

“ETHNIC COMMUNITIES WITHIN GLOBAL JAPANESE STUDIES – ENCOUNTERING DIVERSITY IN A MULTI-ETHNIC, MULTI-CULTURAL JAPAN”

International Collaborative Research-Networking Talk Series at Ritsumeikan University
Sponsored by Toshiba International Foundation

ETHNIC BUSINESSES AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN JAPAN: CULTURAL CAPITAL, ECONOMIC MOBILITY, AND AGENCY

 January 17, 2026 (Saturday)
17:00 - 19:30 JST

 Ritumeikan University,
Suekawa Memorial Lecture Hall
-- Hybrid Zoom Online



Promotion of Japan-Sri Lanka Business Relations through Sri Lankan Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Japan

By Hettige Don Karunaratne
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© Associate Studies, Immigrant Entrepreneurship.

Even though the number and share of foreign-born population in Japan has been low in comparison to other advanced countries, their composition has diversified in many aspects such as the type of visa, profession, ethnicity, location and level of assimilation during the past two decades. There are enough evidences to show that the number of immigrant entrepreneurs have grown in Japan during the past few years.

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Sociocultural Brokers in Commerce: The Indonesian Migrant Entrepreneurship in Japan

Paulus Rudolf Yuniarto¹, Firmian Budianto², Erlita Tantri³

In migrant economies, traditional narratives often focus on the economic adaptation of ethnic minorities with an emphasis on their lack of education, integration, and social mobility. However, the increasing diversity of immigrant populations and the complexities of contemporary globalization challenge these established frameworks. This study explores the role of Indonesian migrant entrepreneurs in Japan's evolving economic and social landscape. Through qualitative research methods, including observations and in-depth interviews, we found that these entrepreneurs leverage their cultural capital and strong social networks to establish businesses catering primarily to their co-ethnic community. Beyond economic pursuits, they act as sociocultural brokers, i.e. promoting halal food, fostering community cohesion, and upholding Indonesian values in the Japanese context. Our findings do not only challenge the traditional view of entrepreneurship as solely profit-driven, but also highlight its potential as a strategy for marginalized groups to achieve both economic independence and social solidarity.

Keywords: migrant, entrepreneurship, sociocultural broker, networks, solidarity



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Expanding Translocal Capability: Ethnic Empowerment Education and Social Inclusion of Brazilians in Japan

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The University of Tokyo, Japan

Abstract
This study examines how ethnic empowerment education contributes to the inclusion of Brazilian immigrants in Japan. Despite being the third largest immigrant group in Japan, after Chinese and Korean, Brazilians have been largely marginalized. Initially migrants as factory workers, recent years have seen them as professionals in various fields and professional development, reflecting an increasing number of skilled workers. However, persistent challenges including language barriers and discrimination in the labor market, as well as low rates of higher education enrollment compared to other ethnic minorities [2]. School nonattendance and drop-out rates are high, particularly among female students, teachers, and parents. The findings show that ethnic empowerment education, which strengthens social networks, facilitates integration and participation in the local community, and lifelong learning, can expand educational, social, and professional opportunities for immigrants. In doing so, the study highlights the importance of ethnic empowerment primarily as a resource of aid, instead of a resource of discrimination and exclusion. Taken together, it offers insights into strategies that can support and expand the capacity of ethnic minorities to succeed in the Japanese society.

Ethnic Empowerment Education
are strengthened from within the Brazilian community



Dynamics of Ethnic Korean Businesses in Japan, 1945-1999

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Keywords: ethnic Korean minority in Japan, zaibatsu Koreans in Japan, yakiniku (Korean barbecue) restaurant, immigrant entrepreneurship, ethnic enclave, ethnic entrepreneur, pachinko industry, self-employment rate

Abstract

This paper explores the complex business histories of ethnic Koreans in Japan, a field that remains relatively understudied not only within the global literature on ethnic minorities but also within the Japanese context. Ethnic Korean entrepreneurs have exhibited a higher rate of self-employment compared to other immigrant communities and Japanese nationals. The primary objective of this paper is to provide a historical context for the entrepreneurial ventures of ethnic Koreans, analyzing the industrial framework and the dynamics of their businesses. This study utilizes two directories, the *Korean Business Directory* and the *Yakiniku Restaurant Guide*, to identify and analyze the growth of ethnic Korean businesses in Japan.



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Program Outline

Ethnic Businesses and Entrepreneurship in Japan: Cultural Capital, Economic Mobility, and Agency

1. Opening Remarks

Dr. Jackie J. Kim-Wachutka, Ritsumeikan University



2. Entrepreneurial Ventures of Ethnic Koreans in Japan: A Historical Overview

Dr. Jaehyang Han, Hosei University

This talk provides a historical context of the entrepreneurial ventures of ethnic Koreans by analyzing the industrial structure and the dynamics of their businesses. The observed transformation in their industrial structure reflects an evolution that responded to the rapid shift towards service-sector. Korean entrepreneurs identified viable profit opportunities and facilitated entry into expanding industries through the sharing of community knowledge.



3. Between “Food from Home” and Gastronomy: Gendered Opportunities for Peruvian Restaurants in Japan

Dr. Naoto Higuchi, Waseda University

Dr. Nanako Inaba, Sophia University

While restaurants are among the most common types of ethnic businesses, their success depends largely on how migrant cuisines attract customers beyond the ethnic community. Although South Americans in Japan have historically been associated with low rates of ethnic business ownership, the gastronomic boom in Peru has created opportunities to launch businesses. We examine how these opportunities are gendered, particularly in relation to the accumulation of human and social capital.



4. Entrepreneurship, Agency, and Wellbeing: Brazilian Women’s Ethnic Businesses in Japan

Dr. Rafaela Yoshiy-Yoshioka, University of Tokyo

This talk explores how Brazilian women in Japan build ethnic businesses as pathways to economic stability, cultural expression, and personal agency. Drawing on qualitative research, it highlights how these entrepreneurs transform community networks, navigate structural constraints, and create spaces that foster belonging and wellbeing within transnational everyday life.



5. Nostalgia, Philanthropy and Entrepreneurship in Japan’s and Taiwan’s Indonesian Community

Dr. Paulus Rudolf Yuniarto, Indonesia National Research and Innovation Agency

Nostalgia, philanthropy, and entrepreneurship serve as powerful symbols of Indonesian migrant social engagement. Based on ethnographic research, this presentation will reflect on the constructive intersections of entrepreneurs' work motivation and spirituality, and the migrant living conditions of Indonesians in Japan and Taiwan as a complement—the so-called 'religionomics as a solidarity method.' The relationship between religion and business activities has shaped immigrant self-identity, internal solidarity, leadership, and collective migrant efforts.



6. Export Competitiveness of Sri Lankan Ethnic Businesses in Japan

Dr. Hettige Don Karunaratne, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan entrepreneurs in Japan derive high export competitiveness from their deep integration into Japanese supply chains, particularly in the used-vehicle sector. By mastering Japanese auction systems and logistics, they maintain a "middleman minority" advantage. Their competitiveness is further bolstered by strong diaspora networks, linguistic fluency, and the strategic ability to navigate complex Japanese trade regulations and quality standards.



7. Discussion, Q&A and Closing Remarks

Organized by: Dr. Jackie J. Kim-Wachutka (Project Director)
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