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Dissertation Synopsis

My dissertation, entitled *Labor Migration Programs in Japan: A Three-Step Pathway to Permanent Residence, but Precarious Labor for All*, investigates the design and implementation of the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP) and the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) program in Japan. The TITP is a guest worker program that recruits migrant workers from China and Southeast Asian countries to labor in labor-intensive fields. To address intensified labor shortages caused by population ageing and declining fertility rates, the Japanese government established the SSW program in 2018. TITP workers may transition to SSW status, obtaining the freedom to change employers and other rights.

Drawing on fourteen months of fieldwork in Japan, my dissertation shows how constraints on migrant workers' mobility persist under both the TITP and the SSW, heightening their precarity. Workers remain at the mercy of brokers and employers, who often withhold required documents for job changes. They also encounter barriers imposed by the government when attempting to change jobs across industries, such as from agriculture to the food industry. Moreover, the precarity of female workers' reproductive rights persists, as they continue to face illegal dismissal by employers and varied obstacles in arranging for childbirth.

By demonstrating the substantial discrepancies between the intentions of policy reform and the realities of implementation, the dissertation highlights major challenges to liberalizing guest worker programs. It also offers policy implications for improving migrant worker protections in the context of intensifying regional and global competition for low-skilled and semi-skilled labor.

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