

Roundtable event

Refugee policies and experiences: Japan and Taiwan in comparison

University of Central Lancashire
and
Ritsumeikan University

24 January 2022

10:00-12:00 UK time

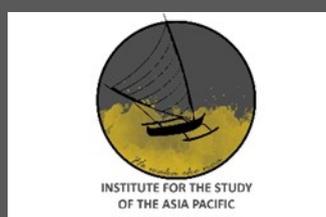
18:00-20:00 Taiwan time

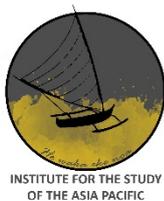
19:00-21:00 Japan time

with

Bonny Ling (Work Better Innovations)
Niki Alsford (University of Central Lancashire)
Sohrab Ahmadian (University of Tsukuba)
Yahya Almasri (University of Hyogo)
Ilaria Canali (Mondo Internazionale)
E-Ling Chiu (Amnesty International Taiwan)

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NEPCAP

Northern England Policy Centre
for the Asia Pacific

UCLan Research Centre
for Migration, Diaspora
and Exile (MIDEX)



Roundtable event

Refugee policies and experiences: Japan and Taiwan in comparison

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24th January

10:00-12:00 UK time

18:00-20:00 Taiwan time

19:00-21:00 Japan time

Free registration to the event:

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/refugee-policies-and-experiences-japan-and-taiwan-in-comparison-tickets-242693511827?utm_campaign=post_publish&utm_medium=email&utm_source=eventbrite&utm_content=shortLinkNewEmail

Chair

Polina Ivanova

Polina Ivanova is a visiting researcher at the Institute of International Relations and Area Studies of Ritsumeikan University and a lecturer at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies. Her research interests lie in the areas of civil society, migration, and international education. She holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Ritsumeikan University. Her doctoral research examined thirty civil society organisations supporting international students in Japan and their contribution to social capital formation in local communities. In addition, she participated in four collaborative projects in the UK, Japan, Australia, and the United States. Based on this work, Polina published six peer-reviewed articles and presented her findings at multiple academic conferences and workshops. Her recent projects focus on volunteer organisations involved with international students in Australia, international students' loneliness in the United States and Japan, and civil society response to the pandemic in Japan, Australia, and the United States in the context of international student support.

Presenters

Bonny Ling

Dr Bonny Ling is Executive Director of Work Better Innovations, a research consultancy with a community service mission working on new ideas for a responsible economy. She is also Research Fellow with the Institute for Human Rights and Business, and Advisory Board Member of Human Rights at Sea, an international NGO that raises awareness of human rights abuses in the maritime sector. She worked for the UN in Geneva, Bosnia, Cyprus and Liberia and holds a PhD in Law from the Irish Centre for Human Rights, MPhil in Criminology from Cambridge University and MA in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School. She has served as an international election observer in East Timor and for the OSCE and writes on human rights, migrants, business responsibilities and international development for Ketagalan Media, New Bloom, Taipei Times, Taiwan Insight and The News Lens.

Talk: Substance and form: UN Refugee Convention in Japan and Taiwan in a regional context

The UN Refugee Convention is an international treaty. However, given its drafting history to address post-war European displacement, it often has a strong connotation in Asia as being primarily a European instrument. In this light, the current backsliding by various European countries on their commitments towards refugee protection means others look to it and find little reason to support the Convention. The result is that the Convention (and its Protocol of 1967 that broadened the scope of application beyond post-war Europe) will continue to be marginalised in inter-government discourses in the Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, more governments in the region are increasingly looking towards voluntary standards, such as the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Responsible Migration, to manage various migration flows. My presentation will frame the discussions around asylum seekers, international protection and the UN Refugee Convention (and its 1967 Protocol) in both Japan and Taiwan in this broader regional context, where ratification rate for the Convention remains low.

Niki Alsford

Niki Alsford is Professor in Asia Pacific Studies and Head of Asia Pacific Institutes at the University of Central Lancashire. Alsford's research focuses primarily on comparative anthropology within the Asia Pacific region. Chief among these is an engagement with Austronesian migration and the maritime cultures of Pacific islands. His present work is bridging a cognitive divide in environmental discussions between indigenous knowledge and climate science. He is an elected fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Royal Asiatic Society, and the Explorer's Club. He works as the Country of Origin Expert for Taiwan, the Pacific Islands, and North Korea for AMERA International and the United Nation's International Refugee Rights Initiative (UNRRI).

Talk title: The refugee status of Taiwan: The historical homeland of Austronesian speaking peoples

Austronesian languages first spread south from Taiwan, through the Philippines, into Indonesia and Malaysia, across all the Pacific islands, and as far west as Madagascar. This was not a single event of mass migration, but rather a process of movement with different push/pull factors. One factor was the climatic emergency brought upon by the end of the last Ice Age. Local knowledge referred to this swallowing-of-the-land-by-the-sea and the subsequent forced migration of peoples as fenua imi. The history of the Pacific is a history of migration. The return of fenua imi in the modern period has come with additional barriers to movement. Colonialism created a complex legacy of political and legal associations among Austronesian speaking nations. This has meant that new territorial boundaries restrict the free movement of people between islands.

Climate change represents humanity's greatest threat. The vastness of the Pacific means that no two experiences are the same and this is particularly so when discussing human resilience. Resilience is 'strategically managed suffering' and peoples' capacity to 'manage' varies. If the world can keep global temperatures below 1.5 degrees Celsius, the movement of climate displaced people from islands such as the Marshalls, Tuvalu, and the Kiribati is still a reality. Taiwan has the potential to be a suitable home for these displaced communities given its history as the cradle of their indigenous languages. The absence of legislation within Taiwan to accommodate asylum prevents the island from achieving this.

This talk will discuss the benefits of Taiwan putting through legislation that would accommodate future climate displaced peoples within the Pacific.

Sohrab Ahmadian

Sohrab Ahmadian is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Tsukuba, Japan. His research focuses specifically on the Kurdish diaspora patterns in Japan and their impact on the growth of political issues and identity formation in the context of Japanese society as well as the country of origin. He has been awarded the MEXT Scholarship for the Super Global Universities program in 2019–2020 and has been granted the fellowship of the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) for the "SPRING" funding program in 2021–2022. Sohrab also writes poems and is currently working on a collection of poems drawn from the life stories of migrants to be published in 2022. His first series of poems, "Confession," was published in Iran in 2014.

Title : The Kurdish diaspora in Japan: Caught in a limbo between immigration policies and politics

The Kurds are one of the largest ethnic minorities in the Middle East without their own nation-state. Kurdish migration to other countries occurred mainly in response to political crises and events, such as the state's repression of ethnic minorities. As a result of nearly four decades of conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdish opposition, some Kurds fled to Japan. In my talk, I'll explain why the Kurds chose Japan as a destination and how the Japanese immigration policies deal with the Kurds as a minority group in Japan. Finally, it is argued that Japan, despite

pursuing democratic and liberal agendas, has so far been so cautious in adopting immigration policies that it has run into a kind of liberal paradox.

Yahya Almasri

Yahya Almasri is a specially appointed assistant professor at the University of Hyogo, School of Economics and Management. His main research interests are in forced migration and Middle Eastern politics. In 2016, Yahya was involved in shaping the official Japanese response to the higher education crisis in Syria. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) provided a total of 150 scholarships for Syrian graduate students as an alternative to resettling Syrian refugees in Japan between 2017 and 2021. Yahya is frequently invited to Japanese universities and high schools as a guest speaker.

Talk: Informal asylum of Syrian refugees

Since the Syrian war erupted in 2011, millions of Syrian civilians sought refuge in neighboring countries, hundreds of thousands headed for European countries, and only a few hundred arrived in Japan. However, the East Asian nation has a stringent asylum policy where the refugee recognition rate has been notoriously low, estimated at 1% in 2020. Between 2011 and mid-2017, 81 Syrians applied for refugee status in Japan, and only 15 applicants were recognized as refugees. The recognition rate stood at 18.51%, which is high for the Japanese standards but is the lowest for Syrians among the G7. Facing this situation, many Syrians choose "informal asylum." They do not apply for refugee status, and consequently, they will not be legally recognized as "refugees." My presentation will explain the informal asylum through the lens of Syrian asylum seekers as a new and understudied trend in Japan. Also, I will explain the positive and negative consequences of informal asylum.

Ilaria Canali

Ilaria Canali graduated in November 2018 with a bachelor's degree in Japanese Language, Economics, and Legal institutions from Ca' Foscari University of Venice with a thesis about the refugee situation in Japan. During her studies at Ca' Foscari, she won a scholarship that allowed her to take part in the Model United Nations (MUN) in New York, 2017. After completing her bachelor's degree, Ilaria enrolled in master's programme at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto where she spent two years (2019-2021) studying and researching about International Politics, diplomacy, international security, and global cooperation. Also for her master's degree, she developed her final thesis in the area of migration studies. After completing her master's studies, she interned for six months in a development agency based in Nagoya, Japan. During her internship, Ilaria started collaborating with a Japanese NGO based in Tokyo whose main mission is to support refugees in Africa and South-East Asia regions. She is a Business Development Analyst for the NGO Mondo Internazionale in the JIYO Project (Japan Italy Youth Opportunities), where she shares her knowledge and professional experience related to international cooperation and geopolitics in the Asia-Pacific region.

Talk: Awareness and media coverage in Japan about the refugee situation: what's the situation now and how can it be improved?

My talk will focus on my academic research and personal experience with a refugee support group in Japan and my collaboration with a Japanese NGO. I will first focus on the lack of awareness and media coverage of the refugee issue in Japan and possible reasons for this. Next, I will provide a brief comparison between national asylum systems in Japan and Italy to better illustrate the situation in Japan. I will then talk in more detail about my own experience with refugee support agencies.

E-Ling Chiu

E-Ling Chiu is the Executive Director of Amnesty International Taiwan, a human rights activist. She is also a Board Member of Taiwan Association for Human Rights, Covenants Watch and Human Rights Network for Tibet and Taiwan. She was also served as a Deputy Chair of East Asia working group of Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network in the past. She got her master's degree from the Institute of Sociology in National Tsing Hua University.

Talk title: Refugee and asylum seekers in Taiwan

Taiwan is not a UN member, and it lacks domestic refugee review and protection mechanism. In the absence of the UNHCR office or other related international mechanism and training, refugees and asylum seekers in Taiwan are facing a dire situation, by either being deported as illegal migrants, or even without deportation, by overstaying without a legal status and living in a limbo. There are some domestic laws related to the asylum issues; however, they do not fit the international human rights standard and lack transparent and clear procedures for the application or appeal. Along with the Hong Kong and China issues, the refugee and asylum issues become a sensitive political topic in Taiwan, and the refugee bill has been stuck in the parliament for decades becoming a taboo topic for the government.