

## **Introduction: Precarity as Critique**

**Miseong Woo** (Yonsei University)

**Chih-Ming Wang** (Academia Sinica)

Although the *Situations* journal has addressed precarity in past issues, the 2025 conference held at Academia Sinica, Taipei, on “Precarity and Injustice: A Global Reckoning of Our Time” offered a truly inspiring opportunity to revisit the concept’s density and explore its global dimensions. Precarity commands grave concern today, as we witness the damage wrought by climate change, wars, disease, aging populations, rising unemployment, and low fertility rates. Yet it is not simply another name for crisis; rather, it is an index of structured injustice in which the minor, the weaker, the poorer, and the elder are often the most vulnerable to crises on a global scale. Attention to precarity compels us to confront and reflect on the structure of injustice, especially when we witness how the powerful throw their weight around the world and get away with it. In a precarious world, the one percent may survive with their wealth and power, while the 99 percent are sacrificed as collateral damage. This is not the world we wish to live in, so precarity becomes the name through which we spell our pain, anger, and critique.

This special issue consists of several papers presented at the 2025 conference, along with an additional essay that speaks to the theme with compelling insights on a wide range of subjects: precarity occasioned by exclusion, by the violence of atomic bombing and historical forgetting, by elite-centered development, and by marriage migration.

Anne Allison examines precarious death among family-less singles in post-Bubble Japan, linking contemporary precarity to tenuous social bonds, the loss of togetherness, the decline of patriarchal family norms, and the “no future” facing those excluded from the heteronormative family template. This exclusion fosters posthumous relationlessness alongside a spiritual reckoning with death and the afterlife. She argues that Japan’s precarity stems less from unstable jobs or housing than from deepening fragility in intimate ties—leaving many with “no one to depend on” and fearful of dying alone—while senior women pursue alternative end-of-life planning that hints at nascent reimaginings of closure, sociality, and subjective agency. Her ethnographic study stands as a model for twenty-first-century academia, offering exemplary rigor and unflinching insight into precarity’s human toll.

John Nguyet Erni takes readers on a virtual tour of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, resonating with affective experiences in some 90 human rights museums across 35 countries. These spaces foster historical and collective introspection on injustice and twentieth-century atrocities, often navigating complex forms of violence. His article posits our post-Axial conjuncture as a rupture that demands rearticulation amid unprecedented apocalyptic forces—accelerating climate collapse, nuclear precarity, geopolitical volatility, and systemic inequalities—and urges a return to ground zero for epistemic and ethical reorientation.

Sourish Jha addresses environmental injustice and elite-centered development in India, spotlighting pollution, groundwater depletion, deforestation, and forced displacement brought about by “green” infrastructure, all exacerbated by bureaucratic failures. He calls for

academic scrutiny and political action, highlighting how problematic juridical, civic, and governance institutions generate precarity under neoliberal climate politics, with India as a pivotal Global South case.

Turning from objects and environments back to human subjects, Sara Son examines the precarious perception of a marriage migrant in South Korea as depicted in *Decision to Leave*, a self-reflexive neo-noir romantic mystery directed by Chan-wook Park. The film's cinematic techniques and mise-en-scène confront audiences with their complicity in policing symbolically doubling images, in which Seo-rae—the Chinese marriage migrant who resolves to leave in the film—becomes both subject and object, visually framed and contained amid capitalist multiculturalism in South Korea. The article further probes the ethical perils of visibility and the menace of mimicry, culminating in Seo-rae's unframed elusiveness, which exposes the fragility of possessive spectatorship.

Yet precarity is not all allusions to tragedy, catastrophe, and senility, as if becoming old were equaling the end of life. With a rich ethnography on ontological learning, Shao-Hua Liu reconceptualizes aging not as a singular, linear decline but as an active process of vibrant learning that is as much about entertaining as enlightening the remainder of life. By examining these emerging phenomena in Taiwan, she records and explores different approaches to aging as they are tied to social equity, educational policy, and sociocultural attitudes. Perhaps living closer to precarity, or seeing the end more clearly, allows seniors to appreciate life in new ways, and in turn shows us how and where we might reallocate our resources in pursuit of a better life.

As we wrap up this special issue on precarity—our final collaboration as editors of *Situations*—we bid farewell with deep gratitude for the journey shared with our contributors, readers, and vibrant scholarly community. This volume not only captures the conference's illuminating dialogues but also embodies the spirit of inquiry that has defined progressive cultural studies in Asian

contexts. We step aside hopeful that these explorations of vulnerability and resilience will inspire future voices to forge more equitable paths ahead. As we contemplate this issue's diverse precarities and critiques—social, political, economic, existential—let us envision more equitable, resilient, and compassionate futures.