grandfather's allowance?" All instructions were followed, but if not, that's when I get irked. Of course, you budget your money. I want to

see that the expenses are correct given the money I remitted. Of course, I taught them how to budget.

Many times, the money is not used for the intended purpose. For example, they will say the electricity bill was paid already. But when I returned home the bill has not been paid for three months! Those are the things that annoy me. You send money monthly, but they do not pay the bills.

The respondents said these roles on family finance were made clear to them, their spouses and their sons and daughters. As for daughters, R2 lauded one daughter's initiative of helping her siblings. Meanwhile, some extended family members can be a source of intra-household jealousy. An example is the niece being helped by R4: the respondent's own daughter mumbled over the money the cousin received from the former's mother.

Respondents were also asked how they negotiate identified financial actions within their families. R1 noted that her husband was disinterested with entrepreneurship, but she still pursued selling at bazaars and engaging in some buy-and-sell activity outside of Metro Manila. Engaging in business was discussed upon R1's return.

Even the role of children in family finance differs across the households. R1 did not want children to worry and did not assign them roles handling the family budget. Meanwhile, other parents—like R3—can be tough on their children's finances to instil unto them the value of hard-earned money. R3 maximised dialogues with children as family finance “moments;” she and her husband provided their children with suggestions on career paths and life situation problems. R4's case saw the eldest daughter handling the money upon the death of R4's wife. R4 was also careful in choosing which child—daughter or son—would better handle the money, with the children's attitudes as basis.

The stage of the respondent's and the immediate family's life cycle also led to adjustments in household members' roles. For two respondents with overseas worker-children, children are now returning the favour by supporting their parents and the households they tend in a display of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude).

### ***Financial Attitudes, Knowledge and Capabilities, Financial Behaviour and Financial Well-Being***

All four respondents [*see Table 3*] claimed to have acquired their ideas on handling money from their own experiences. Except for R2, respondents claimed to be skilled in handling money. The respondents were also asked questions on basic finance concepts. Only R4 answered all the questions on interest rates, inflation and loans correctly.

The financial behaviours differed across the four respondents. Two respondents did not list expenses, while one claimed to list expenses but not all of them. Three of the four respondents would tap their savings when household income was depleted, while one respondent would resort to informal lending. Two respondents claimed they "never" ran out of money before the next remittance arrived when breadwinners were working abroad. In a situation when the household got a windfall of an amount, respondents would either entirely save, spend on consumer goods or durables, or would use the amount for house repair.

Respondents had differing responses on the indicators of financial well-being. All of them had bank accounts, including those accounts used for household members to receive the former migrant workers/respondents' remittances. Reputation was a criterion when respondents (at least two of them) assessed a financial institution



and decided to forge a financial relationship with these institutions. None of them, however, had investments.

R2, R3 and R4 claimed to have saved some of their domestic and overseas incomes; R2 and R3 placed their savings in financial institutions (R4 did not want to divulge where he kept his overseas savings). R2 said she was fortunate to have a gainful job, enabling her to save. R2 and her husband lived simply in the UAE. They even disliked credit cards (“We do not want headaches”), especially since UAE is known for credit card scams that victimise foreign workers.

Meanwhile, two of the four respondents had no insurance. Both respondents cited the previous episodes of pre-need insurance companies that were forced to close as their reason for deciding not to have insurance or pension plans. Only R1 had an ongoing involvement with an entrepreneurial venture.

**Table 3.**  
Respondents’ Financial Literacy, Behaviour and Well-Being

	R1	R2	R3	R4
<i>Financial literacy</i>				
Where do you get ideas on handling money?	All from personal experience			
Do you have skills in handling money?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Correct answers to questions on basic finance concepts				
• Interest rate	All respondents are correct			
• Inflation	All respondents are correct			
• Loans	Respondents 1 to 3 wrong		Correct	

	R1	R2	R3	R4
<i>Financial behaviour</i>				
Savings	Not able to save given monthly remittances to family and relatives in the province	Has a joint account with husband in a commercial bank (respondent claims to have saved some P40,000/month)	Wife and husband practiced saving when latter was alive; has savings in a cooperative found in the village itself	Yes, but did not mention where respondent placed savings
Do you list expenses?	Yes, but not all expenses	No, but respondents 2 and 3 know their family expenses		Yes, everything
What is done when money is depleted?	5-6 (informal lending)		Tap savings (respondents 2 to 4)	
How often does family not spend anything from the remittance before the next remittance arrives?	Never	Never	Before, there's savings. But given husband's death, respondent relies on her savings earned from abroad	There are some amounts left from the remittance (note: household has other sources of income here and abroad)
What influences decisions about money?	Family and children; consumer goods	Family problems	Family	Needs of grandchild and of daughter

	R1	R2	R3	R4
When windfall money arrives, what do you do with it?	Half to save, half to purchase consumer goods	Save	Spend on appliances and household repair	Save
What do you usually look for at a financial institution when you wish to borrow money?	Interest rate	Reputation	Incentives	Reputation
<i>Financial well-being</i>				
Respondent's life insurance situation	Social Security system	No insurance *	Has insurance product in a cooperative	No insurance *
Any investment in the Philippines?	Joins a bazaar	None	None	None
Who handled your savings while abroad	All respondents handled their savings			
When respondent was abroad, does s/he have a bank account?	All respondents had bank accounts in the Philippines; respondent 4 has a bank account in the host/overseas country			

\* These respondents do not want to avail insurance given the previous closures of insurance and pre-need companies.

### ***Return Migration and Reintegration***

As respondents returned, at different life cycle stages, they fulfilled household financial duties. Based on their stories, it seemed that R1 was somewhat struggling in her reintegration. For the long-staying former overseas workers, it is now their children who have been contributing to the household, boosting their economic and family reintegration.

R2 achieved her goal that the family became self-sufficient. But she and her husband hoped the relatives, as well as the respondent's children, would not depend anymore on remittances. This wish had

led R2 to teach children and relatives how to handle money better. R2, at the time of the interview, was preparing to stay in the country for good because of reports reaching her that the extended family allegedly wasted some of the remittances (“So now I am having second-thoughts about going back to the UAE because their system of handling money is not right”).

Despite the death of her husband, R3 has achieved her goal of completing the construction of her house as an “investment” (*naipundar*). However, R3 admitted that sometimes her income did not suffice to meet her household needs so she borrowed money from a cooperative. “It pays when you are together with your spouse. Now I feel short of money, now that he’s gone. You have nothing to draw money from, but from your savings and from your saved earnings from abroad.”

R4 is now above the working-age group. With all his children having finished school, R4 is readying himself to be part of the elderly sector. But R4 did not oblige his children to help him. At this stage in his life, R4 is taking on the role of being the money manager himself.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research explored how returning overseas workers negotiate their household economic roles after their short-to-lengthy migration episodes. These were analysed using the Family Financial Socialisation Conceptual Model (Gudmunson and Danes, 2011), shown to be a useful framework to assess household finance dynamics. The model provides an alternative lens to look at the social costs of overseas migration at the household level. The linkages between transnational family members’ dynamics, in general, and

household finance situations, in particular, can be seen from the four case stories.

The study's findings can be summarised as follows: 1) The returnees have varying migration experiences (in terms of occupation, length of overseas stay, countries of work), while their preparedness to return depended on their financial standing while abroad, as well as that of their families in the village; 2) Respondents carried a savings goal in their migration; 3) Their levels of financial aptitude show an apparent contradiction between their claim of knowing things about managing money effectively and their practices which do not reflect what they claim to know; 4) Household economic decisions were made by the returnees and their kin transnationally while the former were overseas, and have been sustained upon the respondents' return. Roles were assigned according to traditional gender roles or perceptions of how females and males handled money; and 5) Returnees negotiated trust in handling money through dialogues with family members with the negotiation starting when the breadwinners were abroad and continued upon their return.

The following insights can be gleaned from the cases. First, households do have economic goals underlying their migration overseas, whether these were conceived at the beginning of the overseas migration journey or not. But these plans' fruition or non-fruition, through daily household finance activities and moments, is challenged by the transnational living dynamics that households find themselves in (e.g., physical separation, spouses' communication, distant parent-child encounters). Whether these households made their financial goals formally, or the plans were *ad hoc* (Eder, 2006), the succeeding actions seem to reveal that the respondents and their households were executing some "plan." Conjugal budgeting is one action employed, but so is conjugal allotment of incomes as savings

placed in a financial institution (R3). The assignment of budgeting roles to family members is a situational execution of a “plan” given what works and what does not work in specific family dynamics. The plans set forth may even not work given some family circumstances, like vulnerabilities to spousal unity (R1), or the death of the spouse (R3 and R4), or even the pressure coming from extended family members (R2). This paper does not assume that households studied failed to plan for their economic future (similar to Eder 2006).

Second, cultural nuances in Filipino family rearing practices still influence household economic arrangements before and after migration. The gender dimension is an evident example. Women are major money managers, at least in the four cases here. There can be some disagreements between husband and wife (R1) but there can also be mutual cooperation between spouses (R3, R4) through direct and rational discussions with each other.

Another cultural nuance is the role of the extended family members in both family rearing and remittance receipt. This had been seen in previous research on migration and the family (Asis, 2002; Asis, Huang and Yeoh, 2004). As it relates to the respondents’ family finance conditions, the extended family member can be the child-rearer and budget manager (R1). On the other hand, the extended family member/s can sometimes exert pressure on the overseas migrant to take care of them financially (R2). In this case, the migrant becomes an “extended” family member, using remittances to fulfil a commitment (R3) to support a second-degree relative: a showcase of the unity of siblings, of reciprocity, and of the dynamism of siblingship that overseas migration brings (Aguilar, 2009).

Third, family-related issues that may arise can breed household finance issues. For R1, alleged extra-marital activities by her spouse

have somewhat bred R1's scepticism on the husband's money management and economic decision making. But healthy family dynamics can also breed sound household finance decisions and actions. R3's case —the male spouse left behind influencing his overseas migrant wife to purposively save in a cooperative— is an example.

Fourth, household actions on finance reveal respondents making situational responses based on their levels of financial aptitude. This paper is not judging respondents' financial aptitude (whether low or high) given their answers to financial literacy questions. But their actions can give hints if their financial aptitude is translated into sound financial decisions. R1 claims to have money management skills even though she has no savings left from overseas work and admits to resorting to the "5-6" informal lending scheme<sup>8</sup> to support her entrepreneurial venture. The three other respondents have savings that have been utilised not just during emergency situations, but also for the return migrants' needs.

Family matters seem to strongly influence respondents' household finance decisions. Respondents are instituting monetary controls through role designation, co-financial management and situational monetary allotments given family members' individual behaviours. These actions are gendered, highlighting the role of the woman (in Eder, 2007).

Fifth, returnees return to their prevailing household financial arrangements and dynamics, while still having to contribute to household finances. Respondents' reintegration experiences vary

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<sup>8</sup> "5-6" is a lending scheme in the Philippines with high interest rates which is commonly found in public markets and residential areas. "5-6" financiers, identified closely with Indians, impose 20-to-30 per cent interest rates on loans. They target clients who are desperate in need of financial aid, or those who are afraid of going to formal financial institutions because of numerous documentary requirements.

given the life cycle stages they are currently in. But returnees' participation in prevailing household economic activities is their reintegration. Those who had to return after a few years abroad (R1, R3) continue to strive since they are still actively working. The older former migrants, for their part, have been quite established financially—thus giving them some elbow room in their prospective (R2) and ongoing (R4) reintegration. These respondents manage competing financial pressures and family obligations in their reintegration and re-entry (in Tsai, 2017). But there have been responses within households that have somewhat helped ease returnees' pressures, like having children working abroad and sending money (R2 and R4). For these cases, migration as a household's economic decision had reached a second generation—and children's migration had been risk-mitigating measures benefiting their parents' reintegration. A limitation of the analysis here is that respondents' views alone are not enough to determine if family members have been supportive or not to returnees' reintegration.

Finally, trust is the primary thing that returnees negotiate in their households' economic decision-making. Trust building is what some spouses left behind are trying to forge with spouses abroad (R3, R4). But the behaviours of some individual family members are impediments to forging trust, more so while the migrant was abroad (R1). Building trust within migrant households is hampered by the physical separation, but the risks are mitigated by transnational communication.

This exploratory study looked only at four cases, and the lessons learned are only based on these cases. Another limitation of the scope of the study is the possible influence of the community of residence on the economic actions of the returnees and their households. The study may not be as ethnographic as one may have wished given



limited time and resources. Nevertheless, findings here show how certain data gathering tools (e.g., play money, doodling) can guide respondents' answering of questions to yield factual answers. The findings highlight the importance of family financial socialisation in returnees' search for continued relevance in the household.

Utilising the Family Financial Socialisation Model, the study has provided insights into how returning migrants and their families manage transnational arrangements, confront migration's social costs, and designate roles in family rearing and in family finance. It has also shown how return migration becomes a/an (un) fruitful economic experience for returnees. There are visible links between family relationship and family finance dynamics, with return migration by overseas-based family members traversing both spheres of dynamics.

Future research can look into the strategies employed by returnees in making themselves relevant and important in household finance (grounded theory), or the essence of returnees' negotiation of their economic roles in the household (phenomenology). Quantitative and mixed methods studies on family financial socialisation by migrants and migrant households may also be future research directions. For example, the seven pathways' correlations with each other can be tested quantitatively, while more qualitative cases can be captured to explain processes of how families deal with money and what their financial education needs might be. Return migrants, regardless of how old they are upon their return, will find financial education helpful —whether they claim to know how to handle money or not.

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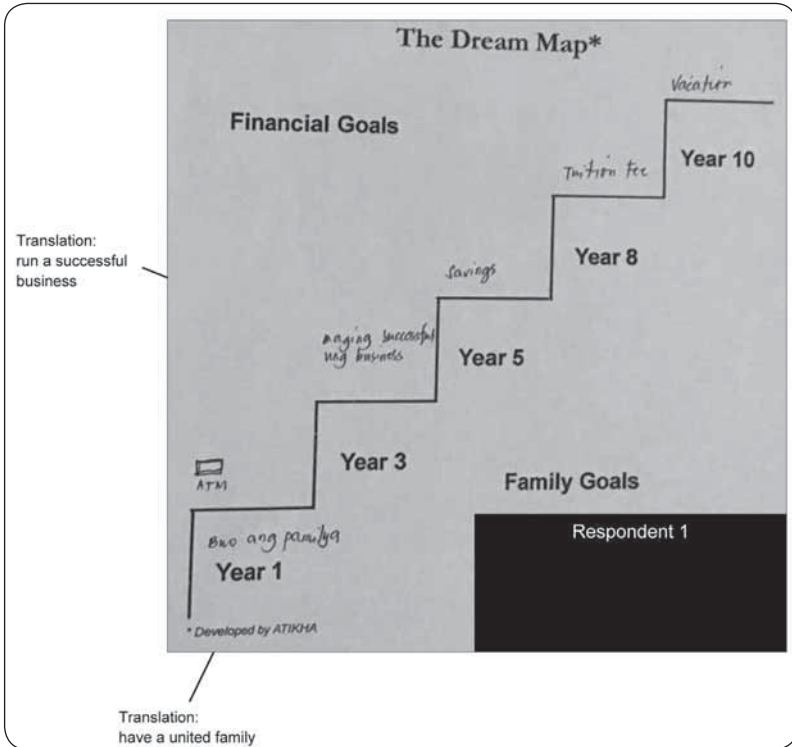
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**Appendix:**  
**Sample Dream Map Doodle**





# Going Back to Poverty: Failed Labour Migration in Flores, Indonesia

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Benny Hari Juliawan<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Labour migration is a known livelihood strategy that is supposed to bring economic benefits, but what if the migration process results in a failure rather than success? Each year between forty to eighty thousand Indonesian migrant workers are deported. Instead of improvements, they actually end up worse off in this scenario. This is a study on the deportation of migrant workers and how the failed migration impacts on their subsequent lives. It follows the fate of 12 migrant workers from Ende in Flores, Indonesia who had been deported from Malaysia. Their predicament offers a glimpse into the deportation of migrant workers as a fractured process facilitated by various agencies and experienced by the migrants themselves and their communities.*

**KEYWORDS:** *deportation, failed migration, Flores, Indonesia, livelihood*

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Labour migration is a known livelihood strategy that is supposed to bring economic benefits. When opportunities to work in the home village or even country are limited, migration offers a real option to generate improvements. At the family level, it may improve household earnings, food provision, housing and education. The benefit may spread wider to the community in terms of better skills, overall wellbeing and improved infrastructure. Furthermore, this overall improvement is likely to create conditions for development. In short, both the household and the community can benefit from the migration.

But what if the migration process results in a failure rather than success? Such is the story of tens of thousands of Indonesian migrant workers who reported having experienced a problem when they returned. A significant proportion of these cases can be found among many undocumented Indonesian migrant workers who are arrested by authorities in the destination country and deported. Each year between forty to eighty thousand Indonesian migrant workers are deported. The largest deportation took place in 2002 when the Malaysian authority repatriated almost 400,000 undocumented migrants in the month of August (Ford, 2006). The prospect of deportation among Indonesian migrant workers is quite high among the two million or so Indonesians reportedly working abroad without proper documents. Most of them are in Malaysia and constantly at the risk of being caught and forcibly returned to Indonesia. For many this return ends their dream of earning higher incomes and improving the living standards of their families. Not only can they no longer send remittances, it is not uncommon that the debts they incurred to pay for the migration have not been paid off. They actually end up worse off in this scenario. So how do they cope with failures? Has the failure altered their view of migration?



How do their communities react to this? To what extent does the state facilitate their safe return?

This is a study on migrant workers who were forcibly repatriated having been arrested for not having proper documents. Their premature return and its consequences are closely related to the condition that prompted and facilitated their decision to work overseas in the first place. Indeed their predicament has its origin in a complex interaction between structural conditions, formal and informal institutions and how individuals perceive them. This paper explores this interaction through the lens of the experience of forced repatriation of Indonesian migrant workers, highlighting the role of government agencies and the village community in the repatriation process. The research is to portray the way the state-society nexus deals with this

The fieldwork followed the forced repatriation of twelve migrant workers originating from the same village, Raburia, in Ende, Central Flores. They were arrested in Perak, West Malaysia in mid-2015, detained in prison, and then deported back to Indonesia and finally their home village. Their predicament offers a glimpse into the way deportation of migrant workers is facilitated by various agencies and experienced by the migrants themselves and their communities.

## **The Malaysian Dream**

Hoo...Malaysia

*Sungguh indahnyaa kau didengar orang/How beautiful people hear about you*

*Sungguh manisnya orang bercerita/How sweet the story is*

*Katanya di sana banyak lowongan kerja/They say there are lots of jobs there*

*Membuat aku jadi penasaran/That makes me curious*

*Kucoba-coba rantau ke sana/I try to go there*

*Siapa tahu nasib berubah/Betting on my future*

....

*Siang kukerja malam tidur di hutan/I work during the day and at night I sleep in the woods*  
*Menyelamatkan diri takut ditangkap/Avoiding arrests*  
*Itulah nasib pendatang haram/That's the fate of illegal immigrants*  
*Rantau tanpa ijinan dikejar-kejar/Without permission always on the run*  
*Suatu hari tanpa kusadari/One day without my knowledge*  
*Asyik bekerja dikepung polisi/Police come while busy at work*  
*Takdapat lari terpaksa kuserah diri/Unable to run I surrender*  
*Tangan diborgol rambut digunting/Handcuffed and head forcibly shaved*

*O sungguh malang nasibku kawan/O how miserable my life is*  
*Ku dimasukkan ke dalam penjara/I am put in prison*  
*Ringgitnya kudapat hasilku kerja/The money I earn from work*  
*Semua itu habis dirampas/Now gone taken away*  
*Tiba masanya aku dibuang/It's time for me to be deported*  
*Ku dipulangkan dengan kapal pemerintah/They send me home on a government boat*  
*Tiba di kampung halaman tak sepeser uang/Arriving home without a penny*  
*Hanya sehelai baju di badan/Only the clothes I am wearing*  
 (Kanis Mado, "Malaysia")

The song from Flores above captures both the attraction and the risks of going to Malaysia for work. For many people in Flores, however, the attraction is often too strong to resist and worth all the risks associated with it. The promise of employment is the biggest draw for a population that is largely impoverished. The province of East Nusa Tenggara or NTT in its Indonesian acronym, where Flores island is located, is consistently in the bottom four of the list of poor provinces in the country. 22.58 per cent of its population lived below the poverty line in 2015, well above the national average of 11.13 per cent for the same year. The district of Ende in Flores is not the poorest in the province, but it is not the wealthiest either.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood, providing employment for more than 53 per cent of Ende's labour force and contributing the largest share of the local economy at around 27 per cent. The sector is dominated by small-scale household farming with low productivity, and in many households the income it brings in does not go beyond the subsistence level. With hilly terrain, the district poses real challenges for any large scale plantation that has been the darling of Indonesian rural development planners in the past two decades.

Traditionally the population in Ende were subsistent farmers relying on staple crops such as maize, rice and cassava (Sugishima, 2006: 123). As recent as the 1980s, the population shifted to commercial crops following a modernisation drive introduced by the New Order government. In NTT province, the programmes were personified in its popular governor Ben Mboi who ruled in 1978-1988. He launched the double programmes of Nusa Makmur Operation and Nusa Hijau Operation. The former was aimed at making the province self-sufficient in terms of food by expanding rice fields and improving the yields so that people would eventually become prosperous (*makmur* in Indonesian). The latter was about turning the land green (*hijau* in Indonesian) by planting cash or perennial crops on critical or non-productive lands. In his own words, Ben Mboi calls this the "NTT Green Revolution" (Mboi, 2015: 63).

Philipus Amheka, a retired official in the Ende government agency for agriculture, explained that at the time the government perceived customary lands as "unproductive" and in need of investment. The government provided soft loans, high-yield seeds and fertilizers and created new crop fields by as much as 150,000 hectares. Customary landholds were reorganised in accordance to the government master narrative that is based on the concept of

ownership. Village chiefs and traditional leaders known locally as *mosalaki* were mobilised to make this a success (Sugishima, 2006: 143-144). The adoption of the term “operation” suggests a policy with military precision, and backing; Mboi was an army officer after all. The modernisation effectively introduced a cash economy to the otherwise traditional way of life in the region. Until today, however, the market economy has not completely dominated the livelihood of the population in Ende. At best, it is a mixed economy where the need for cash is reserved only for expenses such as children’s education, travels, and healthcare. Otherwise, many people survive on food crops they grow in the fields.

A typical farmer’s household sells candle nuts for Rp 10,000 (US\$ 75 cent) per kilogram and cacao beans Rp 24,000 (US\$ 1.8) per kilogram. Using traditional methods, harvests are unpredictable, perhaps only once a year for both crops. In addition, rice, maize and cassava remain important sources of food that people can grow in the field. Several farmers interviewed for this research confided that each of them earned no more than three million rupiah in one harvest. Monkeys are real menace for them and farmers in Ende are frustrated with the pests. The villagers are left to their own devices as there is almost no government intervention in terms of aid and agricultural know-how.

In comparison to that, working in the construction in Malaysia brings in at least RM 1,500 (US\$ 358) per month, excluding overtime pay, which is equivalent to two harvests’ worth back home. Working in the plantation earns around RM 900 (US\$ 215) per month, still much more than what they would get for one harvest in the village. This disparity in possible incomes serves as the biggest advertisement for the villagers. In any case, the prospect of relative prosperity is constantly on display in the shape of the homes of migrant worker

families. Malaysian money helps to install brick walls and hard floors. The tached roofs are replaced by shiny metal sheets.

And there are plenty of stories circulating in the village as well, some of them quite personal. Kornelius Rau, the youngest in the group at 16 years old, heard about Malaysia for the first time from his father, “*Bapak* (Dad) was once there... He told me, in Malaysia it was easy to find jobs.” From his teenage friends, who had been to Malaysia, he heard the same story. It was not only the success story, though, the hardship and danger were recounted in equal measure as well, but for him the urge to go and see Malaysia was too strong. Similarly, Heribertus Minggu heard his friends say, “It was fun there. Lots of jobs.”

Serilus Waka was a seasoned migrant worker in Malaysia who had been in and out of Malaysia repeatedly in 1999-2014 working in shrimp farms, constructions and restaurants. He had never been caught despite not having proper documents, and his demeanour oozes confidence and experience. He had met his Javanese wife in Malaysia and now they lived in the village. He recounted the story he heard long ago, which prompted him to go to Malaysia, “Here in Flores we heard that in Malaysia everything is possible. You brush your teeth with coke.” The Raburia village chief, Laurensius Wanda (47 years old), was himself a former migrant worker to Malaysia. Twice he went and in the last trip, he brought home 36 million rupiah worth of savings after working hard for two years. Growing up listening to these stories, the villagers learn crucially that the Malaysian dream is not a fantasy and within reach of everyone, even if it comes with risks.

## From Perak to Ende

The 12 returnees from Raburia began their ordeal when the school van they travelled on was stopped by police in the middle of the night on the road in Kampung Gajah area in Perak sometime in September 2015. Up to that point they had been working as a group under the same employer in a construction site. In that fateful evening, they were being transported to a new site to work on the next morning. Upon discovering the lack of documents, the police immediately detained them along with the Malaysian driver, who was then released shortly afterwards.

Despite hailing from the same village and being caught as a group, these 12 actually did not come to Malaysia at the same time. Xaverius Eto (42 years old) was a veteran migrant who had been in and out of Malaysia four times in total over the course of 20 years. He was never in possession of proper documents throughout that period but his luck ran out that night. Alongside him were Filarius Lama (26 years old) and Heribertus Minggu (17 years old) who had barely been two weeks in Malaysia. Even the teenager Minggu had been in Malaysia before, in 2011 when he was just 12 years old. The others varied between one and six months in terms of their stay in Malaysia prior to the arrest.

These men had known each other, being neighbours and even relatives in the same village. In fact it is quite common for them to bring friends and relatives to Malaysia to work in the same place. The employer often encourages and facilitates the workers to bring their fellow villagers to the same workplace. The veteran Eto brought his neighbour with him when going back to Malaysia for the second stint. Minggu followed his uncle to work in a plantation back in 2011. The village network or indeed that of people from the same district shapes the migration process in a way that has become convenient to

both migrants and their employers. The migrants do not need to find job orders while the employers can access the pool of labour from a distance. Furthermore, this informal channel ensures cheaper costs for both the employers, who circumvent the requirements for work permits, and the prospective workers who do not need to go through lengthy and bribery-ridden placement bureaucracies. On top of this, they do not have to go to Jakarta where most of the formal overseas placement procedures take place.

The same network facilitates the return of these migrants. No wonder this typical chain migration thrives in Flores and the rest of Nusa Tenggara Timur Province, in spite of aggressive recruitment drives by private agencies in the official migration procedure.

This movement also takes place on the back of the long tradition of migration to Malaysia by people from Flores. Traditional migration of seafaring communities to and from Malaysia had taken place long before the colonial era. The British introduced a new kind of migration when they imported foreign workers for the growing economy. Some of these workers settled and became citizens of the independent Malaysia (Mantra, 2000). These same networks of migrants often acted as sponsors and helped to facilitate the arrival of more migrant workers, including from Indonesia, when there were demands in subsequent periods. The influx of migrants from Flores in particular became greater after the introduction of large scale agricultural estates and timber industry in the 1950s (Tirtosudarmo, 2015: 217). Combining traditional kinship networks and transborder mobility, over time the Florenese established a vast network of labour migration with outposts in many places along the routes that connect Flores and Malaysia. In fact, given the extent of the network that has now straddled the border between Indonesia and Malaysia in places like East and West Kalimantan and the Riau

islands, one scholar suggests that the Florenese have constituted an embryonic transnational community (Tirtosudarmo, 2015: xxxv).

The arrest by the Malaysian authorities interrupted this otherwise functioning labour relation. All of a sudden they entered into the realm of the official and were treated as criminals. In truth, though, arrests by authorities do not always spell the end of their Malaysian employment. After all the presence of millions of undocumented migrant workers in Malaysia would not be possible without some degree of complicity on the part of the authorities. Some scholars even suggest that the Malaysian policies on in-migration are deliberately designed to leave a grey area which can be exploited to fulfill the continuous demand for migrant workers (Devadason and Meng, 2014). In the field, migrants confide that arrests have been used sometimes as a way to solicit bribery. In many cases, the payment of around RM 200 (US\$ 48), which is equivalent to a week's salary, would secure their quick release. Xaverius Eto confessed that he and his friends actually tried to offer some money to the policemen that night. Unfortunately for them, the check point was being supervised by a high ranking officer, and in such a case the policemen on duty did not take bribes. Indeed many migrant workers continuously oscillate between legality and illegality almost on a daily basis.

This time, though, the arrest brought them to the police detention in Sri Iskandar. After staying there for three weeks, the group was taken to a prison in Taiping where they were taken to court. They were found guilty and sentenced to six month imprisonment. To serve the sentence, the authorities moved them to yet another prison, in Tapah. Life in prison was obviously hard. Their money was taken away and food was far from nice. Having served two thirds of their sentence in Tapah prison, the group was then deported to Indonesia.



## The Provision of Protection in Indonesia

Once they set foot on Indonesian soil, the social protection regime kicked in. It is interesting to notice that although these migrants had clearly broken the laws on migrant worker placement and immigration, they were not treated as criminals, unlike when in Malaysia. Instead, the Indonesian government considered them more as victims who need assistance. Stories of ill-fated migrant workers who fall victim to various forms of harm both in Indonesia and abroad appear almost on a weekly basis in the press. In many instances the government is almost always blamed for not doing enough to protect these poor people. This overwhelming moral support for migrant workers leaves few options to the government; prosecuting them would only make things worse as far as the government is concerned. However, the notion of victim here does not necessarily qualify the returnees to seek redress in the Indonesian justice system either. In the case of undocumented migrants, they have no legal documents as a basis to obtain remedy through the system to start with. In fact, even in cases of documented returnees, most migrant workers are reluctant to access justice at all because the country's system "presents many challenges...particularly for poorer segments of society." (Farbenblum, Taylor-Nicholson et al., 2013: 37). Their multiple vulnerabilities – poor, low levels of education, little formal work experience – render the barriers to justice even greater.

The idea of seeking redress or compensation never crossed the mind of the men from Raburia. Their only stated wish was to go home as soon as possible, and this was facilitated by the Ministry of Social Affairs under the framework of "*Pekerja Migran Bermasalah*" or migrant workers with problems. In particular, the Decree of the Minister of Social Affairs no. 22/2013 defines "*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia Bermasalah*" or Indonesian migrant workers with

problems as “Indonesian overseas migrant workers who have no work permits, legal documents, and/or who work in violation of their work permits, has encountered problems in terms of violence, exploitation, deportation, neglect, social disharmony, inability for self-adjustment.” The decree also stipulates that the Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible to repatriate the returnees from the point of arrival to Indonesia to their home province where regional governments take over the process and bring them to their home districts and eventually villages.

The group arrived in Tanjung Balai and was immediately taken to a shelter run by the Ministry of Social Affairs, known as Rumah Perlindungan dan Trauma Center or RPTC. They stayed for 10 days in this facility with limited freedom. The shelter authorities banned them from going out but did not avail them with activities either. It was a long ten days doing nothing. Afterwards they were taken to Jakarta by boat, arriving at Tanjung Priuk port.

Upon arrival, the authorities gave each of them Rp 250,000 (US\$ 19) as a pocket money and they were immediately taken to the RPTC run by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The institution was started in 2004 in Kemayoran area in Central Jakarta, occupying a property belonging to the Jakarta provincial government. In 2008 it moved to a much bigger facility in East Jakarta until today. The move was partly facilitated by the increasing trend in the number of PMB. In 2013, there were 763 returnee migrants out of 1,303 individuals who received help in the shelter. In 2014 the figure was 935 out of 1,571. By June 2015 the figure was already 769 out of 1,264. (Kemensos 2015, p.35).

The role of RPTC as outlined in the Decree of Ministry of Social Affairs no. 102/2007 is actually quite comprehensive. It doubles as a crisis centre which gathers information and runs

advocacy programmes, and as a trauma centre which offers healthcare, psycho-social rehabilitations and trauma healing. This is on top of the duties to provide food, temporary accommodation, and clothing. The shelter is also supposed to prepare the returnees for reintegration with their families and communities, in collaboration with regional governments. Related to the latter, the staff at RPTC are tasked with home visits to the families of the returnees to prepare them before the family reunion. In particular they are to look out for signs of rejection by the families and communities in cases of rape and unwanted pregnancy.

However, an internal review commissioned by the Ministry criticised the centres for falling short of the responsibilities entrusted to this institution in general (Kemensos, 2015). In terms of resources RPTCs operate on a very small budget and each institution only employs one or two civil servants who work as the coordinator and secretary, assisted basically by volunteers. The review mentions how the RPTC in Bambu Apus Jakarta struggles with the financial burden of having to feed and repatriate the increasing number of returnee migrants. High medication bills for serious cases of illness or injury stretch the meagre budget even further. The recently established national health insurance scheme turns out to be useless as it requires identity documents which is precisely what the undocumented migrants are lacking.

The twelve men from Raburia luckily did not have serious physical or mental problems and therefore it was mostly boredom that troubled them while in the shelter. Indeed, the range of services as stipulated by the regulation take place intermittently, only if the volunteers and facilities are available. Once a volunteer organised a cooking lesson for a group of female returnees and she had to bring all the basic equipments from home because they were not

available in the shelter. Even after she had left all the equipments in the shelter, the next week when she came for another lesson she found that they all dissappeared. Sports facilities are available although limited to volleyball and football and the pitch is uneven. Spiritual or pastoral services are available when the centre invites local ulemas or pastors.

Overall the Raburia returnees spent about a week in RPTC Bambu Apus. On 13 February 2016 they were taken to the Tanjung Priuk port to board KM Umsini that would take them to Maumere in Flores. No staff from the RPTC or from any government agency accompanied them in the boat trip. Alongside them was another returnee from Manggarai, an eastern district in the same island of Flores. They were given tickets and an official cover letter to be handed over to the *Dinas Sosial* or the Office of Social Affairs in Maumere. The boat took four days to reach the destination. The idea was that once they got off the boat they were supposed to go to the *Dinas* and reported the arrival and received assistance. They did arrive safely but it was late in the evening and the office of the *Dinas* was obviously closed. Although aware of the instructions from Jakarta, “We simply wanted to get home as soon as possible. We could not be bothered to wait until dawn to access the *Dinas*,” said Eto who acted as the *de facto* leader of the group. Maumere is about four hours away by car to their home village. Being closer to the final destination, the twelve men decided to let the sole returnee from Manggarai, which is around 12 hours away from Maumere, bring the cover letter from the RPTC in Jakarta with him. At this point, they used what remained of the pocket money to hire a van to take them home. At the entrance to their village, friends and relatives awaited with their motorbikes to bring the returnees home.

The repatriation procedure stipulates that once returnees arrive in the provincial port, the local government agencies will take over the responsibility from the Ministry and bring them to the home village. In reality, no one in the Dinas in Maumere, nor in Ende was aware of the Raburia returnees. “I have double-checked. We do not know anything about the deported migrants from Raburia,” confided Romanus Tato, the head of the department of social security and assistance of the *Dinas Sosial* in Ende. Similarly, Yoseva Dewi, the head of the department of labour placement and empowerment of the Dinas Tenaga Kerja or Labour Agency in Ende knew nothing of it.

This lack of coordination is often blamed on the decentralisation policy that started in 2001 as part of the political reform following the demise of the New Order regime. Decentralisation is supposed to encourage greater public participation in development by transferring some of the powers from Jakarta to the regions. It is a means of improving public services, reducing inefficiency and corruption, and deepening democracy (Manor, 1999; Dasgupta and Beard, 2007). Under this policy, local governments could reorganise departmental offices and reallocate the resources according to their priorities. This often makes governmental coordinations across various levels complicated. Messages from Jakarta do not necessarily find willing partners in the regions. The lack of coordination is acutely exposed in the repatriation of migrants as the process involves various agencies at all levels of governance.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the related *dinas* in the regions are part of a special task force or *satgas* in its Indonesian acronym that is responsible to facilitate the safe return of deported migrants. Apart from this ministry, the other members of the *satgas* are from the Coordinating Ministry of People’s Welfare, the Ministry of

Home Affairs, the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, the Ministry of Labour and Transmigration, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection and the National Agency for Protection and Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI).<sup>2</sup> In reality, though, only officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and Transmigration, and BNP2TKI and their related agencies are present in the field. And that is not always as a team, especially in the regions (Husmiati, Widodo et al., 2015: 60). On various occasions, officials from these agencies complained about the lack of collaboration and the culture of blame shifting among these different institutions.

Even if the willingness to serve the vulnerable is present, the financial resources prevent the agencies to act swiftly. For 2015 Romanus Tato's office in Ende, which is tasked with helping returning migrants, only had a budget of Rp 82 million (US\$ 6,300), while Yoseva Dewi's budget for 2016 was Rp 88 million.

## **Life after Repatriation**

Back in the village the men quickly resumed their routines in the field, but a spectre was looming. They took out loans to finance their trip to Malaysia and now they were struggling to pay the debt. The villagers typically borrow money from loan sharks who charge a fixed 100 per cent interest per year. Even if they could repay the debt before the end of the year, the interest would remain the same. Such was the case of Minggu. In his first trip to Malaysia, his

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<sup>2</sup> Under the Presidential Decree no. 106 of 2004, this task force is called the Coordination Team for the Repatriation of Indonesian Migrant Workers with Problems and Their Families or TK-PTKIB in its Indonesian acronym. This legislation has been replaced by the Presidential Regulation no. 45 of 2013, which does not significantly change the substance of the old law.

mother borrowed three million rupiah (US\$ 226) for him and after four months he earned enough to repay the debt six million rupiah, including interests.

Bartolomeus Laka, better known as Barto, borrowed Rp 11 million (US\$ 828), including interest, from a known money lender. Before he got caught, he had paid six million rupiah from his savings of 11 months and now he still had to find five million. Yohanes Juma took a loan of two million rupiah and had to repay four million, but having just worked for a month before the deportation, there was no money left in his pocket.

“It is hard here. We really struggle to make ends meet. Food is not a problem but other expenses are difficult,” said Barto referring to school fees of his child. He added, “I have a plan to go back to Malaysia.” “For me it would not be so soon. I do not know for sure,” answered Eto, hinting at the possibility of going again. After all, he knew the migratory route very well after four spells in Malaysia. Given the desperation at home and the ease of going to Malaysia, it is small wonder that the first thought that crossed their mind was indeed returning to the jobs in Malaysia.

Another major pecuniary expense that families in the village have to make is the lavish *adat* (traditional) ceremonies. Traditions in the shape of elaborate rituals and ceremonies are still dutifully observed in many villages in Ende. They range from events that mark life’s milestone such as birth, coming of age, first holy communion, wedding, funeral to achievements such as graduation, promotion, and to agricultural festivities such as planting and harvest. In addition, failures to fulfil these duties and violation of *adat* codes may incur heavy penalties sanctioned by the local *mosalaki*. Relatives working in Malaysia are not excluded from these duties; in fact they are

expected to make greater contributions to their families back home because they are perceived as better off.

In recent years the government began to take into account the economic mitigation measures following the repatriation of overseas migrants. The National Agency for Protection and Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers in 2015 introduced a series of entrepreneurship training programmes for former migrant workers, which aimed to reach out to at least 15,000 people in the first round. Under the name “*Indonesia Memanggil*” or “Indonesia Calling” its objective is to empower former migrants economically by equipping them with entrepreneurial skills.

A similar programme was launched a year later by the Ministry of Labour and Transmigration called “*Desa Migran Produktif*” or “Productive Migrant Village”. This programme is more ambitious as it targets 120 villages across the country for piloting and will eventually transform villages with high concentration of former migrants into a service station offering information on safe migration, training in entrepreneurship, community parenting to left-behind children and financial supports through microfinance institutions. Given the scale of this programme, the Ministry will work with 10 other ministries and several private and state-owned companies. Out of the first 120 villages, 20 slots are allocated for the NTT province. Plans for the future indicate that in total 400 villages will be targeted. It is still too early to make any meaningful assessment of these initiatives, but at least they show that the government is aware of the dire situation in the home villages of the migrants.



## Conclusion

Failed migration receives relatively little attention in general and especially when it comes to forced repatriation or deportation. Existing accounts of repatriation often focus on the hardship that migrants have to endure or on identifying unscrupulous individuals that foil migrants' attempts to improve their livelihoods. This paper follows the repatriation of 12 migrants from a particular village in Flores island, Indonesia, charting their experiences along the way, and uncovers the complex reality of poverty, migration and their aspiration for better lives.

Their premature return from Malaysia is closely related to the condition that prompted and facilitated their decision to work overseas in the first place. Poverty is not the only factor that explains migration. The long tradition of inter-island and eventually cross-border movements is deeply embedded in the ideas and practices of rural Flores. The presence of considerably large Flores population along the route to Malaysia helps facilitate this movement. Consequently, going to Malaysia for work or family visit for them is not as difficult as other rural population in Indonesia would like to think, even if in most cases the migration goes through unsanctioned channels.

The traditional migration is disrupted when authorities in the destination country step in and deport them back home. The deportation process is marked by shifting narratives of criminal/victim, lack of coordination, and limited resources. Most importantly, however, it does not address the conditions that prompt the impoverished population to migrate in the first place. It seems that repatriation is not an integral part of the migration policy; it is more of an afterthought, an unplanned process that does not feed back into the policy. In this sense, it does not contribute to building

better protections for migrants, and in some cases it may even make the condition worse as is shown in this paper in the case of mounting debts incurred by migrants. This study calls for a reconsideration of the repatriation process as a coherent part of the migration policy.

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# Psychological Challenges of Returning Vietnamese Migrants

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## ABSTRACT

*Vietnamese migrants often face the challenges of reintegration regardless of their education levels, class, or economic and social background. Particularly, those who have experienced psychological problems while being abroad find the reintegration process even more challenging. Given the lack of psychological services in Vietnam, mental health issues of the returned migrants are rarely addressed and cared for, particularly those returning to the rural areas. The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the situations that Vietnamese returning migrant workers are confronting upon returning and to examine some of the psychological aspects.*

**KEYWORDS:** *returned migrants, mental health, Vietnam, repatriation, psychology*

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Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535-475 B.C.) once said, “You could not step twice into the same river,” referring to the ever flowing and changing reality of the universe. The concept of not being able to step into the same river twice is particularly true for migrants. Those who have left their birth place, either for political or socioeconomic reasons, will never be able to come back and return fully integrated into their own families and neighbourhoods. Migrants not only experience the gap of time, but also perhaps the “experience gap,” the biggest gap facing them when they come back to their neighbourhoods and families. They are now people whose values and viewpoints are drawn from multiple cultures; their experiences as migrants have forever changed them both psychologically and culturally. Like other migrants in the globalised economy, the Vietnamese have had their fair share of contributions to a workforce of both neighbouring countries within the Asian continent and also other countries of different continents. In addition, due to the Vietnam War, many Vietnamese have migrated to other countries to seek political refuge. As immigrants, they face many challenges in their new countries such as racism, unfair employment practices, and sexual abuse and harassment. Migrants are unprotected, vulnerable, and prone to develop multiple psychological issues while living abroad.

Vietnamese migrants often face the challenges of reintegration. Many Vietnamese migrants are breadwinners for their families and yet, they find the reintegration process challenging. What they left behind while living abroad is no longer the same, including their families and neighbourhoods. At times, they are received by their families and others under the suspicion of having misbehaved while overseas. Perhaps, women’s behaviours are perceived more critically than men. Particularly, those who have experienced psychological problems while being abroad find the reintegration process even

more challenging. The psychological challenges encompass all returning migrants regardless of their education levels, class, or economic and social background. The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of the situations that Vietnamese returning migrant workers are confronting upon returning and to examine the psychological aspects: the challenges they face at home and where they seek help and find support for their psychological needs.

### **Participants and Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted by phone with eleven returned migrant workers, six women and five men, aged from 29 to 46. With the exception of one migrant worker returning from Korea, the rest were part of the Malaysian migrant workforce. The participants left Vietnam between 2005 and 2010, and returned between 2011 and 2016. Most participants left Vietnam when they were aged 18-25, but there were also two older women, aged 33 and 35, who had reduced their ages by three years on the applications to appear younger. While the two older women had small children prior to going overseas for work, the other nine participants were single when they left.

Most participants did not finish high school with some having only completed a middle school level of education. One male participant who had completed an electronic vocational training after high school was able to use his skills when he went to Malaysia. The participant who went to Korea worked in construction. Those who went to Malaysia worked as vendors, electrical maintenance workers, tailors in the garment industry, and other jobs including as workers in electronic factories. Eight remained with the same job; one changed jobs due to unforeseen circumstances, and two worked many different jobs. The reason for their return was mostly due to

end of contract while some felt the need to return because they had been away for too long.

Most participants had positive views about the host countries. However, most had negative views about other Vietnamese workers. Some had bad impressions about the recruitment agencies who would take half of their salary. One participant was angry with the Vietnamese recruitment agency which had cheated and scammed him. Two participants, one who went to Korea and the other to Malaysia, said that they would go overseas to work again. Other participants were unsure. One participant said, “If I had known, I would not have left Vietnam.”

### **Experiences of Returned Vietnamese Migrant**

Vietnamese men and women in the past few decades have found employment outside the country. According to the Vietnamese Department of Overseas Labour (DOLAB), Vietnam had more than 560,000 migrant workers working in 49 countries and territories by December 2012; these migrant labourers worked in 30 different occupations. At a given year, there are about 80,000 Vietnamese workers overseas (DOLAB, undated). For many families, labour migration can be a good source of income that provides for the education and the basic needs of the children (DOLAB, undated). Nevertheless, when their work contracts expire, many migrant workers face challenges upon returning home.

According to the report published by International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Organisation for Migration (IMO), and UN Women, returned migrants “could face unemployment, underemployment, debt, social alienation, family conflict, and poor health related to migration including stress-related health effects and physical injury” ((2014: 2). In addition, returned migrants are



often not able to use the skills and knowledge they gained overseas. Instead they return to unskilled or low-skilled work, or the jobs which they had before migration (DOLAB, undated). Part of the reason is because the majority of returned migrants are from the rural areas, making it difficult to apply and integrate their skills locally. They must learn new business models that could work in their rural areas (ILO, IOM and UN Women, 2014).

In fact, upon return most of the participants from the interview worked in jobs that do not require the skills they had gained overseas. Some returned to their farms, others remained at home as housewives or set up small shops at their houses. The DOLAB (undated) reports that few returned migrants women have access to better employment opportunities. 78.9 per cent of returned female workers were found in unskilled professions, compared to 47.8 per cent of male workers. The lack of support from local authorities and recruitment agencies contributes to the difficulty of the reintegration of returned migrants (DOLAB, undated). Returned migrants who are in their late 30s and older also experience difficulties in finding work (Kuyper 2008) because employers want younger workers.

Migrants also deal with issues surrounding relationships with their families. The biggest issue facing migrant workers and families is the feeling of emptiness and loneliness after their departure; children are vulnerable, fearing that their absent mothers no longer love them (DOLAB, undated). Studies suggest that children of migrant mothers may be prone to anger, feelings of being abandoned or unloved, confusion and worries (Graham and Jordan, 2011). The ILO, IMO, and UN Women (2014) report that returned migrant women are more likely than men to suffer family disharmony due to spousal poor behaviours or infidelity. Some of the interviewees reported that they knew migrants who had extramarital affairs overseas and

maintained those relationships even when they returned to Vietnam. The separation of a spouse or a parent greatly affects the dynamic of family, and the lack of care for the children while the mother is away is also an issue for many families. The two older women participants left their children in the care of the grandmother or the husband. One reported that her absence affected the children but she explained that the children understood why she had gone overseas. In a number of cases, returned women migrants have impressions that foreign men were kinder to women than Vietnamese men (DOLAB, undated). A small percentage (3%) separated or divorced after they returned to Vietnam (DOLAB, undated). Some interviewees also reported that they knew of some returned migrant workers whose marriages ended up in separation or divorce when they returned to Vietnam.

Returned migrants still face health care access problems when they returned. Extensive working hours, lack of health insurance, safety issues, difficult living conditions, and stress and psychological distress while overseas have affected migrants workers. When they return, these issues are often not discussed or addressed properly, leading to further mental health issues or distress later on.

## **A Psychological Analysis of Participants**

During the interviews, most male participants indicated that they had no worries nor did they face challenges when they returned. However, when probed a little more, while two participants said they have nothing to report, one mentioned he had concerns about the difference between the two economies but adapted quickly. One expressed anger toward the recruitment agency, and another expressed disappointment because his money was lost due to a bad investment. The female participants had different challenges. Two participants said that they had nothing to report. One worried about

her family while another felt insecure about employment and life in general as she worried about the instability of the family economy. One mentioned being pregnant and a single mother, and one had traumatic experiences overseas leading to different feelings of fear and anxiety.

These returned migrants might not recognise or notice their own psychological health issues even if they had the symptoms. The mentality of Vietnamese is to deal with the issues themselves and accept the challenges as part of life. Fancher et al., (2010) in their research state that Vietnamese patients and families may deny signs or symptoms of mental health as a way to save face. Furthermore, others in the community may see mental illness as a sign of poor moral character, spiritual weakness, or problem of family upbringing (Fancher et al., 2010). People often associate sufferers of mental illness with patients in an asylum. Even jokes are made at the expense of those in the mental health institution in Bien Hoa. For instance, the participant with traumatic experiences only mentioned her experiences to her parents once because of a flashback experience she had at home. She had no understanding about her mental health condition and the phobias she was living with.

Coping with the mental health challenges for these participants take different forms. When asked whom they shared their feelings with, they came up with various answers, which are not necessarily exclusive of each other. A significant number kept to themselves or shared with a priest. Some shared with friends, and some other shared with family. One participant shared his story for the first time during the interview. Two other participants said that they had no worries or challenges when they returned. Furthermore, a few other responses included “I carry the burden by myself,” and “I created my mess so I must accept it.” In addition, some of the participants knew

other people who had mental health issues after returning home from working overseas such as depression or losing one's mind.

## **Psychological Challenges of Returning Migrants**

There is a lack of studies on mental health issues suffered by returned migrant workers in Vietnam. Together with the lack of policy concerning the psychological well-being of returned migrants, that factor leads to a general neglect. Returned migrants often have to deal with stressors of reintegration into family and society as well as other mental health issues themselves. While being overseas seeking employment opportunities, many have experienced depression, mental illness, or traumatic life events, yet they do not have the means to receive proper treatment.

Kuyper (2008) indicates that the returned migrants' psycho-social embeddedness depends on how they are perceived and received by others and the way they see themselves as returning migrants. Although being united with family may make many returned migrants feel at home, they also feel unwelcome and misunderstood (Kuyper, 2008). The feeling of unwelcome and misunderstanding is influenced by how government officials approach them or negative reactions from family, friends, and people in the community upon their return (Kuyper, 2008). Research shows, those who have returned less than a year are less embedded on all levels than those who have been back between one and two years. However, those who have been back longer than two years are better embedded economically but not socially and psycho-socially (Kuyper, 2008). Returned migrants have to deal with gender stigmatisation and discrimination especially in rural areas. The concept of working overseas are still considered an unacceptable livelihood option, especially for women (DOLAB, undated). Single women face more problems than single men or

married women because people associate them with commercial sex work (Kuyper, 2008). Many families do not comprehend or imagine the challenges migrant workers must face while being overseas: robbery, gambling, drinking, sexual crimes, etc.. When they return, these issues are still affecting them.

There is a connection between social support and depression (Nguyen et al., 2015). Social supports serve as a buffer to stresses and may decrease one's susceptibility to mental illness (Nguyen et al., 2015). Without social supports, returned migrants could potentially be under increased duress and experience stressors. Signs of depression or other mental illnesses might be ignored or suppressed both overseas and at home. Thus, migration for work put the individuals at greater risk of mental distress or disorders (Nguyen et al., 2015). Studies indicate some contributing factors to depression among migrants including "higher age, gender inequality, ethnic origin, manual labour other than service work or self-employment, being unmarried or living alone, sexual orientation, higher consumption of alcohol, and illicit drug use" (Nguyen et al., 2015: 576). Migrants often learn to cope with stressors differently including repression which might lead to depression. From the interviews, the participant who had traumatic experiences did not know how to deal with her fear or the psychological effects of trauma. To her, it is something she must endure. Positively, coping with stress has two functions: "to deal with the problem causing the stress and to regulate emotional response to the problem" (Nguyen et al., 2010: 27).

The two common ways of dealing with stressors are problem-focused coping (PFC), which focuses on solving or relieving the sources of the stress, and emotion-focused coping (EFC) which aims to reduce or manage the negative emotions caused by the stress (Nguyen et al., 2010). Most participants from the interviews used

emotion-focused coping to deal with their challenges by asking a priest to pray for them, listening to a recorded sermon, or accept the situation as part of life. Priests can only offer limited assistance such as listening and prayers unless they are trained psychologists, and most priests are not trained as psychologists or counsellors. Returned migrants rarely see a psychologist or counsellor for their mental health issues. From the interviews, all participants never thought of needing professional help or finding proper assistance to process their experiences.

Given the amount of stress related to reintegration, feeling unwelcome and misunderstood, stigmatisation, discrimination, and trauma, returned migrants have no place to find help for their psychological needs. Rural areas have less access to mental health care than larger cities. The ILO, IMO, and UN Women (2014) suggest that psychological counselling be needed for returning migrants and their families, especially for those who have experienced extreme hardship and living outside the cities. Helping family to reintegrate and have peer support groups should be a priority. Migrant workers and family members receive little psychological preparation on issues related to migration that could potentially affect the dynamic of the family, particularly the emotional state of children (DOLAB, undated). Separation from parents has detrimental effects on the psychological well-being of children (Graham and Jordan, 2011); it also affects the parents, especially mothers. Counselling services for migrant workers and their families before going overseas help ease the distress and anxiety among children and family members. Counselling services for returned migrants help them better reintegrate into their families and society and provide them with the proper skills to deal with their experiences.

## Conclusion

Migrant workers leave their countries for work hoping to find a better future for themselves and their family, yet, sometimes they return without any economic improvement. While many migrants have suffered economic hardship, oppression in factories, crimes, and traumas abroad, returned migrants face many psychological challenges that go unaddressed. Given the lack of psychological services in Vietnam, mental health issues of the returned migrants will not be addressed and cared for, particularly those returning to the rural areas. On the basic level, migrants need to understand how to care for their mental well-being and recognise the importance of body-mind-spirit relationship. Basic classes on psychological first aid should be given to returning migrants and their families to help them recognise signs of mental health issues and how to deal with them. Thus, proper care for returned migrant workers such as providing psychoeducation, psychotherapy, and psycho-spirituality is needed. Service agencies such as the church need to plan on how to address the mental health issues of the returning migrants as well.

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