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Precarious stepping stones: Transnational Japanese Hostesses in London and their labour, career and gendered migration

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Nanase Shirota

Thursday
2024-10-24
18⁰⁰~19³⁰



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Some single Japanese women go abroad to places such as London, Los Angeles, and Southeast Asia for a variety of reasons, and work as hostesses entertaining Japanese (and other Asian) men in nightclubs. These women – transnational Japanese hostesses – are a subject from the North largely overlooked in surveys of global intimate labour.

This talk focuses on Japanese hostesses working in London. These women, typically in their 20s and 30s, are often working holidaymakers or students. Their personal narratives reveal that they try to compensate for their lack of social and linguistic capital by selling femininity, Japaneseness and communication. Moreover, their stories disclose some structural factors, such as the diversification of intimate work on

a global scale, that influence their decision to pursue this line of work, which eventually led them to gendered migration.

First, Nanase Shiota will present these hostesses' personal narratives and explain the structural elements that influence their work choices and career paths. Second, based on these analyses, she argues that they use hostess work as a stepping-stone for their own goals, whilst these jobs and strategies eventually draw them back to 'their own place', which they had initially decided to leave. Finally, she will share some findings from her most recent fieldwork in Amsterdam, Ho Chi Minh City, and Kuala Lumpur.

Nanase Shiota

is an affiliated lecturer in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge, where she earned her PhD. She holds an MA from Keio University, studying Arabic and Islamic studies, and a second MA in Sociology from the University of Glasgow. Her research focuses on communication (particularly listening), work, and gender in contemporary Japan, with a specific current focus on transnational Japanese hostesses working abroad. She is also methodologically interested in ethnography, interviews, and oral history.

