

Changing family structures of Nepalese transmigrants in Japan: split-households and dual-wage earners

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***Abstract** Based on surveys and interviews conducted in Japan and Nepal, this study of Nepalese labour migration to Japan examines the changing patterns of family responses to international migration, the increasing participation of married women in the global labour force, and the implications of these changes for households, communities and the Nepalese economy. The split-household family has long supported sojourning males of Tibeto–Burman linguistic groups as Gurkha soldiers in Indian and British Armies before returning to Nepal upon retirement. As women have increasingly left Nepal to take advantage of overseas employment, a pattern of husband–wife migration has emerged, with children being left in the hands of relatives – the dual-wage earner family. Thus, Nepal has recently witnessed the development of transnational families and individuals whose work, residence and life trajectories extend beyond the nation-state.*

International migration has been one of several strategies for economic survival among subsistence farming households in Nepal (KC 2004; Seddon et al. 2002; Thieme et al. 2003). For decades, hundreds of thousands of farmers have descended from the Himalayan middle hills to the Indian plains every year to serve as security guards, domestics, manual labourers, low-level public servants, and to join the Indian or British armies as foot soldiers (Dixit 1997). By the late 1980s global capitalism had integrated this Hindu kingdom into the expanding economies of East and Southeast Asia, and by the mid-1990s, into those of the Gulf region (Graner and Gurung 2003; Yamanaka 2000). In Nepal, growing cash needs and declining crop yields, coupled with lack of employment opportunities outside of agriculture, have increased the importance of a steady flow of remittances from abroad. Yet, international migration incurs heavy costs with no guarantee of the anticipated rewards. Migrants and their families are thus driven to develop strategies to maximize their benefits while minimizing their costs and risks.

Based on a ten-year study of Nepalese labour migration to Japan, in this article I analyse changing patterns of family responses to international migration and the implications of these changes for households, communities and the national economy.

The increasing number of women in the Nepalese migrant community studied here, most of them married, indicates the development of 'dual-wage earner' families in which husband and wife migrate, leaving their children in the hands of relatives. This is a radical shift from the traditional 'split-household family' in which male breadwinners migrate, leaving their families behind (cf. Glenn 1983). The change in migrants' family forms is an adaptation to expanding employment opportunities for women abroad, that has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of Nepalese transnational families and transmigrants whose work and life trajectories have extended across and beyond national borders (Pries 2001a).

Split-household and dual-wage earner family structures

International labour migration enables migrant households to diversify their means of economic survival by providing extra sources of cash income. The process is, however, fraught with the unpredictable risks that arise as a result of distance, fraud, ill health, and legal and institutional barriers that may jeopardize its rewards. Sustaining migratory flows therefore requires migrants and their family members to remain united and respond to the many constraints migration imposes upon them.¹ The sociological literature has amply documented that in order to lessen risks of migration while maximizing its benefits, migrants and their families commonly mobilize kin and friendship networks that permit migrants access to the social capital these networks provide, such as emotional support and information about jobs and housing (Boyd 1989; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes 1998). Recent analyses of Nepalese international migration have also established the critical importance of social networks and social capital for migrants to enter and secure jobs in the new host country (Yamanaka 2000, forthcoming), and to form informal rotating credit associations for raising funds at their destinations (Thieme and Müller-Böcker 2004).

A split-household family structure is one in which a migrant household maintains two family branches separated by geographical space and a national border, while remaining connected through the flow of remittances and the occasional return of migrant members. This arrangement is characterized by a clear division of domestic tasks between the two households. Usually male migrants are responsible for generating cash income abroad, while females remain in the homeland carrying out all other family functions, namely reproduction, socialization and consumption (Glenn 1983: 38–9). An example of this family structure is that of Chinese male immigrants to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century who left their families in Southern China. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited Chinese labourers from bringing their families to the USA while at the same time anti-Chinese hostility and long distance discouraged them from attempting to do so (Yung 1995). When the American government relaxed its immigration policy in the late 1960s, Chinese immigrants were able to be reunited with their families. This spawned chains of family migration and gave rise to new family structures. In response to economic pressure, most new arrivals are adopted a 'dual-wage earner family' structure in

which husbands and wives both worked to support their families. Because work and family life were almost entirely separated, intimacy between parents and their children diminished (Glenn 1983: 42–3).

Transmigrants and transnational families

Technological advancement during the latter half of the twentieth century uncoupled geographic and social spaces that once were embedded within the territories of nation-states (Pries 2001a, b). The constant circulation of people, goods and information throughout the globe has given rise to new ‘transnational social spaces’ in which migrants and their families left behind are able to interact frequently with one another and at the same time establish familiar occupational and residential bases in multiple places across national borders.² In such transnational settings, the ‘transmigrant’, as an ideal type, is different from such traditional categories as ‘immigrant’ and ‘return migrant’. The immigrant leaves the nation-state of origin to reside permanently in the nation-state of arrival. The return migrant leaves the nation-state of arrival to return permanently to the nation-state of origin.³ In contrast, transmigrants and their families, which are now identified by social scientists as ‘transnational families’, frequently cross national borders to work and build their lives in several places beyond the nation-states of their origin and return (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Chamberlain and Leydesdorff 2004; Lima 2001; Massey et al. 1994; Yeoh et al. 2002). They have been defined as ‘families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely “familyhood”, even across national borders’ (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002: 3).

Based on his analysis of job histories of 500 Mexican migrants in New York, most of whom were undocumented, Pries (2001a) found that despite great risk and expense, the majority of the migrants moved frequently to and from the USA and Mexico. In contrast to the common perception that undocumented workers who return to Mexico do so because they are deported, Pries (2001a) reported that such involuntary factors as problems with their legal status, loss of employment, or bankruptcy were rarely cited by his respondents as reasons for returning to Mexico. The reasons cited proved to be primarily personal. Typically, Mexicans went to the USA to earn money, and returned to Mexico for family reasons, or to go to school, or because of dissatisfaction with their jobs in the USA. Strong transnational and social networks facilitated migrants’ border-crossings, thus enabling them to emerge as transmigrants. This indicates to Pries that transmigrants are neither failed immigrants nor failed return migrants. On the contrary, they are seasoned migrants who have learned to manage risks and live with them rather than letting a promising opportunity to migrate pass without trying. Restrictive US immigration policies and enforcement undoubtedly sharply reduce transmigrants’ options. Consequently, ‘(T)hey are not free in defining conditions of their action, but the horizon of their realized options of action and expectations is not limited to the region of departure or the region of arrival, it *spans between and over them*’ (author’s emphasis, Pries 2001a: 68).

Migration and remittances in Nepal

Nepal is one of the least developed countries in Asia with the rapidly growing population in the narrow territory (52,820 square miles, the size of Tajikistan) landlocked between Himalayan peaks and Ganges plains. The 2001 national census recorded a total of 23.2 million persons up from 18.5 million in 1991, a 2.25 per cent annual increase (KC 2004: 205). During the decade 1993–2003, the per capita Gross National Income (GNI) increased from US\$ 180 to 250.⁴ In the hill regions, overpopulation and deteriorating ecological conditions have aggravated the state of the agricultural subsistence bases of already impoverished rural households. In towns and cities very high unemployment and underemployment forced many households to seek alternative income sources. As a result, by the mid-1990s, large numbers of Nepal's households were found to resort to remittances from migrant members as a means of economic survival. Despite the increasing importance of remittances as a source of household income and national revenue, migration has remained one of the least examined topics in Nepal. Encouraging exceptions are to be found in recent research publications on internal and international migration based on Nepalese census and other survey data (KC 2004; Seddon et al. 2001, 2002; Thieme and Müller-Böker 2004). Results from these studies reveal significant differences in patterns of migration and amounts of remittances by type of migration (short- vs. long-term; internal vs. international), migrants' destinations (rural vs. urban; India vs. elsewhere) and other characteristics such as sex, ethnicity, region of origin, socioeconomic status, and military migration history.

For the poorest migrants, lack of resources constrains their mobility, keeping most of them within Nepal or just across the border in India, for seasonal work. The 1950 Indo–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship keeps the border open, providing tens of thousands of Nepalese labourers every year with access to low-paid, low-skilled jobs (as porters, domestics, security guards, and so forth) in India. Among them more than 100,000 young women work in the sex industry in Mumbai and other large cities, raising concerns for their health and welfare (Hennink and Simkhada 2004; Seddon 2005). Researchers estimate the number of Nepalese migrants of both sexes working in India's private sector to be as many as 750,000 (Seddon 2005). In addition, some 250,000 Nepalis may have worked in India as public servants and soldiers, resulting in an estimated total of one million Nepalese workers in India in the mid-1990s.

With the increasing integration of the Nepalese economy into global capitalism, by the early 1990s employment opportunities became available for Nepalese workers in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE) and East and Southeast Asia (Hong Kong, Brunei, Japan, Korea, and later Malaysia). Having realized migration's potential for national revenue, the Nepalese government legislated the 1985 Labour Act which formalized recruitment processes through registered manpower agencies. Because overseas employment entails high costs and great risks, it has remained available to relatively few, unusually resourceful, migrants. Nonetheless, the number of overseas workers, most of them on low-paid manual jobs, grew to some 700,000 in the early 2000s from less than 100,000 in the early 1990s (Seddon 2005). Altogether,

more than 1.7 million Nepalis were working in foreign lands and remitted to Nepal possibly more than US\$ 1.5 billion, an amount equivalent to 18 to 22 per cent of Nepal's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Seddon 2005).

Nepalese women workers abroad

Despite the growing information on Nepalese international migration, the sex of migrants has been insufficiently studied. Increasing concern about female Nepalese sex workers in India has heightened public attention to the issue of the human rights of these women who are trafficked and inevitably exposed to HIV/AIDS and other risks (Hennink and Simkhada 2004; Seddon 1998). The majority of Nepalese women working in India and elsewhere is, however, engaged in low-paid, low-skilled employment in the informal sectors as domestics and service workers.

Seddon (2005) estimates that women account for five per cent (n=35,000) of the 700,000 Nepalis overseas (excluding India), of which 57 per cent (n=19,800) are in East and Southeast Asia, mostly in Hong Kong and Japan. These statistics, however, provide very little information about women's migration experiences, including their demographic and socio-economic characteristics, emigration processes, employment, working conditions and housing at destination. Much less known are their changing household structures and family relations while working abroad for extended periods. Since the 1980s, feminists' focus on women of colour has identified the roles that women play, which, though less visible than those of men, are crucial in shaping and reshaping adaptation strategies employed by immigrant households. The example of the Chinese split-family households discussed above, demonstrate that women's private status must not be allowed to obscure the fact that they participate in migration processes by performing the productive and reproductive labour in the home that is essential to family well-being and community development (Glenn 1986; Kibria 1993). Such flexible and resilient adaptation of immigrant households has evolved in the span of one to three generations in response to the large amount of social, political and economic inequality that defined late nineteenth century Sino-American relationships, of which labour migration was an important part (Mei 1984). Analyses of family strategies and women's position in them, therefore, require examination of not only historical changes but also how those changes have affected migrants' family life cycles. The decision to migrate is highly correlated with one's sex, age, marital status and position in family life cycles. In the case of Nepalese migrant women and men I have studied in Japan, the long familial traditions of military service in the Indian and British armies has defined the families' migration decisions, family life cycles and family structures. To these topics I now turn.

Research and data

The data upon which this analysis is based were collected in Japan and Nepal between November 1994 and May 2004. During that decade, I conducted surveys, interviews, and observational studies among Nepalese migrant workers in Hamamatsu, a city of half a million in western Shizuoka Prefecture, 257 km southwest of Tokyo.

Contiguous to, and west of, Hamamatsu and its several neighbouring cities, lies Toyohashi, a city of 350,000 and its neighbouring cities, in the eastern part of adjacent Aichi Prefecture. These cities host the headquarters of several major automobile and motorcycle companies, such as Suzuki, Yamaha, Honda, and Toyota, together with thousands of subcontractors that supply the parts assembled by the companies to become vehicles. Foreign migrant workers are attracted to this area, referred to in its entirety as Tokai, because of chronic labour shortages there among small- to middle-scale enterprises with fewer than 100 employees. My informants estimated their own numbers working in Tokai at 400 to 500 in the mid- to late-1990s. There I collected data through survey questionnaires from 130 men and 19 women. During the 10-year span of my research, I visited Kathmandu, Nepal's capital, and Pokhara, the country's fourth largest city, five times to interview return migrants (29 men and 11 women) from Japan and to collect information relevant to migrants' experiences from scholars and policy makers.

The data gathered from individuals in both countries include information from a total of 159 men and 30 women about their methods of arrival in Japan, work and employment history in Japan, and personal backgrounds. In addition, return migrants were asked about their activities after returning to Nepal.⁵ These data were supplemented in each country by interviews with more than 50 informants – scholars, journalists, bureaucrats, NGO workers, etc. – who were knowledgeable of social, historical and political contexts in which migration took place.

Statistical analyses reveal that the 189 migrants who participated in the study were of working-age, entered Japan between 1985 and 1997, and overstayed their short-term visas (which are issued for tourists, business travellers, etc.), while working illegally. More than 80 per cent of the informants were from the Tibeto-Burman language speaking ethnic groups in the Himalayan middle hills, such as Gurungs and Magars in the west, and Rais and Limbus in the east. These are ethnic groups that the British designated as 'martial races', and whose tradition of foreign service as 'Gurkha' soldiers in the British and Indian armies produced a culture of emigration and a remittance economy in rural Nepal. Interviews with returnees in Nepal and migrants in Japan demonstrated that many Tibeto-Burman informants were relatives – sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, wives and in-laws – of former or current soldiers in the British or Indian armies. As a result, they were familiar with travelling and living overseas or had worked overseas themselves prior to arriving in Japan. Most informants in this study were well educated, with some years of post-secondary schooling. Prior to migrating to Japan, these men and women had engaged in a variety of occupations, including small business owners, public servants, teachers, social workers, farmers, housewives, migrant workers, students, or ex-soldiers.

Gurkha split-household families

The historical roles played by Gurkha Brigades in preserving Britain's colonial power in South and Southeast Asia have been amply documented elsewhere (Caplan 1995; Des Chene 1991, 1993). For the past 190 years, the tradition of military service has

provided many Gurkha families and communities with a steady source of cash to supplement their subsistence economies based on terrace farming and cattle herding in Himalayan pastures. Over a few decades, soldiers' remittances and retirees' pensions were sufficient to enable their families to enjoy higher living standards than families without soldiers (Hitchcock 1966; Höffer 1978). At the individual level, foreign military service has not only defined the Gurkhas' 15-year military careers and post-military activities, but also shaped their family life cycles and family structures (Des Chene 1991; Pettigrew 2000).

Young Nepalese men are usually recruited to the Gurkha Brigades at 18 years of age. Upon completion of their three-year basic training in Britain, India or elsewhere, Gurkhas are granted a six-month leave in Nepal during which the majority of them marry. Before returning home, many will have obtained 'family permission' allowing them to be accompanied by their brides for three years in military housing during their assignments in Britain, Brunei, Hong Kong or India. Thus, during these years, the soldiers and their wives often begin family lives with the birth of their first child. When the three years of family permission ends, army wives and children return to Nepal to live with the soldiers' extended families. Every three years army husbands return home for six months, thereby temporarily resuming 'normal' family lives with wives and children. During a 15-year enlistment, Gurkha soldiers and their families spend a total of 13 years of isolation from one another, including full time active military duty. As a result during most of a soldier's career, his family and its domestic functions are divided between two widely separated locations: husbands in Britain, India or elsewhere, working or fighting, while families are in Nepal receiving their vital remittances.

Most Gurkha soldiers' military careers end before they reach the age of 40. The transition to retired life marks a drastic change in a serviceman's life that until then was strictly organized by the foreign military regime. Upon discharge, the soldier became entitled to a pension, obviating any immediate need to look for a source of income. Yet, to a man in his mid-30s with growing children, a military pension hardly covers the expense of supporting a joint family in the city.⁶ His economic anxieties are grounded in the fact that jobs are scarce in the long stagnant Nepalese urban economy. Unemployment and underemployment are widespread even for their university graduate sons and other male relatives. Increasing numbers of them join 'the long exodus of those "going to foreign" in search of work' (Pettigrew 2000: 14). Others attempt to establish businesses, shops or companies, but rarely succeed in the competitive markets long dominated by Newar and other mercantile groups. As a result, 'the life of a retired soldier is frequently one of enforced leisure' (Pettigrew 2000: 16).

The increasing incidence of sojourning abroad among ex-soldiers and the following generation signal the development of the transmigrant as a new type of Nepalese migrant: those who frequently cross national borders in search of employment and develop their work and residence trajectories in what Pries (2001a) calls 'transnational spaces'. A historical transition from 'global warriors' to 'global workers' among Tibeto-Burman males has thus increased intergenerational spatial mobility

and has expanded their global opportunities for employment and transnational spaces for community and family formation (Yamanaka 2000, 2003a). To family members, the sojourning of ex-soldiers foretells the beginning of another round of family separation, yet again splitting the family into two households for what may prove to be many years. Unlike military service, foreign employment is not punctuated by periodic family visits. During men's extended absence, women are again left to fend for their children and the elderly, with the house and fields in the village left to be tilled by tenants or even to lie fallow (Des Chene 1991). In recent years, however, this pattern of solo male migration is changing as women have begun to join their men in migration, in many cases entrusting their children to the care of home-bound relatives (Pettigrew 2000: 19).

Nepalese labour migration to Japan

According to the Japanese Bureau of Immigration Control (1996), in May 1996 there were 284,500 undocumented visa-overstayers in Japan from all over the world, almost all of whom were illegally employed. The majority were from Asia, the highest nationality number being 51,580 Koreans, followed by 41,997 Filipinos, 41,280 Thai and 39,140 Chinese. Governmental statistics on entry and exit of Nepalese nationals provides an estimate of 2000 to 3000 Nepalese visa-overstayers in the mid-1990s most of whom used short-term visas to enter the country legally (Yamanaka 2000). The proportion of females among the total Nepalese entrants in Japan from 1986 to 1995 was about one fifth, although it has been gradually increasing in recent years. The total number of Nepalese visa-overstayers is therefore but a drop in the ocean of undocumented migrants, posing little threat to Japan's immigration control.

In June 1990, in an effort to stem inflows of migrants who might overstay their visas to work illegally, the Japanese government implemented a revised immigration law. This new law ruled employment of unskilled foreigners to be illegal and instituted criminal penalties for the hiring of illegal workers (Cornelius 1994; Tsuda and Cornelius 2004). In this legal context, it is significant that despite the small population of Nepalese visa-overstayers, their number grew rapidly in the ten years following 1986. Prior to 1989, the accumulated excess of entries over exits remained at less than 500, but by 1995 the excess had grown to 2665 and by the year 2000 to 3888. This suggests the importance of understanding migrants' strategies for entering Japan and for sustaining the flow of migrants once it had begun.

Using a migration system approach together with theories of social networks and social capital, my previous studies (Yamanaka 2000, 2003a, forthcoming) have analysed Nepalese strategies for reaching and entering Japan, sustaining the migration flow, and surviving the pervasively hostile Japanese environment against undocumented workers. These strategies include: extensive use of their Gurkha connections and the Nepalese diaspora (centring on Hong Kong) to obtain information; travel to 'intermediary' countries in Europe or the Gulf countries among others to acquire visas from Japanese embassies that are less restrictive before attempting to enter Japan; the use of agents operating underground in Nepal; formation of a variety of mutual

support associations for welfare and recreation.⁷ By the mid-1990s, the social networks and social capital thus accumulated among Nepalese Tibeto–Burman migrant communities, have also facilitated migration groups with no history of international labour migration beyond India, groups such as women and upper caste Hindus.

Women's arrival and family relations

Table 1 shows selected characteristics by sex, of the 189 Nepalese migrant workers (159 men and 30 women) surveyed and interviewed in the study. This population comprises primarily members of Tibeto–Burman ethnic groups who, including Newaris, account for more than 80 per cent of the sample. The remaining 20 per cent are the high caste Hindu Brahman and Chhetri migrants. More than 70 per cent of these men and women are married. The majority (80 per cent) of men and two thirds of the women entered Japan before 1995. Data not reported here indicate that Tibeto–Burman groups first arrived in the mid-1980s, whereas Newar and upper caste Hindu groups began to arrive in the late 1980s to early 1990s (Yamanaka 2000: 75–8). Most migrants are between 25 and 45 years of age, although there are ten older men among those interviewed, all of whom belong to Tibeto–Burman groups.

Table 1: Selected characteristics of Nepalese migrants and their families in Japan by sex

Selected Characteristics	Men		Women	
	Number	%	Number	%
All				
Ethnicity/caste				
Tibeto–Burman	107	67.3	19	63.3
Newar	17	10.7	7	23.3
Brahman/Chhetri	31	19.5	4	13.3
No response	4	2.5	0	0.0
Total	159	100.0	30	100.0
Marital status				
Unmarried	45	28.3	7	23.3
Married	112	70.4	23	76.7
No response	2	1.3	0	0.0
Total	159	100.0	30	100.0
Year of arrival				
Before 1988	6	3.8	0	0.0
1989	31	19.5	1	3.3
1990–1991	41	25.8	6	20.0

Table 1: (continued)

1992–1993	30	18.9	8	26.7
1994–1995	19	11.9	4	13.3
1996–1997	32	20.1	11	36.7
Total	159	100.0	30	100.0
Age				
24 and younger	11	6.9	5	16.7
25–34	91	57.2	18	60.0
35–44	45	28.3	7	23.3
45 and older	10	6.3	0	0.0
No response	2	1.3	0	0.0
Total	159	100.0	30	100.0
Arrival in Japan				
Alone	93	58.5	9	30.0
With family member(s)	17	10.7	13	43.3
With friend(s)	30	18.9	5	16.7
No response	19	11.9	3	10.0
Total	159	100.0	30	100.0
Family present in Japan at Arrival				
No one	117	73.6	5	16.7
Someone	30	18.9	23	76.7
No response	12	7.5	2	6.7
Total	159	100.0	30	100.0
Among Married				
Spouse present in Japan				
No	95	84.8	7	30.4
Yes	17	15.2	16	69.6
Total	112	100.0	23	100.0
Number of children left in Nepal				
0	6	5.4	4	17.4
1–2	73	65.2	12	52.2
3–4	27	24.1	7	30.4
5–6	6	5.4	0	0.0
Total	112	100.0	23	100.0

Sources: see the text.

Whether and with whom migrants had travelled to Japan differed by sex. More than half of the men reported arriving in Japan alone, whereas only one third of the women were unaccompanied. The rest of the women travelled in the company of one or more family members or friends. Upon arrival, the majority of women (23 of 30) joined one or more family members already working in Japan. For 16 of the 23 married women (70 per cent), the family member in Japan was her husband. In contrast, nearly three quarters of the men had no family member in Japan. The married women and men working in Japan had left their children in Nepal.

Table 2 shows the number of family members present in Japan by sex. Of the 159 men and 30 women in the sample, 55 men (35 per cent) and 29 women (97 per cent) reported the presence of one or more family members in Japan.⁸ Among these men and women, 32 men (20 per cent) and 12 women (40 per cent) reported the presence of only one other family member, most often their spouse, brother or uncle. The remaining 23 men (15 per cent) and 17 women (57 per cent) mentioned the presence of two to five family members, including spouses, brothers, sisters, uncles, children and in-laws.

Table 2: Number of Nepalese family members present in Japan by sex

Family Members	Men		Women	
	Number	%	Number	%
Zero	101	63.5	1	3.3
One	32	20.1	12	40.0
Two	9	5.7	9	30.0
Three	6	3.8	6	20.0
Four	7	4.4	2	6.7
Five	1	0.6	0	0.0
No response	3	1.9	0	0.0
Total	159	100.0	30	100.0

Sources: see the text.

These data demonstrate the considerable number of family members and the extensive nature of kin networks in the Nepalese population in Tokai. Given their undocumented status, the extent to which family relations are available to the migrants is striking; one third of the male participants and almost all female participants in the study reported one or more family members working in Tokai or in a few cases, somewhere else in Japan. The additional migrant family member is usually a graduating student or unemployed younger brother of a male relative who is already

working in Japan. These data indicate that the migrant who joins is now frequently the working man's wife who had been tending their urban family in Nepal.

Nepalese dual-wage earner families

The small but significant number of married women in the Nepalese migrant community reveals the changing economic strategy of Nepalese migrant families in response to changing economic opportunities in Japan. In the late 1980s, to help firms short of labour, the Japanese government encouraged women and the elderly to enter the workforce. The calls for their labour, however, met with limited success. By the mid-1980s many firms found themselves left with too few workers to support the kinds of production that could not be transferred elsewhere. Such production, including construction and vehicle parts manufacturing, are often delegated to small- to middle-scale firms with less than 100 employees which is where most labour shortages are concentrated and where working conditions are inferior (Higuchi and Tanno 2003). Most undocumented workers, including Nepalis, find their jobs in establishments with fewer than 50 employees (Yamanaka 2000: 82–3). It was this acute shortage of labour of the late 1980s and early 1990s that attracted the trickle of Nepalese women who followed to Japan in the steps of their husbands and other male relatives.

The arrival of married women and their subsequent employment also produced a significant shift in their family migration strategy. The majority of Gurkha army families and their relatives have until recently adopted the split-household type of family in which only males sojourn abroad. This remains the dominant form according to the data analysed here. But more recently some wives have joined their husbands in seeking employment opportunities abroad. This clearly indicates the emergence of the 'dual-wage earner family', in which both husband and wife work to support a family. Unlike the dual-wage family structure adopted by Chinese and other immigrants to the USA after the Second World War, Nepalese migrant couples in Japan are geographically separated from their children who remain in Nepal. This is partly because Nepalese migrants have no visa that would allow them to reunite with their families in Japan. It is also because they remain in Japan for relatively short periods of time – on the average, two to four years – making family migration less attractive and less profitable than if they were to stay longer and become adjusted to Japan and make more money.

The presence of multiple family members, together with their relatively brief stay in Japan, indicates the emergence of the new Nepalese migration strategy, namely for the family to send as many family members as possible and have them work for short periods of time, in the expectation that they will 'make the money and run'. For this economic goal, Japan's high wages are a strong incentive.

The economic advantages of a dual-wage earner family

The economic advantage of a second income in a dual-wage family is tangible and large. Table 3 shows selected characteristics of Nepalese workers employed in Tokai

and upon their return to Nepal. In Tokai, nearly three quarters of the Nepalese men and two thirds of the women work in the vehicle parts manufacturing industry – the area's main industry. Often women work in the same firm as their husbands. The remaining quarter of the men find jobs in the construction industry where wage levels are somewhat higher than those in the manufacturing industry but the work is more arduous and dangerous. By the time of the study, Tokai Nepalese men had been in Japan for an average of 3.4 years (41.3 months), while women averaged 1.8 years (21.0 months). Among returnees, men stayed in Japan for an average of 4.3 years (51.6 months) and women 3.0 years (35.6 months). During their residence in Japan they frequently changed jobs, seeking higher wages and better working conditions. Men changed jobs more than four times on the average and women changed more than twice. All of their work is as day labourers where pay is determined by the hours they work. Men earned an hourly wage of 1125 yen (US\$11.25 at 100 yen = \$1), while women earned 835 yen (\$8.35). In the sexually and ethnically segregated Tokai manufacturing industry labour market, undocumented Nepalese women earn 56 per cent of the mean hourly wage of Japanese men in the same industry, whereas undocumented Nepalese men earn 74 per cent of the Japanese men's mean wage (Yamanaka 2003b: 184–6).⁹

Based on these mean hourly wages and a 'hypothetical' but typical monthly 240 working hours ([8 working hours + 2 hours overtime] x 6 days x 4 weeks), the monthly wages for Nepalese men are computed to be: 270,000 yen (\$2,700).¹⁰ Because women often do not work overtime, an alternative monthly 192 working hours (8 working hours x 6 days x 4 weeks) is used for purpose of this comparison. This equation yields 160,320 yen (\$1603) per month for Nepalese women. If these monthly wages for a couple are combined, the monthly family income would be 430,320 yen (\$4303) – a sum of 270,000 yen for husband and 160,320 yen for wife. From this monthly income, the couple might spend a total of 100,000 yen (\$1000) for their housing and food and other necessities.¹¹ This would leave 330,320 yen (\$3303) in savings in each month.¹²

In 1993, Nepal's GNI per capita was US\$180, one of the lowest in the world. In Kathmandu, the average income per month for a university professor or a government official is about 5000 Nepalese rupees (\$100 at \$1=Rs 50).¹³ In Tokai, an undocumented male makes that amount in a single day. He may be able to save 200,000 yen (\$2000) per month and remit \$1000 to \$1500 of it to his family in Nepal. According to Seddon et al. (2002: 26), who studied Nepal's remittance economy, the average monthly remittance from Japan is estimated at Rs60,000 to 80,000 (\$1200 to \$1600); they state that 'these are huge, almost unimaginable sums for those living in rural Nepal'. The amount of remittance can double if both husband and wife work, because they save money as a result of sharing the expenses of housing, food and other necessities. It is these extraordinarily high wages, by Nepalese standards, that attract hundreds of Nepalese workers to Japan each year, including increasing numbers of women – wives, sisters, sisters-in-law, and so forth – from their family homes in Nepal, many of them leaving their children behind with relatives in order to work, free of child care and household duties.

Table 3: Selected characteristics of employment among Nepalese workers in Japan by sex

Selected Characteristics	Men		Women	
	Number	%	Number	%
Industry				
Manufacturing	113	71.1	20	66.7
Construction	32	20.1	2	6.7
Service	5	3.1	4	13.3
No response	9	5.7	4	13.3
Total	159	100.0	30	100.0
Time spent in Japan				
Among migrants in Japan				
Mean in months	41.3	–	21.0	–
Standard deviation	28.8	–	21.4	–
Total	130	–	19	–
Among returnees in Nepal				
Mean in months	51.6	–	35.6	–
Standard deviation	17.9	–	18.8	–
Total	29	–	11	–
N of jobs held				
Mean	4.1	–	2.6	–
Standard deviation	2.5	–	1.6	–
No response	11	–	4	–
Total	159	–	30	–
Mean hourly wage (yen)				
No response	12	–	5	–
Total	159	–	30	–
Estimated mean monthly wage (yen)				
240 working hours	270,000	–	–	–
192 working hours	–	–	160,320	–

Sources: see the text.

Returning to Nepal

Despite the substantial remittances they are able to send home, Nepalese undocumented migrants usually remain in Japan for no more than two to four years. This relatively short stay is partly a result of their undocumented status, but is also explained by personal reasons that pull them back to their homes in Nepal. Table 4 indicates that by the time of the 40 interviews in 1997–8, in Kathmandu and Pokhara, about two years had already passed since the respondents had returned to Nepal from Japan: 2.3 years (27.6 months) for 29 men and 1.9 years (22.9 months) for 11 women. Of these, five men had been unmarried while working in Japan, three of whom married upon their return to Nepal. By contrast, all of the women had been married before migration (as had 24 of the men).

Table 4: Reasons for return and activities among Nepalese return migrants from Japan by sex

Selected Characteristics	Men		Women	
	Number	%	Number	%
Mean Months after return to Nepal	27.6	–	22.9	–
Standard deviation	25.3	–	16.3	–
Total	29	–	11	–
Reason for return				
Involuntary	13	44.8	4	36.4
Voluntary				
Wished to return	9	31.0	4	36.4
Family problems	5	17.2	1	9.1
Own health problem	2	6.9	0	0.0
Pregnancy	n/a	n/a	2	18.2
Total	29	100.0	11	100.0
Activities after return to Nepal				
New business	12	41.4	2	18.2
Previous business	1	3.4	0	0.0
NGO employee	1	3.4	0	0.0
Retired	1	3.4	0	0.0
Housewife/mother	0	0.0	9	81.8
‘Doing nothing’	14	48.3	0	0.0
Total	29	100.0	11	100.0

Sources: see the text.

Table 4 also lists reasons given for their return to Nepal. The data show that involuntary departure by force of Japanese authorities was the reason that 13 of the 29 men (45 per cent) had returned home. The remaining 16 men (55 per cent) returned voluntarily for a variety of reasons. Nine said they returned because they were homesick or because they were tired of the stress of their undocumented status. Five reported that their families were facing problems that required their presence, such as illness of a parent or other family member, or trouble with the family business. Two of the male interviewees had fallen ill in Japan and were no longer able to work there. Among women, the rate of involuntary return was somewhat less than for men: four of the 11 cases (36 per cent). This may indicate a lower probability that women will be arrested for illegal overstay. The majority of women (7 of 11, or 64 per cent) returned voluntarily. Four stated that they returned home because they were homesick or because they were fearful of the consequences of remaining undocumented. Two said that they left because they became pregnant while working in Japan, and one cited family illness at home.

It should be noted that the personal reasons cited here often overlapped with other factors, including forced return. For example, one man reported that his mother had become ill in Nepal and at the same time, injury to his feet led him to quit working. The mother's illness triggered his return but he had already been contemplating returning home before he heard the news. As another example, one man fell seriously ill and required major heart surgery. His case attracted public concern beyond the Nepalese migrant community, which in turn caught the attention of the immigration office. In the end, with the assistance of public-spirited Japanese health professionals and citizens, he was able to receive successful surgery. Upon his recovery one year later, the immigration authority forced him to return to Nepal.

By the time of the interviews, these returnees had been engaged in a variety of activities. Many of them said that during the time following their return, they had invested a major portion of their savings in housing, land, rental units and businesses. Among the 29 men in the sample, 12 (41 per cent) started new businesses, and one returned to his previous business. One man retired, while the remaining 14 men (48 per cent) reported that they were unemployed and doing nothing in particular, attending to daily household matters, or working on constructing a house for themselves or family members, etc. The significant proportion of unemployed men reflects clearly the fact that jobs matching the returned migrants' experience and expectations were extremely scarce in the local labour market. Of the 11 women returnees, nine had resumed their former lives as housewives and mothers, although some assisted with the family business as well. Two had each started a new business on her own using her savings from Japan.

The making of transmigrants

These findings underline three major characteristics of Nepalese return migrants: (1) the high proportion of voluntary returnees, which suggests a high level of migrants' personal autonomy; (2) gender differences in returnees' migration experiences; and

(3) the scarcity of economic opportunities for male returnees in Nepal, with the resultant re-departure of many of them.

The high proportion of voluntary returnees clearly points to migrants' ability to exercise their will. Although there is no doubt about the strong attraction Japan's high wages exert, they do not prevent the Nepalis from returning to their home when they long deeply for it or when they are needed there in response to crises such as illness, death or litigation. Similar to the Mexican transmigrants studied by Pries (2001a), the Nepalese workers in this research constitute another case in which migrants are generally 'not free in defining the conditions of their action' (Pries 2001a: 68). They are, however, free to choose their action within the constraints defined by others, namely Japanese law. The following account by one undocumented Nepalese informant demonstrates his determination to return to Nepal and the fact that it is not impossible to choose an action that is extralegal. The man surrendered himself at a police station after two years of illegal stay in Japan in order to initiate his exit. The officer who interrogated him asked why he wanted to go home. When the man replied that he missed his home, the officer responded that Nepal is a poor country and he would be better off to remain in Japan and continue to work. The Nepalese man chose to return home despite the officer's unexpected advice to violate the law.

The Nepalis' returning migration experiences differ depending upon their sex. As discussed above, the mean years of stay in Japan for female returnees is shorter than those for males (3.0 vs. 4.3 years, respectively). Given the lower rate of women being deported than that of men (36 vs. 45 per cent, respectively), women's shorter stay cannot be explained by their illegal status. Their return is best explained by reasons specific to their sex and traditional gender roles as mothers and wives, such as pregnancy and childcare responsibilities. For example, one woman took the next flight to Kathmandu when she and her husband learned that her sister, who had been caring for their children in Nepal, could no longer do so. In a few other cases, women left Japan while their husbands remained. This indicates that a married woman's migration tends to be responsive to others' circumstances. It is undertaken to supplement her husband's income when their family situation permits her absence.

Upon their return from Japan, Nepalese migrants experience the 'reverse culture-shock' of the change from the fast life and bright lights of urban Japan to the routines of Nepal and responsibilities there. Because of the sharp division of labour by sex practised in Nepalese society, most female returnees returned to their previous activities as mothers and wives. The only women who did not were the two who started small businesses with their savings from Japan. They reported having opened factories, one to produce mayonnaise and the other to manufacture buttons. Male returnees are more likely to embark on new enterprises with their savings than are women, as is shown by the fact that 12 of the 29 male returnees chose such activities. Reflecting the popularity of tourism in Nepal, men frequently opted to operate hotels, tourist agencies, or bus companies. Others established retail stores, or factories.¹⁴ The fact that many men choose to become self-employed

suggests that their wives are available to become involved as unpaid workers in their business.

On the other hand, the findings also reveal a significant proportion of male returnees who have remained jobless. Many of interviewees whose sojourn in Japan had been abruptly interrupted by the Japanese authority, were ready for another try, the next time in Hong Kong, Korea or elsewhere. It is not unlikely that in some cases their returned wives will join them in their new location if conditions for childcare and other family matters permit their re-departure. Based on these experiences of their sojourn abroad, these Nepalese men and women may no longer be regarded as permanent return migrants, but are better characterized as transmigrants whose work and life plans develop in the transnational social spaces that span national borders of Nepal and elsewhere. Evidently, for these transmigrants return to home is temporary and portends a family split or return to dual-wage family structure for extended periods of time.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of Nepalese transmigrants and transnational families analysed here confirms the fact that this land-locked Himalayan country has become a labour source for labour-short countries in East Asia. In this process, organization of work, family and gender in Nepal's hill villages and cities has undergone dramatic changes in response to the increasing employment opportunities abroad, on the one hand, and the constraints migration imposes upon them, on the other. The split-household family has long supported sojourning males from Tibeto-Burman groups serving as Gurkha soldiers, and more recently has supported their relatively educated male relatives. The arrival of Nepalese women in Tokai, foretells the new strategy – adoption of the dual-wage earner family – by their families who want to take advantage of new economic opportunities there. Although the nature of married women's migration reflects the prevalence of traditional gender roles in Nepal, their departure to Japan demonstrates expanding economic roles of women and their emerging identities as wage earners. It also indicates their changing relationships with their husbands, children and in-laws. Future research will be required to fully document and understand the shifting gender dynamics and family relations that have resulted in increasing women's participation in international migration.

This study also demonstrates the rapid development of transnational social spaces generated by the frequent circulation of people, goods and ideas between Nepal, as the nation-state of origin and return, and Japan as the nation-state of arrival. The consequences of Nepalese transnational activities, including sending remittances and forming families and communities overseas, are significant forces that will profoundly affect Nepal's future economy, politics, society and culture. The stagnant domestic economy – especially tourism, Nepal's main source of foreign exchange – hard hit by the devastating civil war that erupted in 1996 and continues to the present (Hutt 2004), has forced both the state and the families that comprise it, to become increasingly dependent for economic survival on international remittances from

international migrants (Seddon et al. 2002). In Japan, the influx of diverse ethnicities and nationalities, a small group of Nepalis among them, has catalyzed development of Japan as a multicultural society (Douglass and Roberts 2000). This challenges the ideologies and goals of that nation's welfare state, of which social homogeneity has been canonical. The advance of transnationalism within and outside its national border requires Japan to acknowledge its *de facto* internal diversity – of ethnicity, nationality, gender and class – as a valuable resource for the nation's economic growth, cultural enrichment, political influence and societal vitality in the progressively borderless Asia-Pacific and worldwide.

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Notes

1. Throughout this article, the terms family and household are applied interchangeably. In Nepal's subsistence agriculture, the joint family household comprises the unit of production and consumption. A migrant remains an integral part of the family and household to which he or she sends remittances.
2. For theoretical discussions on transnational social spaces, and studies based on the concept, see Pries (2001b) and Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004).
3. In addition to 'immigrants', 'return migrants' and 'transmigrants', Pries (2001a: 58) includes in his four types of migrants 'diaspora migrants' who migrate primarily for 'political, religious or organizational reasons and maintain loyalty with their diaspora group', but the last of these is not relevant to this discussion.
4. It should be remembered that Nepal's economy is overwhelmingly one of rural subsistence agriculture to which GNI is largely irrelevant.
5. For further information on research methods employed in this study and findings from analyses of the Nepalese data, see Yamanaka (2000, 2003a).
6. Upon retirement, ex-servicemen often move from their mountain villages to towns and cities for the education of children and for easier life styles which include such amenities as plumbing, electricity, cinemas and paved roads (Pettigrew 2000).
7. Although negative characteristics, such as exclusion of others and restrictive membership rules, are inherent in these homogeneous and closed social networks, the social capital

- available to members enables them to benefit from their collective resources, actions, and opportunities (for example, Menjívar 2000).
8. Only one woman in the sample indicated an absence of family members in Japan. She was an unmarried Newar woman who had arrived in Japan legally as a company trainee in a corporation. There she had received very little training but had been assigned to a production job with very low pay. She eventually left the training program and found a job in a different company through Nepalese friends she had met in Tokai.
 9. The most striking finding from the comparison of hourly wages earned by workers of differing nationalities, legal statuses and both sexes, is that illegal status is penalized less than female gender. As a result, female Japanese citizens earn wages 15 per cent lower than illegal foreign males (Yamanaka 2003b: 186).
 10. It should be stressed that undocumented workers frequently encounter unpaid wages, verbal and physical abuses, labour injuries and as a result, loss of employment. The monthly incomes used here are computed by assuming that a worker was able to work for a month with no such problems.
 11. This calculation is based on 50,000 yen (\$500) for an apartment and another 50,000 yen for food and other necessities.
 12. Members of the same family, two brothers, for example, do not always share the same residence although migrants usually do share an apartment with relatives or friends or both.
 13. During the 1990s, exchange rates for Japanese yen against the US dollar fluctuated between 94 and 145, whereas the value of Nepalese rupees against the US dollar decreased from 50 in the early 1990s to 70 towards the end of the decade.
 14. Information about the success or failure of their businesses was not available at the time of the interviews, although some men described serious difficulties they encountered in running a business.

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