

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ Tokyo)

DIJ Study Group



October 29, 2026, 6.30 pm (JST)

“Walking on Two Legs”: Decision-Making among High-Skilled and Elite Chinese Immigrants in Tokyo

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By the end of 2025, the number of Chinese nationals residing in Japan increased to 930,396, accounting for 22.55% of all foreign nationals. Notably, Tokyo hosts one-third of this population, many of whom hold skilled and elite residence status. This research premises on the conceptualization of immigration decision-making as a process shaped by past and ongoing lived experiences in countries of origin and destination—in this study, the PRC and Japan, respectively—alongside comparisons with the “West” and its imaginaries. It situates Chinese mobility against a backdrop of geopolitical, economic, and sociocultural volatility, marked by evolving US–China tensions, authoritarian resurgence, and shifting immigration politics.

In light of these dynamics, this project employs longitudinal multi-sited, multi-scalar ethnographic research to provide comparative perspectives across China, Japan, and the “West.” Drawing on participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews in Tokyo, this presentation shares preliminary findings on the decision-making processes and rationales of Chinese businesspeople and professionals. It highlights the population’s heterogeneity while examining the uncertainties, dilemmas, and precarity they navigate. Ultimately, I look forward to engaging with the Study Group to explore theoretical frameworks for effectively conceptualizing the co-constitution of mobility and agency on the one hand, and infrastructural development and social transformation on the other.

Xiaoling CHEN (陳曉玲) is an interdisciplinary scholar and ethnographer trained in biotechnology, anthropology, and human geography. Currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, her research examines the role of infrastructure in China’s COVID-19 response and Chinese multidirectional mobility. Her work provides both in-depth domestic insights into China and comparative perspectives across China, Singapore, Japan, and the “West.” She has published in international journals and edited volumes, such as *Critical Asian Studies*, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, *Made in China*, and *Human Organization*. As a Global Indo-Pacific Mobility Fellow, funded by the Max Weber Stiftung, she is currently visiting the DIJ.

About:

The DIJ Study Group is a forum for scholars from all disciplines conducting research on contemporary or modern Japan. The event is open to all. This session is organized by Barbara Holthus.

This is a public event. Please be aware that audio-visual recordings may be made, stored, and published during and after the event.

On-site Only Event:

For participation, please register via email to holthus@dijtokyo.org until October 28, 2026.

Venue:

DIJ Tokyo: <https://www.dijtokyo.org/access/>