Research Paper XI

NEPALI MIGRATION TO JAPAN AND KOREA

Converging Ends, Diverging Paths, and Contrasting Effects

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INTRODUCTION

International labour migration has increasingly become important to Nepali individuals and households of all classes and regions. Among Asia's active labour-receiving countries, Japan and South Korea (Korea, hereafter) are known in Nepal, one of Asia's major labour-sending countries, for their lucrative wages but also restrictive immigration policies. Similar to other labour-receiving countries in Asia, Japan and Korea aim to prevent permanent settlement of unskilled migrants, while employing them as temporary workers in industries shunned by citizen workers (Tseng and Wang 2013; Surak 2013). As recent countries of immigration, the two ethno-nationalist states wish to preserve social homogeneity for unity, thus reluctantly accepting foreign workers in the face of growing economic and demographic needs (Tsuda 2006; Lie 2014).

In the early 1990s, when global migrant workers arrived *en masse* in search of jobs, Tokyo and Seoul declared that the state accepted only skilled workers not unskilled ones. However, they tolerated the entry and employment of the latter through a variety of side doors, allowing migrants to arrive as ethnic return migrants (*Nikkeijin* in Japan and *Chosenjok* and *Koryoin* in Korea), industrial trainees on a short-term contract, and unauthorised visa overstayers to name a few. Predictably, such contradictory policies resulted in an upsurge of unauthorised workers throughout the 1990s in each country (Cornelius 1994; Seol and Skrentny 2004; Lim 2006). These and other unprotected migrants constituted the most vulnerable labour force who were subject to exploitation, industrial accidents, and human rights violation. Small but unknown numbers of Nepalis were among them in Japan and Korea, toiling in factories and construction sites at the bottom tier of the segregated labour market (Yamanaka 2000, 2005).

In response, Japan and Korea looked for new ways to manage emerging immigration problems. By the mid-2000s, their policies diverged in handling unskilled migrant workers. In 2004, Seoul launched the new state-run programme, the Employment Permit System (EPS), which allowed unskilled migrants to enter and work for up to three years (C. Kim. 2018, 165). Under this programme, the Korean Ministry of Employment and Labour (KMEL) was responsible for signing memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with labour-sending counterparts, administering a Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK), and matching qualified

Table 1: Nepali Residents and EPS Workers in Korea, 2004 to 2019

Year	Total Nepali Residents	Number of EPS Workers	Female EPS Workers (%)	EPS Workers among Residents (%)	Annual Increase in EPS Workers (%)
2004	5,300	1,019	17.0	19.2	–
2005	5,515	742	16.4	13.5	-27.2
2006	5,039	608	16.6	12.1	-18.1
2007	5,357	1,314	10.3	24.5	116.1
2008	6,737	3,067	5.8	45.5	133.4
2009	8,164	4,693	4.5	57.5	53.0
2010	9,834	7,217	5.3	73.4	53.8
2011	12,603	10,315	4.7	81.8	42.9
2012	18,908	15,410	5.1	81.5	49.4
2013	22,015	18,236	4.7	82.8	18.3
2014	26,790	22,748	5.4	84.9	24.7
2015	30,185	25,761	5.7	85.3	13.2
2016	34,108	29,510	6.1	86.5	14.6
2017	36,627	31,509	6.1	86.0	6.8
2018	40,456	34,467	6.1	85.2	9.4
2019	42,781	35,353	11.5	82.6	5.7

Source: Ministry of Justice, 2005-2020, (accessed 2/6/2021).
Notes: The total number of residents includes an estimated number of unauthorised residents, except for years of 2004, 2006 and 2011.

workers with Korean employers before migration. At work, KMEL ensures equality between foreign workers and Korean workers in the application of labour-related laws and policies (KMEL 2020a). Foreign workers are, however, not permitted to change employers in principle.

In Japan, the official unskilled migrant programme, the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP), launched in 1993, and continued to operate under the auspices of the Japan International Trainee Cooperation Organization (JITCO), a semi-governmental organisation. Over time, the programme underwent some changes. In 1997, the duration of years for trainees was extended from two to three, and in 2010, protection, according to the Labour Standards Act, was guaranteed to foreign interns (formerly trainees).[1] The programme has remained unchanged since despite increasing criticisms due to many cases of abuse and human rights violations (Bhattacharjee 2014). A major policy shift took effect in April 2019 when, facing growing labour shortages and mounting criticisms of TITP, the government

1 See Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [Japanese], n.d.

Table 2: Registered Nepali Residents by Visa Category in Japan, 2006-2020

Year	Total	Skilled	Family Stay (Dependents)	Student	Technical Intern Training Program
2006	7,844	1,388	1,403	1,780	–
2007	9,384	2,213	1,787	1,780	–
2008	12,286	3,791	2,397	1,973	–
2009	15,255	4,970	3,297	2,197	–
2010	17,525	5,283	4,314	2,587	82
2011	20,383	5,704	5,505	3,589	257
2012	24,071	6,209	6,992	4,793	310
2013	31,537	6,775	8,621	8,892	416
2014	42,346	7,412	10,308	15,697	305
2015	54,775	10,134	12,896	20,278	247
2016	67,470	12,480	17,471	22,967	201
2017	80,038	12,706	21,873	27,101	183
2018	88,951	12,547	26,017	28,987	270
2019	96,824	12,679	29,992	29,417	403
2020	95,367	12,515	30,533	24,821	469

Source: Ministry of Justice, 2007-2020 (accessed 2/6/2021).
Notes: Statistics are of December for 2006 to 2019, and of June for 2020.

launched a new foreign workers' programme called the Specified Skilled Workers Program (SSWP). Under this programme, applicants are required to pass exams for the minimum level of Japanese language and skills for specified occupations. Successful migrants can work for up to five years and can change employers within the same certified occupations (Oishi 2020).[2]

In Nepal, migrants aspiring to work in Korea and Japan have responded to the changing policies of each country in different ways. In 2007, three years after Korea started the EPS, the government of Nepal signed an MoU with the Korean government in order to regulate the sending of Nepali workers to Korea (Sijapati and Limbu 2017, 78). Since then, the number of Nepalis under the EPS rose quickly, from 1,314 in 2007 to 35,353 in 2019 (see Table 1). Because EPS was the only measure by which Nepalis without recognised skills could be employed in Korea, those on the programme dominated the legal Nepali residents in the

2 As of June 2020, a total of 5,950 foreigners were registered as SSWP workers, an increase by 3.7 times from 1,621 in December 2019. The Vietnamese (N=3,500) topped the nationality list (59%), followed by Chinese (597, 10%), and Indonesian (558, 9%). The new SSWP workers were mostly former TITP workers who had already been employed in Japan (Ministry of Justice [Japanese] n.d.).

country. In 2019, a total of 42,781 Nepalis were registered in Korea, of whom more than 82 per cent were under the EPS programme. The majority were working-age males, engaged in the so-called 3 Ds (dirty, dangerous and demanding[3]) jobs in manufacturing, agriculture, and other labour-intensive industries.

In the case of Japan, instead of applying for the TITP, which became available in 2009 (Sijapati and Limbu 2017, 84), Nepali youths arrived mainly as international students enrolled in Japanese language schools, and as cooks working in popular Indo-Nepali food restaurants throughout Japan. After securing employment, the cooks often sent for family. Both international students and spouses of skilled workers such as cooks were permitted to take part-time jobs for up to four hours a day, 28 hours per week. They worked for minimum wages to support their lives and studies while paying back debts incurred during migration. As more Nepalis arrived on these visa categories, their numbers soared. In 2006, out of a total of 7,844 Nepalis residing in Japan, a majority (58%) consisted of students (1,780), skilled workers (mostly cooks) (1,388), and family members of those with permission to stay in Japan (1,403) (see Table 2). Fourteen years later, in 2020, a total of 95,367 Nepalis were registered, with 24,821 students, 12,515 skilled workers, and 30,533 spouses and children, accounting for 71 per cent of the total.

What explains the contrasting patterns and numbers of labour migration among Nepalis in Japan and Korea since the 2010s even though the two East Asian countries had the same goal of preventing unskilled foreigners from settling down albeit with dissimilar policies? In Korea, the Nepalis, predominantly unaccompanied males, arrive as sojourning labourers on a government-sanctioned labour-rotation programme. In Japan, they entered the country as skilled professionals and international students who hoped to get a skilled job in the future. And, once they secured their employment and residence, many sent for their families while developing extensive networks of businesses and communities throughout Japan. At this stage, a pertinent question to ask would be how Nepalis in Japan managed to increase their numbers by 12 times from 7,844 in 2006 to 95,367 in 2020, an achievement Nepalis in Korea did not attain over a similar time period. In this paper, I seek explanations for the diverging paths and contrasting effects of the converging immigration goals observed in Japan and Korea by documenting migration experiences of Nepali workers in the two countries during the same period from the early 2000s to the late 2010s. I consider a case study of these two migrant populations to be an empirical testimony to the diverging paths of the immigration policies of the two states despite sharing a common goal.

3 The 3Ds are also sometimes referred to as 'dirty, dangerous and demeaning'.

This article comprises three sections. In the first, I discuss the two theoretical constructs, 'gap' and 'convergence', regarding the goals and implementation of immigration policies commonly adopted by many developed countries experiencing labour shortage. This is followed by an examination of the major social and policy changes that have taken place since the early 2000s in the three countries involved: Japan, South Korea, and Nepal. Then, I describe the methods of data collection used in each country. The second section analyses the case of Nepali migrants in Japan, focusing on the two prominent groups: i) skilled cooks and their families, and ii) international students. The third section investigates the case of Nepali EPS workers in Korea. In conclusion, I summarise the major results from this study and discuss its implications for policies and future research.

CONVERGING ENDS AND DIVERGING PATHS

Gap Hypothesis and Convergent Hypothesis

In my previous studies (Yamanaka 2010, 2011, 2015), I examined the development and evolution of immigration policies from the mid-1990s to the late-2000s of Japan and Korea, two industrialised countries that were beginning to face labour shortages. In two comparative studies of such policies among highly industrialised countries, Cornelius et al (1994, 2004) examined the two central themes used in this paper. The first is the 'gap hypothesis', which argues that there are significant gaps between official policies and their actual outcomes. This happens as a result of the two contradictive goals of immigration policies. On the one hand, states need unskilled workers to alleviate labour shortages. Yet, they also want to exclude them from mainstream society in order to maintain national unity. This makes it almost impossible to manage immigration, rendering it not only a highly controversial practice but also a difficult problem to solve. The second theme is the 'convergent hypothesis', which claims that there is growing similarity in immigration policies among industrialised countries. Typically, the contradictory policy on unskilled migrants between 'needed' labour and 'unwanted' workers is reflected in strict regulations on the number of admissions, duration of stay, and access to integration and citizenship (Yamanaka and Piper 2005, 14).

In Asia, global labour migration began in the late 1970s after the onset of rapid industrialisation in East and Southeast Asia in the 1960s. In contrast to Singapore and Malaysia that relied heavily on migrant workers ever since the beginning of their industrialisation drive, Japan and Korea resisted opening their borders until

the early 1990s. When growing labour shortages demanded foreign workers, the two East Asian states denied employment officially to unskilled migrants but, in practice, imported a variety of *de facto* migrant workers through many side doors, as mentioned above.[4] As the contradictions developed, public criticism also arose while employers' demands for foreign labour increased. It was around this time when the approaches to the handling of foreign labour diverged between Japan and Korea. In 2004, Korea launched the EPS, and abolished the Industrial Trainee System (ITS) two years later that had resulted in the hundreds of thousands of unauthorised workers, as discussed later (Seol and Skrentny 2004; C. Kim 2018). In contrast, Japan continued the TITP for the next two decades.

Focusing on the role of civil society in shaping immigration policy, I argued in my earlier studies (Yamanaka 2010, 2011, 2015) that the different political histories in the post-WWII period led the two East Asian states to diverge from each other in their policies towards unskilled immigration. A major force for divergence, I maintained, was different agents of social change and their actions intended to enhance the rights of unprotected foreign workers against the state's contradictory policies. In Korea, it was the united front of various civic groups that significantly influenced the decision of the state to launch the EPS (J. Kim 2003; Lim 2006; D. Kim 2011; C. Kim 2018). These civic groups drew on their experience of challenging the state during the democratic (*minjung*) movement that toppled the military dictatorship in 1986 (S. Kim 2004). In contrast, in Japan, the powerful bureaucracy tightly regulated civil society that resulted in the dual structure of citizens' groups and actions. According to Pekkanen (2006), Japan's civil society is characterised by the two distinct goals and organisations of civic groups. On the one hand, there are a plenty of groups engaged in a variety of activities aimed at enhancing social networks and social capital. On the other hand, there are far fewer groups dedicated to advocacy of various social causes for policy change. Consequently, although many small groups arose to fight for the rights of migrant workers, their advocacy fell short in being able to introduce a progressive agenda in national politics (Milly 2006). Instead, it was the local governments of the industrial cities where the large numbers of legal *Nikkeijin* workers from Latin America had settled with families that took the lead in integrating the new arrivals into municipal public services and community lives (Tsuda 2006).

4 As a former imperial empire, Japan has been home to former colonial citizens and their descendants from Taiwan, China, and the Korean Peninsula. As of 2020, a total of 309,282 individuals from these countries and regions were living in Japan as Special Permanent Residents (Ministry of Justice [Japanese] n.d.).

Social and Policy Changes

Much has changed since I studied labour migration in the two countries in the early 2000s. In Korea, the conservative government elected in 2008 shifted the policy focus from labour migrants to multicultural families. Instead of the confrontational politics of labour migration, the state turned its attention to the growing concern about mixed families as a result of increasing marriages between Korean men and immigrant women from other Asian countries (H. Lee 2008; H. Kim 2012). Both the state and the public saw an urgent need for assimilating immigrant spouses and their children into Korean culture, thus worthy of spending public funds on multicultural families (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2021). By this time, two major problems regarding unskilled migrants had been resolved by new policies. First, the EPS brought a steady flow of willing migrant workers, supplying a reliable source of inexpensive and tractable labour to the labour-short Korean employers. In addition, the number of the unauthorised and illegal foreign workers also decreased through the amnesty programmes offered before the EPS (C. Kim 2018, 183). Second, the legal status of Korean diaspora workers, such as *Chosenjok* and *Koryoin*, was settled by a series of laws, legitimating the co-ethnics' privileges unavailable to non-diaspora workers such as being able to change jobs and having a pathway to permanent residency (C. Kim 2018, 169). Over the years, co-ethnic immigrants have developed niches in the construction industry for males and the service industries for females as domestics and caregivers (Y. Kim 2018).

In Japan, too, significant changes took place, mostly as a result of the financial and natural disaster shocks. The global economic crisis (GEC) of 2008 hit hard the export-oriented manufacturing industry that had been the major employer of *Nikkeijin* workers. Soon, a substantial number of the diaspora workers and other foreign workers returned home after losing their jobs. In 2011, the 9.0 Tohoku Earthquake caused a huge tsunami and the devastating nuclear plant explosions at Fukushima. The disaster caused many foreign workers to leave Japan. In the next few years, the Japanese economy bounced back and started hiring migrant workers again. But, this time, corporations turned to the training interns on the TITP instead of the *Nikkeijin*, whose numbers had plummeted to half of that before the GEC and the earthquake. The diaspora workers were ageing and costlier than the interns from Asia (Tian 2018). As a result of this shift, the Chinese who were the most numerous interns until the early 2010s, and the Vietnamese interns who were rapidly increasing after the mid-2010s, replaced the *Nikkeijin* (Ministry of Justice,

n.d.; Bélanger et al 2011; Liu-Farrer 2013; Liang 2014).[5]

During these tumultuous years, the Japanese government attempted to reframe the TITP by passing a series of laws and cabinet directives in 2010, 2015 and 2017.[6] These reforms included the recognition of interns as workers, re-categorisation of their visas, an extension of their tenure from three to five years, and the establishment of the Organization for Technical Intern Training to supervise Japanese employers.[7] None of them, however, addressed the fundamental problems embedded in the TITP. By definition, the programme is aimed at providing skills training for economic development of the sending country. In reality, it is used as an official channel for labour-short employers to recruit foreign workers (Bhattacharjee 2014). The contradiction between policy and practice manifests itself in the denial of interns' free labour mobility. Moreover, the cumbersome documentation and the complex webs of the intermediary agencies that have developed at both ends of migration have plagued a smooth and timely operation of the TITP (Wang and Bélanger 2011; Bélanger et al 2011). According to political scientists, Japan's reluctance to address this contradictory policy may be attributed to the political leaders' commitment to the ideology of an immigration-free nation (Akashi 2014; Endoh 2019). Despite the country's ageing labour force and declining fertility, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe[8] refused to use the word 'immigration' (*imin*) in his policy statements even though Japan was home to more than 2.8 million long-term residents and 830,000 foreign workers in 2020 (Tian 2018; Roberts 2018).[9]

In Nepal, although political stability was restored with the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015, economic stagnation continued, pushing large numbers of working-age men and women overseas for employment. The 7.8-magnitude Gorkha Earthquake of 2015 added further difficulty to the nation's economic development. According to the latest Labour Migration Report 2020 from the Government of Nepal (2020, XV), the volume of outmigration, measured by the

5 Over the years, Vietnam has grown to be the third largest labour-sending county to Japan after China and Korea. In 2020, there were a total of 420,415 Vietnamese residents in Japan, of whom 219,501 were TITP workers and 65,818, international students, accounting for 53 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively (Ministry of Justice [Japanese] n.d.).

6 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [Japanese], n.d.

7 'About OTIT', Organization for Technical Intern Training, https://www.otit.go.jp/about_en (accessed 2/20/2021).

8 Prime Minister Abe resigned in September 2020 due to his declining health.

9 In 2020, Japan registered a total of 408,000 foreign residents on visas issued for unskilled workers and a total of 422,000 on visas for skilled workers, amounting to a total of 830,000 foreign workers, 29 per cent of the total foreign residents (Ministry of Justice [Japanese] n.d.).

number of labour permits issued annually, increased from 106,660 in 2003/04 to a peak of 519,638 in 2013/14, from which it declined to 354,094 in 2017/18 and to 236,208 in 2018/19. The overwhelming majority of Nepali migrant workers were male, aged 18 to 35, engaging in low-skilled occupations and repeating short-term contracts in the Gulf countries (mainly, Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait) and Malaysia. Hundreds of thousands of Nepalis migrate to India for a variety of low-skilled jobs but since they do not require labour permits, remain unrecorded (Government of Nepal 2020, 11). In addition, from around 3,000 Nepalis migrating to Korea under the EPS scheme in 2008, the figure rose to more than 8,000 in 2018; and the Korean government has set a quota of 7,500-8,500 for Nepali workers in recent years (Government of Nepal 2020, 12). Despite the dip in the volume of outmigration, the volume of financial remittance more than tripled, from USD 2.54 billion in 2010/11 to USD 8.79 billion in 2018/19, the amount equivalent to nearly 30 per cent of Nepal's GDP (Government of Nepal 2020, 92). In terms of proportion of GDP, Nepal was the fifth highest remittance-recipient in the world in 2017/18.

Among the popular destinations for Nepali migrants, Japan and Korea occupy a special position between the most-desired Western countries such as the USA, the UK and Australia, and the less-desired countries of the Middle East and Malaysia (Sano and Tanaka 2016, 28). Compared to the former that require high levels of English competence and occupational skills prior to migration, Japan does not require high-level Japanese language qualification at entry and makes available a variety of visas to students, skill-holders, and interns under TITP. Japan's lack of requirement for prior qualifications attracts the attention of aspiring Nepali youths with fewer resources. In Korea, since the onset of the EPS, the TOPIK has been instituted in order to screen a large pool of job applicants, thus making it necessary for them to invest in language education before migrating. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, when both Japan and Korea faced increasing contradictions in their immigration policies, Nepal's aspiring migrants saw a growing chance to migrate to these two countries that were closed to them until then. In the following sections, I discuss results from my studies of Nepali workers in Japan and Korea.

Data Collection

For this study, I used different methods of data collection in Japan, Korea, and Nepal. In each of the three countries, I interviewed individuals and organisations recommended by my academic colleagues, research assistants, and local institutions active and knowledgeable on migration issues. In Japan and Korea, I conducted

casual interviews with and distributed questionnaires among Nepali workers who congregated in public places, including restaurants, cafés, and train stations. Specifically, in Japan in 2018 and 2019, during my one- to two-month stay in both years, I interviewed a total of 26 Nepali cooks, students, and professionals of various occupations in Tokyo and Shizuoka City, the capital of Shizuoka Prefecture, 150 km southwest of Tokyo.[10] In these cities, I also met a total of 11 Japanese scholars, business owners, and instructors of one Japanese language school. I primarily used Japanese in conversation with Nepalis. In Seoul, I conducted field studies in 2017, 2018, and 2019, spending seven to 14 days each year. In these field studies, I discussed immigration issues with a total of eight Korean scholars and researchers and interviewed a total of 11 Nepali EPS workers and nine Nepali professionals, students, business owners, and activists. I also visited a total of seven Korean and immigrant NGOs and governmental training and multicultural centres. Korean research assistants and Nepali interpreters helped me in Korean and Nepali conversations for interviews with Nepali workers. During a two-week stay in Kathmandu and Pokhara in 2019, I visited three Nepali scholars, one Japanese language school, and interviewed two former EPS workers, and four return migrant workers from Japan. The interviews were conducted in English and Japanese mostly. Based on these three-country data sets collected from 2017 to 2019, I now turn to an analysis of migration experiences of Nepali workers in Japan and Korea.

NEPALI MIGRATION TO JAPAN

Nepalis have a fairly recent history of labour migration to Japan. I have documented the migration experiences of Nepali migrants employed in the manufacturing cities of Central Japan from the 1990s to the 2000s (Yamanaka 2000, 2005). They were visa-overstayers who landed in Japan on tourist visas and worked in small factories and construction sites. Mostly males of working age, a majority of them hailed from

10 Located in the Tokai Region on the Pacific Coast of Central Japan, Shizuoka Prefecture is home to a total of 89,000 foreign residents, 2.4 per cent of the Prefecture's total population, which was 3,656,000 in 2018. Shizuoka City, the second largest city with a population at 687,000, hosted 616 Nepalis, accounting for 39 per cent of the of the total of 1,594 Nepalis registered in the Prefecture (Shizuoka Prefecture Official Homepage, accessed 1/3/2021). As of February 2019, there were two major international language and vocational schools and 11 Nepali-owned Indo-Nepali restaurants and South Asian food and goods stores in Shizuoka City. I chose Shizuoka City, my hometown, as the main site of this study for easy accessibility to the growing Nepali communities.

the western hills of Nepal from families with British and Indian armies service tradition. They arrived in Japan via Hong Kong where a large Nepali diaspora thrived, secured employment in Japan through social networks, and earned wages 10 times higher than the average wages in Nepal. Most returned to Nepal in the aftermath of the 2008 GEC. In my trip to Pokhara in 2019, I was reunited with four former workers whom I had befriended in Japan. By then, the then-young men were middle-aged and married with children. One ran a business, one managed his properties, one was employed in a local school, and one had gone on to take a security guard job in Afghanistan. In their meetings with me, they relished episodes of having fun in Japan (Yamanaka 2003, 2007). Unlike the horror stories common among the undocumented, these men presented the migration as a positive event in their youthful years and an investment that was worth the hardships their unlawful status entailed.[11]

Following the footsteps of the early migrants were two streams of migrants from Nepal. The first were the cooks with professional skills in Indian cuisine that became popular in Japan in the 1990s. The second flow was shaped by the youth who enrolled in Japanese language schools in the 2000s. Although Nepal signed up for Japan's TITP in 2009, the programme never picked momentum, drawing fewer than 500 interns annually from Nepal (see Table 2). The low participation may be explained by the fact that some Nepali overseas employment agencies charged exorbitant brokerage fees, that the skills acquired under TITP were rarely useful in Nepal upon return, and that the working and living conditions in Japan were unfavourable for some Nepali interns (Sano and Tanaka 2016, 25-27). The TITP might also have missed a chance to grab the attention of aspiring Nepalis in the 2010s when Nepali cooks and students were already building a momentum to go to Japan.

Cooks and Families

The recent migration of cooks from Nepal's western hills to Japan is well documented by Kharel (2016). Applying theories of social network and social capital, Kharel shows how the chain migration began, developed, and sustained

11 During the period of serious labour shortages in the 1990s, Japanese employers valued labour supplied by unauthorised workers, suggesting relatively lax controls to this practice (Yamanaka 2000, 89). This did not preclude many forms of abuses and discrimination committed by Japanese employers and co-workers against unauthorised workers. My Nepali informants frequently referred to such incidents in conversations with me. The Japanese government tightened regulations against them after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US, increasing crackdowns and calling the unauthorised, 'terrorists'.

its flow between Malma, a rural village in Baglung District, to the big cities throughout Japan. According to him, in the early 1990s, some Nepali cooks worked in Indian-owned curry restaurants in Tokyo. Riding on the growing popularity of exotic Indian cuisine among Japanese, Indian businessmen hired India-trained Nepali cooks in their restaurants in Japan. They were deemed to be hard-working and cheaper than Indian cooks. As the demand for Nepali cooks rose, a system of 'network migration' developed by which successful Nepali restaurant-owners, who replaced Indian owners, recruited cooks in Malma and sponsored the visas (*gino*, skill) issued for professional cooks. In this transaction, a large amount of capital of up to NPR 1.5 million (ca. USD 12,500) moved from a migrant cook to the restaurant owner who acted as recruiter, visa-sponsor, and employer (Kharel 2016, 179). For an aspiring migrant cook, the high fee was acceptable as an investment in his future job in Japan. It was seen as a win-win deal satisfying both the employer and the cook. However, Kharel's study reveals grossly unequal relationships between the two parties. The restaurant owner made a huge profit from a newcomer cook and was able to open another restaurant in Japan. In contrast, indebted heavily, the cook was forced to work long hours and for many years before he paid off the debt and began sending remittances to his family in Nepal (see also a video by Kharel and Saito 2012).

Taking off where Kharel's study stopped, my study focuses on Nepali cooks' employment, family life, and their future plans in Japan. In Shizuoka City, I distributed a short survey to a total of 18 Nepali cooks, all males, working in the city's two Indian-Nepali curry restaurants.[12] As a follow-up to the survey, I interviewed nine of them to ask about their education, career as a cook, employment history, spouse and children, and future plans. The results from my research confirm Kharel's network migration theory. All the 18 cooks who participated in my study came from villages and towns in Baglung and the surrounding districts. Of the 14 cooks working for the four restaurants in the chain owned by a Japanese businessman, six shared the same surname and nine were from Galkot Municipality alone. Their socio-demographic characteristics revealed that they were 34.4 years old on average, had attained modest education up to the tenth grade, started to work as a cook in India or Nepal after schooling, and all the informants, but one, were married with children. Of those married, all but four lived with wives in Shizuoka,

12 Of the two restaurants, one was owned by various Nepalis and the other by a local Japanese businessman who promoted Indian-Nepali cuisine as part of his global business scheme (Interview, 2/20/2019). Four cooks in my survey were employed by the former, and the remaining 14 worked for the latter.

with the wives commonly taking up a part-time job. Among the cooks who were parents, children's education presented a concern they found no easy solution for. Six lived with children, sending them to Japanese public schools. The rest had left the children in the care of relatives in Nepal. Almost all but one wished to live in Japan for a long time in the future.

The following narrative of one Nepali cook, aged 36, typifies the background, career trajectory, employment, family life, and future plans common among my informants.

> I am from Galkot and my parents are farmers. Growing up, I did not care much about study and did not obtain the certificate.[13] I went to India to learn cooking and looked for a job in Nepal. I had many relatives in Japan. All of them were working as cooks and recommended me to come to Japan. I arrived in Japan in September 2011. My first job was in Osaka, working in a restaurant owned by a Nepali. My wife came one year later, leaving our daughter in Nepal. She was then still very young. I worked there [Osaka] for three years. I moved to a small city near Kobe, where I worked for three years. There we sent for our daughter and she went to a local day care. I came to Shizuoka in August 2017. The restaurant is owned by multiple Nepali men and employs four cooks. I like working here and like the city, too. The restaurant is like a centre of the Nepali community attracting many Nepalis on holidays and for festivals. We're busy and I work all day from 9 am to 10:30 pm with a two-hour break after lunch. I earn 190,000 Yen [ca. USD 1,900] per month from which tax, health insurance, and other fees are deducted. When I was alone, I lived in an apartment with other three Nepalis. The company leased the apartment for us and charged not only rent and utilities but also meals. Now, here, my wife and I live in an apartment belonging to a public housing development and pay everything on our own, including the rent at 33,000 Yen [ca. USD 330] per month. The apartment is spacious with three bedrooms, kitchen, and dining room. My wife works in a food-processing factory for 20 hours in a week. She earns at about 920 Yen [ca. USD 9.20] per hour that amounts to about 80,000 Yen [ca. USD 800] per month. She loves Japan and is very happy with the kind-hearted middle-aged Japanese women she works with. For her, Japan is safe and she can walk by herself in the night.

13 The School Leaving Certificate (SLC) used to be the national examination given at end of 10 years of school education in Nepal. Success in this test allowed a student to advance to higher education (see https://www.scholaro.com/pro/Countries/Nepal/Education-System, accessed 2/18/2021).

> Sometime ago, when my daughter was about the age of going to elementary school, we sent her back to Nepal. This was because she needed to learn English which was not available in Japan. If she speaks English, she would be able to go to any place in the world. This is why not only we but many other Nepali parents send their children back to Nepal for English-medium schools. By now, we have a son who is also in Nepal in the care of my parents. Our children come to see us in Japan with my parents every two years. In the future, I would like to obtain Japanese permanent residency [PR], which requires ten years of residence prior to application. Once I have got it, my wife would be able to get it and my children would be able to do so. With the PR, I would be able to do anything in Japan. I want to own my own restaurant. I would bring my children and we would all live together as a family in Japan. They would go to a Japanese school. So far, I have worked in Japan for eight years, and need to work for another two years to become eligible for a PR. Two more years! I have been working so hard all these years, every day, from morning to night. I am tired but I need to continue working until my children finish education.

His eight-year journey suggests a number of concerns that point to a lack of an integration policy for long-term residents and their families in Japan. Among these, my Nepali informants stressed two main issues they faced while living and working in the country. First, they said that the limit of their wives being able to work only 28 hours per week did not bring enough extra income to their households. The living costs are high in Japan. If the wives could work longer, say eight hours per day, it would be helpful. Second, they were concerned that their children would lose their mother tongue while growing up in Japan speaking Japanese (Tanaka 2017a). This would affect parents-children communication as they grew older. The immigrant parents want their children to keep their Nepali identity despite their long residence in Japan. The informants were aware that they have no say in policy-making. Nonetheless, they were troubled with their inability to resolve their concerns on their own. Given the Japanese government's indifference to immigrants, the truth is that even long-term residents, such as Nepali cooks and their dependents, are defined as foreign residents on the specific visa granted only for specified activities and specified duration of residence. By the rules, a spouse on a family visa is not a worker and is, therefore, subject to the working hours permitted to a non-worker. Accordingly, any ethnic and cultural matters specific to each foreign nationality are outside the governmental purview, and, therefore, should be resolved by each community (Tanaka 2017b, 2018; Shakya et al 2018).

An obvious contradiction arises, however, between policy and outcome. The fact that skilled foreigners are legally accepted as long-term residents in order to meet the needs of the Japanese economy and their family members are legally reunited with skilled migrants in Japan is important here. In fact, the right to family reunification is recognised as part of the basic human rights according to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), both of which Japan ratified in 1979 and 1994, respectively.[14] Both of these international instruments oblige ratifying states to allow the parents to perform their parental responsibilities and the states to protect the children's rights. Yet, Japan's immigration policy has given rise to an increasing number of foreign populations, including Japanese-speaking youths without citizenship rights, thus leaving them on the margin of Japanese society.

International Students

International student migration to Japan became prominent in the mid-1980s. In 1984, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone announced a plan to accept 100,000 foreign students in order to match the country's globalising economy (Liu-Farrer 2009, 2013). For the next two decades, Chinese students dominated the flow of international students to Japan. According to Liu-Farrer in her 2009 study of Chinese students in Japan, international student migration has two major functions. The first is that it serves as a channel of 'brain drain' migration from a developing country to a developed country. For example, in the 1990s and the 2000s, more than 90 per cent of the Chinese students who acquired a PhD in science and technology in American universities chose to stay in the US. The second function is to facilitate unskilled labour through a side door to labour-short industries. Throughout modern history, as a developed economy and a close neighbour, Japan has attracted Chinese students. After Japan welcomed international students in the 1980s, the number of Japanese language schools soared in order to meet the demand from foreign students. Being driven by profit, some of these gave less priority to quality education. Liu-Farrer (2009, 187-190) notes that the interests and motivations of the increasing number of Chinese students were also varied. Some simply used education as a means to work for quick cash. However, the

14 According to IOM (n.d., 1), ICCPR 'stipulates that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State" ... These human rights instruments exhort States to facilitate family reunification for migrants, including migrant children'.

majority of Chinese students migrated to Japan with the intention of seeking higher education and developing a career in Japan. Because they were allowed to work for up to 28 hours per week to support themselves, most Chinese students took up part-time jobs. Many had to pay back the debt incurred during migration. In this way, they also filled the gaps in the labour-short industries such as restaurants, factories, and the construction sector. Liu-Farrer (2009, 196) adds a third function of international student migration. The part-time jobs that the Chinese students took also enabled them to cultivate the cultural and linguistic skills critical for employment and career development in Japan.

International students from Nepal began arriving in Japan in the late 1990s and increased rapidly in the early 2010s as the number of Chinese students declined, especially after the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake (Liu-Farrer 2013). Japanese language schools responded to this decline by recruiting students from other Asian countries. They targeted Vietnam and Nepal and carried out an aggressive campaign to sell the 'study and work' programme. This drew the attention of many Nepali youths who were financially constrained (Sato 2012; Hamada 2014; Minamino and Sawa 2017; Ryu 2017). Soon in Kathmandu, Nepali-run Japanese language schools mushroomed in order to teach the basic Japanese required for enrolling in the Japanese language schools in Japan. In my interview, the principal of a Japanese language school in Kathmandu explained in fluent Japanese how Nepalis study and work in Japan.

> Japanese language schools in Japan require the students to attain the N5 level Japanese, the minimum level, before they enter the school.[15] In my school, we teach Japanese to beginners for a total of 180 hours in four months. The students pay 10,000 rupees [ca. USD 85] for tuition, 3,500 rupees for textbooks and tax, a total of 13,500 rupees. It takes another seven to eight months for the students to attain the N4 level with a total 14,065 rupees. On the average, our students go on to attain the N4 level. We request the parents to pay the costs. Upon completion, we issue the certificate to prove the student's level of Japanese language and apply for the visa on behalf of the student.
>
> In Japan, a Japanese language school teaches Japanese for four hours per day, five days a week, a total of 20 hours. This amounts to a total of 960 hours

15 The Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) measures Japanese language competence in five levels starting from N5, the lowest, to N1, the highest (see https://www.jlpt.jp/e/about/levelsummary.html, accessed 10/9/2020).

> for two years. For the first year, the school charges a total of 1,200,000 Yen [ca. USD 11,000] for admission fee, selection fee, tuition, dorm fee, health insurance, plus 47,000 Yen [ca. USD 440] for the flight. Including 150,000 Yen for pocket money, the total cost is 1,500,000 Yen. Again, we request the parents to remit at once the total amount to the Japanese language school before the student leaves Nepal. For the second year, the school charges a total of 1,000,000 Yen, excluding the admission fee and the selection fee. The student pays the amount on their own, usually in monthly instalments. Therefore, every month the student pays 80,000 Yen [ca. USD 740] for tuition, 20,000 Yen for dorm, and 50,000 Yen for food, a total of 150,000 Yen. In addition, the student remits some money back to the parents to pay back the debt.
>
> If a student works in Japan, he earns 900 Yen [ca. USD 8.30] per hour before the consumer tax of 8 to 10%. This leaves him 800 Yen. If he worked for four hours per day, he would earn 22,400 Yen [ca. USD 210] per week, totalling 89,000 Yen per month. This is why a student takes two to three part-time jobs, which is illegal. If he took two jobs, he would work for eight hours a day. If they work in the night, their hourly wages are higher. As a rule, Japanese language schools require students to attend at least 80 per cent of the total classes. If a student fails, his visa will not be renewed. After two years of schooling, the school graduates the students with a certificate regardless of the level of their Japanese language skills.
>
> Upon graduation, most Nepali students advance to vocational schools specialised in IT, hotel management, care-giving, etc, for another two or three years. They want to stay on in Japan with a job. In Kathmandu, I have been running my school for the past 18 years. I have sent approximately 2,000 Nepali students to Japan. I know only a few who returned to Nepal. Frankly speaking, they were mostly from rural areas with little English. That is why they wanted to go to Japan to learn Japanese and attempt to enter Japanese universities. They can also work part-time. In a nutshell, they were from low-middle class with few options.

The principal's statement reveals the fact that Japanese language schools at both ends run a big international business that siphons large sums of money from Nepali students and parents. These schools also channel unskilled labour in the name of education from a developing country to a developed country, the second function defined by Liu-Farrer (2009). The students in part-time jobs in Japan provide

cheap and tractable labour to restaurants, convenience stores, supermarkets, and many other labour-short workplaces. In fact, there are some Japanese corporations that recruit students in their home countries with the promise of a job in Japan.[16] However, the study-and-work scheme that benefits schools and employers takes a heavy toll on the students who work at multiple part-time jobs in order to study in Japan. Many spend their time and energy on the jobs, as a result of which they hardly master the level of Japanese necessary for advancing to Japanese universities. According to one study, of the 1,303 Nepali students who completed Japanese language schools in 2013, almost all of them continued to study in Japan. Of those who studied further (N=1,232), 1,115 (91%) advanced to vocational schools to study a variety of occupations such as in the IT industry and hotel management, and only 105 (9%) enrolled in universities (Ryu 2017, 118). One positive side to the part-time jobs is, as observed by Liu-Farrer (2009), the Japanese language schools train students to become acculturated into the Japanese manners and behaviour that help them get a job in Japanese corporations. In Shizuoka City, I interviewed a Nepali student studying in a vocational school who emphasised the importance of working in a Japanese restaurant. As he worked as a server, he picked up not only working Japanese but also Japanese work ethics and service manners. After graduation, he planned to work in Japan in order to learn Japanese business management that would help him open and run his own Japanese restaurant in Nepal in the future. This is a form of social remittance that encompasses ideas, behaviour, and social capital that flows from migrant communities in destinations to labour-sending communities and countries (Levitt 1998).

NEPALI MIGRATION TO SOUTH KOREA

Turning to South Korea, Nepali migration presents very different features from what has been happening in Japan, overall. In Japan, the Nepali cooks, spouses, and students, men and women, work at labour-intensive jobs, struggling to secure their livelihoods while wishing to stay on in the country. In Korea, most Nepalis are unaccompanied, working-age males under the EPS for a job contracted for less

16 For example, a company that distributes Japanese newspapers recruits students in Asian countries with an offer of a two-year work and study scholarship. In Nepal, the company collaborates with a Japanese language school for recruitment and visa arrangement for the scholarship awardees. In Japan, the students enrol and study in a Japanese language school in the daytime and distribute daily newspapers twice a day every day; the morning edition in the early morning and the evening edition in the late afternoon (Interview with the company owner, 5/14/2019).

than five years. As will be shown below, they are from cities and towns of different regions in Nepal, relatively well educated, and toil at jobs that few Koreans want to take. In other words, they are an army of disposable sojourners on temporary duty, filling the labour gaps in the lowest tiers of Korea's segregated labour market. By definition, a guest worker programme is a global capitalist design for exploitation of a docile labour pool due to uneven economic development (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014; Rodriguez 2010; C. Kim 2018; Surak 2013; Lenard and Straehle 2010; Stilz 2010). Classism and racism are universal ideological tools used in implementing such a scheme. The extreme vulnerability of migrant workers is, thus, deeply grounded in the imbalance of economic and political power that employers of the developed economy take advantage of in an effort to survive in the ever-competitive global market.

The exploitation and human rights violations commonly experienced by migrant workers have also generated social movements across national borders, aimed at alleviating the structural powerlessness that migrants are subjected to (Sassen 1998). For example, in Asia, highly feminised labour migration gave rise to NGOs committed to empowerment and protection of migrant women's rights (Hugo 2000; Yamanaka and Piper 2005). The migrant grassroots activism was especially salient in Hong Kong where more than 300,000 women from the Philippines, Indonesia, and other Asian countries work as live-in domestics (Yamanaka and Piper 2005, 22-28). Led by transnational, pro-migrant organisations and religious groups, the women workers fought collectively for better policies and working conditions.

Migrant workers in Korea were not an exception to this global human rights movement sweeping across national borders. The early Nepali migrants working in Korea rose to the occasion (Gray 2007). In a well-known case, in January 1995, 13 Nepalis chained themselves to the post of the property owned by the Myeongdong Cathedral in central Seoul, the site and symbol of the *Minjung* democracy movements in the 1970s (N. Lee 2007). They held up signs demanding better treatment from the Korean employers: 'We get no salary in our hands.... We may be from a poor country and that's why we are working here in Seoul like slaves' (*Reuters* 1995; Seol and Skrentny 2004, 483). This was a harbinger of the Korean social movements that fought for the rights of migrant workers throughout the 1990s to the early 2000s. With support from Korean labour unions and other civic groups, migrant activists, including Nepalis, hit the streets and squares demonstrating for their causes (C. Kim 2018, 216).[17] Their voices were picked up by Korean organisations

17 In one of my earlier field studies in Seoul in the mid-2000s, I witnessed a large demonstration

and their coalitions that fought against the Korean Federation of Small Business, the main beneficiary of the ITS (Seol and Skrentny 2004, 484-487; C. Kim 2018, 141-149). Backed by the progressive incumbent presidents, Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008), the Korean pro-migrant forces contributed significantly to the improvement of migrants' rights and eventually the launch of the EPS in 2004 (Lim 2006; C. Kim 2018, 164).

Although the new policy was met with criticisms from both the progressive and conservative fronts and underwent a number of changes, the EPS became the major channel for small-scale employers in labour-short industries to secure a reliable workforce. In the current form of EPS, government institutions, primarily the Korean Ministry of Employment and Labour (KMEL), is in charge of exchanging MoUs with labour-sending countries, administering the TOPIK, matching migrant workers with employers, and overseeing working conditions and other matters (Park 2017). The policy has been praised worldwide for its transparency, an absence of profit-making intermediaries, and equality of migrants to domestic workers in terms of working conditions (Cho et al 2018). However, complaints persist among migrant workers about the lack of free labourmarket movement. In cases of difficult situations, migrants are permitted to change employers up to three times during their tenure that last up to four years and 10 months, two months short of the five-year residency requirements that qualifies a foreigner to apply for Korean citizenship. Upon successful completion of the first EPS assignment, migrant workers are allowed to repeat a second term of the EPS with a break of a three-month stay in their home countries between the two terms (C. Kim 2018, 165). In 2018, there were 274,239 workers from 16 countries on work visas (E-9) issued for EPS participants (Seo 2018, 6).[18]

In 2007, the Nepal government signed an MoU with the Korean government to send Nepali workers in a regulated manner through EPS. Since then, the number of EPS applicants has soared in Nepal. One year later, the number of EPS workers in Korea grew to 3,067, mostly males, 45.5 per cent of the 6,737 Nepalis in the country. An informant (age 41) I interviewed in Kathmandu, an SLC-holder, was among the Nepali pioneers who landed in Korea in 2008. He discussed his motivation, employment in Korea, and post-migration life thus:

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organised by a foreign worker branch of a Korean trade union. Approximately 30 foreign workers, mostly South Asians, participated in the demonstration. The event attracted about 80 young Korean supporters as well as journalists reporting the event.

18 In 2020, a total of 16 countries sent EPS workers to Korea. They were Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam (KMEL 2020b).

> After graduation, I ran a business in Kathmandu for 14 years. My two children were growing up fast and I needed more money than my business produced. I decided to go to Korea. I was 32 years old then. I learned Korean language in a school for six months and passed the test. It was easy in reading and writing but difficult in speaking. I paid for the air ticket and, upon arrival in Korea, received a three-day training. My first job was driving a loading truck but paid very little, only 500 [US] dollars per month. I asked my employer for a letter of job change and moved to a job in a factory that produced motor parts. I worked on 12-hour shifts, 6 am to 6 pm and 6 pm to 6 am, for only 1,000 dollars. But I could not adjust to the shift and lasted only for 45 days. My third and last job was at a pig-slaughtering house. I did very well there, taking out intestines and cleaning the meat and sending it to another company. I earned 1,500 dollars and worked for three years and six months with the provision of lodging and food. One time, I cut my finger with a sharp knife. The company looked after my injury. After I returned to Kathmandu, I tried to go back to Korea for another round. I took the Korean test again and passed it. But the company could not hire me due to the EPS age limit of 37 years, my age by then. I accepted it and decided to stay in Nepal with the family. I bought some land and built a multi-level house. My family and I live on the top level and rent the lower levels to shops. My wife and I run a small restaurant serving light meals. Now, my son has entered the university, and is studying computer engineering.

The stories of extraordinarily high wages in Korea, unimaginable for ordinary Nepali workers, quickly spread throughout Nepal (Hindman and Oppenheim 2014). By the early 2010s, more than 10,000 Nepalis were arriving annually on EPS, representing more than 80 per cent of the Nepali residents in Korea. In 2015, when another informant (age 35) from the far-western town, Mahendranagar, arrived in Korea, he was among the 25,761 Nepali EPS workers. Prior to migration, he moved to Kathmandu where he enrolled in a Korean language school for six months. Then, he took the extremely competitive TOPIK that attracted more than 65,000 applicants.[19] He recounted his journey and job history in Korea thus:

> After I passed the test, I applied for a job under the EPS district branch office of my area and paid 200 dollars for application and about 1,000 dollars for

19 Once EPS applicants pass the TOPIK, they have to wait for a job placement by the KMEL. One interviewee waited for a year to be matched with an employer after his second trial at the TOPIK (Interview 6/23/2019).

> the flight from Kathmandu to Seoul. Before the EPS, overseas employment agencies charged 5,000 dollars for employment abroad. In Korea, the Ministry of Labour matches an applicant with the employer. Once in Korea, the job did not require conversation in Korean. My first job was cutting wires and lifting and carrying heavy 60-kg boxes. The Korean foreman was very abusive and verbally violent. Two Nepali workers escaped. I quit the place after one year and two months. Two months later, the Ministry of Labour found the next job for me. It was a factory that manufactured plastic products, from 8 am to 8 pm. They promised 2,300 dollars but with many deductions, including internet fee for using the phone, I received 1,700 dollars. In that company, there were many South Asians. They were from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal. We communicated in Hindi. Four workers of the same nationality occupied a dorm room. After four months at that taxing job, I sought a new employer. Currently, I work in a big factory manufacturing nuts and bolts, with 40 Koreans and 14 foreigners from Cambodia, Thailand, and Nepal. I am happy with the present employer who pays 1,800 dollars, of which I send home 1,300 dollars. Now, I am recognised to be a hard worker.

The two cases above reveal a number of serious concerns indicative of working conditions and quality of life for migrant workers in Korea. One conspicuous issue is the intensity of physical labour in the factories that demands the full attention and physical strength of the workers. In my interviews with eight Nepali workers (seven men and one woman) in a restaurant near Dongdaemun subway station one Sunday, I heard a couple of words and phrases frequently repeated by the informants. They were the 'dangerous, dirty, dark and noisy' that described the workplaces, and the 'bbali' (hurry, hurry) that were thrown at the workers by the supervisors to pressure them to produce more. A 34-year-old Nepali man who was on his second round of EPS summarised the hazardous working conditions to which many EPS workers were subjected succinctly: 'The Korean companies do not follow government rules. The law is good, but inside a factory the Korean employer ignores it. At work, Korean workers dominate foreign workers. We are placed in the lowest level of hierarchy. We get no training. Our hands and our bodies ache. This is why many industrial accidents happen and even deaths happen. Migrant workers fall into depression'.[20] In addition to the dangers at work, his words and other informants'

20 According to statistics from the Nepali Embassy in Seoul, suicide topped the cause of deaths among Nepalis in Korea in 2018 (E-mail from Migrants' Trade Union, 10/11/2020). Although the exact causes of suicide are not known, the psychological problems faced by Nepali workers

stories often referred to widespread racism and prejudices among Korean co-workers against foreign workers. As stated above, the EPS programme guarantees equality between migrant workers and domestic workers on working conditions. However, the ideological attack in the form of racism, along with classism, generates a racial hierarchy that places domestic workers on top and migrant workers at the bottom. In the face of such structural and ideological oppression, migrants are left with few recourses to fight back against the physical danger and psychological insult. Despite these problems, Nepali workers want to stay on their jobs in Korea. This is because the jobs pay wages ranging from USD 1,000 to 1,800 per month, an unheard amount in Nepal or any other country to which they have easy access.

A study by Basnet and Seo (2016, 490-493) confirms most of my observations above regarding the dire working conditions lacking safety concerns and rampant racial discrimination against foreign workers. The results from their survey of a total of 2,112 workers (93% males) from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, and the Philippines show that they predominantly laboured on the jobs characterised as the undesirable 3D industries such as construction and manufacturing (86%), followed by agriculture and forestry (7%), and fishing and marine industry (4%). A majority (40%) worked for about 13-18 hours a day and 33 per cent for about seven to 12 hours every day, and a majority (52%) did not get a day off every week while nearly half (46%) received one day off a week. About half of the respondents (49%) earned USD 1,100 to 1,300 per month while very few (1%) had a salary higher than USD 1,900. Their wages were reported to be lower than those of Korean co-workers doing the same job. The extent of the denial of foreign workers' labour rights and human dignity revealed took the researchers by surprise. They write (2016, 491-492):

> They [the workers] were exploited, verbally abused, and sexually assaulted by their co-workers in general and the owners of the company in particular. Most surprisingly, the migrant workers were denied their perks and incentive as per the agreement signed with the owner of the company ... [o]ne of the prominent problems among migrant workers was domination [sic] behaviors [sic] by Korean co-workers in their workplace. They were controlled by their co-workers (or sometimes a supervisor) and were treated in an inhumane manner. A worker from Indonesia suffered from mental illness after he started working...He was verbally abused and tormented on a regular basis, culminating in mental illness...

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may have contributed to the high incidences of suicide (Interview with Udaya Rai, Chairman, Migrants' Trade Union, 6/26/2017).

A question arises as to how migrants counter many forms of these difficulties they face in Korea. My research suggests a number of measures migrants use to resolve their problems. One is personal resistance to excessive or unreasonable demands from the employers. One interviewee told me that he went on a 'a three-day strike' by not working when his boss ordered him to drive a vehicle even though he did not have a driver's license. When such passive resistance does not change an employer's abusive behaviour, workers try to move on to a new employer. However, that requires an approval letter from the current employer whom the worker wants to leave, a rule that serves as a deterrent to the workers. When an attempt to leave fails, the worker may bring the case to the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU), dedicated to the protection of migrant workers' rights. This was what the man from Mahendranagar quoted above did. He recounted: 'I telephoned Udaya Rai, the chairman of the MTU, originally from Nepal, about my problem. He called me a "comrade" and visited my employer whose company turned out to be an illegal paper company. Udaya also called the Ministry of Labour on my behalf. He did the same thing for my second job change'.

My informant was very impressed by the power of a migrant labour union and joined the MTU. However, his decision to participate in collective action is rather rare among my Nepali informants. As I discussed earlier, the progressive social movements for migrants' rights in Korea subsided after the rise of the multicultural family support endorsed and instituted by the government (Dicolen and Sanchez 2016). According to C. Kim (2018, 259), the declining pro-migrant movements after the launch of the EPS is related to the penetration of neoliberal global capitalism in the Korean economy and society. In this process, the once-active organisations that advocated for the rights of migrant workers have been co-opted by the authorities who serve the interests of the giant Korean global corporations. The EPS exemplifies one such neoliberal scheme that reduces a migrant worker to an individual without social protection in an unfamiliar environment. The workers have no choice but to compete for better opportunities in order to support their family. C. Kim (2018, 224) cites a migrant activist frustrated by this phenomenon: 'They [EPS workers] don't care about labour rights. They only seek to earn as much money as possible in [a] short time. They think they can go back home with a lot of money. They are selfish and absurd. They don't have the idea of "We are labour"'.

The individualistic tendencies of EPS workers are reflected in Seo's study (2018) on the psychological adjustment of young, middle-class Nepalis to the downward class mobility in Korea. Although initially shocked at and depressed by the reality of the EPS, they adapt gradually to and reluctantly accept their fate as low-class workers. According to Seo (2018, 9), her informants rationalised their current

lives as factory or farm workers being 'out of the ordinary' from their normal lives in Nepal. They, thus, justified the unbearable lives in Korea as being merely a temporary necessity to earn quick money. In my own study, a 28-year-old man with a bachelor's degree in education defined his current work in a die-casting factory as a type of labour that had nothing to do with his planned future business career in Nepal. For him, his hard labour in Korea was an investment for the future he was willing to take despite the risks of accidents at his workplace. In a similar but more direct way, a young Nepali man saw a chance of increasing his future options by taking the Korean language class offered by the Korean government every Saturday.[21] He figured that his enhanced linguistic capacity would advance his qualification to work as a guide for Korean tourists in Nepal and increase his eligibility to apply for a residence visa in Korea. As such, Nepali migrants pursue the financial goals earnestly and single-mindedly while working at exhausting jobs all day long, six days a week. On Sundays, they seek a break from work and rest with friends in a small Nepali enclave that has developed along the Dongdaemun subway station (Seo and Skelton 2017). On the big streets and in the narrow alleys packed with shoppers and pedestrians, there are more than a dozen Nepali restaurants highlighted by colourful Nepali and Korean signs. Soaking in the cultural oasis filled with Nepali food and symbols for a few hours, the sojourners regain humanity and reconfirm their national identity before they return to another week-long stint as low-class migrant workers.[22]

CONCLUSION

In search for answers to the question, 'Why do Japan and Korea demonstrate contrasting patterns of labour migration from Nepal despite pursuing similar immigration policies?', I discovered some clues by analysing the data collected in Japan,

21 The Korea Immigration and Integration Program (KIIP) 'provides basic knowledge about the Korean language, economy, society, law and other information necessary for immigrants in adapting to the Korean society', see https://www.gov.kr/portal/foreigner/en/m010302 (accessed 1/5/2021).

22 I should add that the migration experiences of Nepali workers in Korea described above are similar to those I observed among Nepali workers in Japan during the 1990s and 2000s. Both groups worked hard on the jobs during weekdays and relaxed on Sundays, engaging in many activities with friends and sometimes with locals (Yamanaka 2003, 2007). The only difference is that Nepalis in Korea were legal migrants, whereas the Nepalis in Japan were visa-overstayers and were constantly in fear of deportation.

Korea, and Nepal. According to the convergence hypothesis, developed countries with a shortage of labour adopt similar policies in an effort to control immigration that are contradictory in practice, thus engendering the gaps between intended goals and consequential realities as the gap hypothesis suggests. Such gaps between policy and practice open an opportunity for global migrants to enter a high-wage country. In the 1990s, Japan and Korea, the two recent East Asian countries of immigration, fell into that trap by officially holding up the policy of no immigrant settlement while admitting migrants through various programmes as they faced increasing labour shortages. And that is the opportunity Nepalis took advantage of in Japan by utilising any means possible. In the absence of the Japanese government's clear policy, the migrants capitalised on their existing social and business networks to cross borders and work as unauthorised migrants, skilled cooks, and future skilled professionals. With a growing contingent of dependents, the Nepali population is halfway through building a semi-permanent resident community. In Korea, confrontational politics fought by civil society shaped the launch of a state-run EPS in the early 2000s. The new policy guaranteed transparency, fairness, and equality in migration and employment, rendering Korea a highly desired country among migrants. However, in reality, the EPS functioned as a labour rotation scheme by which employers of the country's peripheral sectors secured a temporary pool of tractable migrants. Toward this Korean economic goal, the migrants persevere in a lonely sojourn, dreaming of the day they return to the homeland with a large sum of money.

The contrasting effects of these divergent paths raise new questions as well as suggest solutions to the problems in each country. In Japan, an unanswered question concerns as to why the Japanese government refuses to admit the stark reality that Japan is already home to diverse nationalities of long-term residents, including Nepalis. These *de facto* immigrants and their families contribute to the revitalisation of the Japanese economy and society as new workforces with their multicultural values. Once the state moves closer to the reality, the existing side-door policies, such as the TITP and the study-and-work programme, must be replaced by new policies that allow migrants to be recruited as workers with rights equal to Japanese workers. The SSWP is the latest attempt that holds such goals. Furthermore, Japan as a country of immigration should develop social incorporation policies that satisfy the growing needs of long-term residents. As shown in the case of Nepali cooks and their families, a lack of a comprehensive system that guarantees their social rights makes long-term residents and their families insecure and uncertain of their future in Japan. In effect, it is no longer possible for Japan to keep maintaining the contradictions that the denial of immigration has created. Instead, it is time for the state to adopt national policies that match the reality and implement them in earnest.

For Korea, after the state launched the EPS, the ways in which some Korean employers and co-workers treat migrant workers have highlighted gaps between policy and practice. As this study found, although the EPS guarantees transparency, fairness, and equality for migrant workers, in reality, these principles do not exist in many workplaces where safety and environmental concerns are minimal and labour-rights violations and racial prejudices are rampant. In this reality, migrant workers have become a vulnerable underclass minority without representation. How can this situation be improved? A hint may lie in the recent history of global migrant rights movements that arose across national borders as labour exploitation and human rights violation increased. As discussed above, Korea was once home to such social movements in which a coalition of different groups, citizens and migrants, fought together for the enhancement of migrant workers' rights. Although the inauguration of the EPS reduced civic activism in the late 2000s, it is possible that the growing gap between policy and practice that harms migrants may give rise to collective actions demanding better treatments. The existing civic organisations such as labour unions and human rights groups may play a leading role. However, it is the migrants themselves who must participate in actions and raise their voice to be heard. Given the structural constraints imposed on the EPS workers, such as divisions along nationality lines, geographical separation, and long working hours, it is difficult for migrants to organise a united front in order to assert their demands. Yet, it appears to be the one possible way by which migrants can appeal to the Korean authorities for tighter regulations against violations of the rights guaranteed in the EPS contracts and the MoUs signed with their home countries.

Finally, future studies must follow up on the changing forms and nature of the contradictions between policy and practice as policies, implementations, and social movements change over time in both Japan and Korea. International migration is likely to increase in the near future in Asia due to the prevailing gaps in wealth, population, and power. More research is necessary to make international migration fair and beneficial to all parties involved. An analysis of converging ends, diverging paths, and contrasting effects of immigration policies offers a useful tool to shed light on the fast-evolving landscape of immigration in East Asia, a wealthy and ageing region yet reluctant to admit immigration.

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Japan and South Korea hold the same goal of preventing unskilled foreigners from settling down while implementing different immigration policies. This paper documents the migration experiences of Nepali workers in the two countries from the early 2000s to the late 2010s to explain the divergent paths and contrasting effects of the converging immigration policies adopted by these two states. In Japan, Nepali migrants relied on existing social and business networks to cross borders and work as skilled cooks and Japanese language students. With a growing contingent of dependents, the Nepali population there is halfway through building a semi-permanent resident community. In South Korea, predominantly unaccompanied Nepali males arrive as sojourning labourers under the state-run Employment Permit System, which guarantees transparency, fairness, and equality in migration and employment but in reality functions as a global labour rotation scheme. In contrast to the host country's goals, Nepali migrants persevere in a lonely life, dreaming of the day they return to the homeland with a large sum of money. The paper ends with a discussion of possible solutions to the contrasting effects of the divergent paths taken by each country.

The Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility is a research centre within Social Science Baha, Kathmandu, established with the primary objective of contributing to broader theories and understandings on labour and mobility. It conducts interdisciplinary, policy-relevant research on critical issues affecting workers to provide new insights on the impact of labour and migration; functions as a forum to foster academic, policy and public debates; and serves as a clearinghouse on various resources related to labour and migration in and from Nepal.

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