

## **Nostalgic migration - Factors behind recent Japanese migration to Shanghai**

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### **Introduction - Japanese migration as a phenomenon**

The demographic changes taking place in Japan in recent years, of which a declining population and aging society are currently the most prominent symptoms have been widely discussed in the media and academic circles<sup>1</sup>. The Japanese government has also tried to address this issue. Interestingly, while this decline in population continues within Japan, a look at the statistics shows that the number of Japanese people living outside the country has been going up steadily over the last couple of decades. The numbers published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan indicate that close to 1.2 million Japanese nationals were living outside Japan in 2011 - almost threefold increase since 1984<sup>2</sup>. It is evident that along with Japan's economic globalization, the country is rapidly dispersing its citizens all over the world (Befu 2000). Almost 38 per cent of them and the largest chunk of the overall number in 2011 resided in North America, followed by 28 per cent in Asia and 15.5 per cent in Europe. At country level, the United States ranked first in the world in terms of its Japanese residents with 397,937 people and China ranked second with 140,931.

In the past, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, Japanese communities abroad were formed mainly by expatriates sent overseas by Japanese corporations. This was closely linked to the dynamic economic growth that Japan was enjoying at that time. The number of Japanese expatriates abroad grew in line with the expanding economy at home. As the Japanese economy suffered some severe blows in the last two decades, including the devastating burst of the economic bubble in the early 1990s, one would expect that the numbers of Japanese nationals abroad should fall accordingly; yet, as demonstrated by the above figures, there have been more and more people venturing abroad.

There are numerous questions that arise in connection with this phenomenon: What motivates Japanese migrants' decision to move abroad? How is their decision affected by the current situation in Japan, e.g. do they move abroad because of or despite the recession? Who exactly are these migrants? How do they find employment abroad? And, eventually, can this migration be interpreted as the evidence that a once closely knit country like Japan is dissolving? This article tries to look into the above issues by focusing on one migrant destination which has been popular with the Japanese in the recent years. The place in question, Shanghai, had not been a typical outward destination for the Japanese in the 1980s and 1990s; however, more recently it has seen a significant inflow of Japanese migrants throughout the 2000s that continues into the 2010s, and currently is home to the largest number of long-term Japanese residents in the

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<sup>1</sup> In Japan, the annual number of deaths started surpassing that of births in 2005. The trend has continued until present with the exception of 2006 (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2012).

<sup>2</sup> In their reports, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs divides Japanese overseas into two categories: *eijyūsha* - Japanese citizens with permanent foreign residency, and *chōkitaizaisha* - Japanese citizens living abroad for 3 months and longer without permanent foreign residency. In 1984 there were 478,168 Japanese nationals living outside Japan (249,254 *eijyūsha* and 228,914 *chōkitaizaisha*). In 2011 this number grew to 1,182,557 (399,907 *eijyūsha* and 782,650 *chōkitaizaisha*).

world.<sup>3</sup> The choice of Shanghai as the research field is not coincidental as it can provide very new insight into the relatively well investigated question of Japanese migration precisely because in certain ways it is a new territory for Japanese migrants and because it deviates from the migration trends observed in the previous research.<sup>4</sup>

### **‘Spiritual migrants’**

Outward Japanese migrants of the last two decades have in fact been researched quite extensively; however, the research focused almost exclusively on developed countries, namely the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia as receivers (Machimura 2003; Fujita 2009; Nagoshi 2007; Kato 2009; Sakai 2000; White 2003; Yatabe 2001; Glebe 2003; Sato 1993). By explaining migrants’ motivation to leave Japan, the research on recent Japanese migrants to North America, Europe and Australia manages to describe the socio-economic changes that Japan has been facing. It also describes those leaving Japan as ‘spiritual migrants’ rather than ‘economic migrants’ because their motivation to migrate does not entirely derive from economic reasons (Sato 1993). As a general rule, these migrants are driven to leave Japan because of their disappointment with the traditional Japanese family system, rigid education system and Japanese corporate culture; and are characterized by their constructed illusions about the West, such as their admiration of individualism. They move away from Japan to find alternative places for self-realization and discover the meaning of their lives.

In one case, Etsuko Kato researched young Japanese who sojourned in Vancouver on a working holiday visa. She concludes that her subjects’ motivation for leaving Japan derives from the search for identity extending beyond national borders (Kato 2009). The young people from her study make an effort to cross the border into Canada to discover who they are and what they want to do. They are interested in self-improvement and wish to become global citizens, or *kokusaijin*. Further on, Kato argues that since the young migrants’ goals are so vague and hard to obtain they often become trapped in an impossible fantasy of someday finding their dream role or job.

Kato’s observations about Japanese migrants from Vancouver follow previous research by Yuiko Fujita who interviewed young Japanese residents of London and New York, terming them ‘cultural migrants’ (Fujita 2009). Applying Appadurai’s theory of the relation between media and migration, Fujita describes how young Japanese artists create their ‘imagined West’ through television programs, films, magazines and the Internet in Japan. She argues that they migrate to New York and London to be a part of that image.

Japanese migrants to developed countries share certain common traits. While still in Japan they see themselves as independent, individualistic and often too assertive by traditional Japanese standards, which causes them discomfort and disappointment. In their chosen host countries, on the other hand, these characteristics are mostly regarded as positive. At the same time, along with the rapid economic growth of the past and the long recession of the present, many Japanese begin to grow frustrated with the outdated Japanese education system and traditional family and workplace structures, and see these as obstacles to actualize themselves.

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<sup>3</sup> The numbers published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan indicate that 56,481 Japanese nationals lived in Shanghai in 2011, 12% more than in the previous year.

<sup>4</sup> For information about the methodology used in this research please refer to *Notes* located at the end of this article.

As a consequence, they escape from Japan's socio-economic conditions and move to places perceived as more suitable, where they find the life to be more beneficial to their self-actualization (Nagoshi 2007). As the research of Japanese 'spiritual migrants' indicates, these places tend to be western, developed countries.

Generally speaking, although their motivations to move overseas vary, all 'spiritual migrants' find so-called western values desirable and suitable for themselves. This conflict between the values perceived as western and those perceived as Japanese can be traced to the ideas raised in *nihonjinron* - discourse on Japaneseness - which has shaped Japanese national and cultural identity since the Meiji restoration. *Nihonjinron* tends to essentialize the West as the Other, thus reinforcing Japan's distinctness. There is a relationship between this and the pull to leave Japan. As a consequence of demarcating the western and the Japanese so scrupulously many Japanese people who feel uncomfortable with their current situation in Japan turn to the West as a natural and obvious alternative.

### **Why China?**

By focusing on developed countries as recipients of recent Japanese migration most of the existing research ignores the fact that many Japanese also move to developing countries such as China, Thailand and the Philippines. In fact, China has the second largest Japanese population in the world after the United States and the number of Japanese nationals living there has been rapidly increasing throughout the 1990s and the 2000s. As recently as 1996, China ranked 11th in the world in terms of the size of its Japanese population which stood at 19,379 people; by 2011, however, this number increased seven-fold and there were 140,931 Japanese nationals living in China in that year (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012). This is a clear indication that China has become an important place on the Japanese migrants' list of possible destinations alongside more typical destinations of the past.

Certainly, there are many reasons for contemporary Japanese attracted to the idea of moving their life abroad to pick China as their home. Many of these reasons are quite straightforward and have a lot to do with the booming Chinese economy, lower cost of living relative to Japan, and its physical proximity. Although Chinese immigration policies are relatively strict, there are ways of obtaining a residence permit that are available to prospective Japanese migrants. Most often, these migrants will use one of the many agencies that have been expressly established to handle employment and study visa applications on their behalf.

There is no surprise that the rapid economic development in Chinese coastal cities and other inland metropolises launched by the opening policy has become a major draw for Japanese business expatriates moving to China in recent years. To a great extent, this economic boom is also responsible for the inflow of other migrant categories, such as recent graduates and retirees. It would be, however, oversimplifying the matter to credit this recent migration solely to the attractive economic opportunities awaiting migrants in China. With regard to the set of questions raised by the phenomenon of 'spiritual migration' described above, what are Japanese migrants' motivations for moving to China? Are they motivated by their perception of self; i.e. do they move to China because they regard themselves as too individualistic and assertive for Japan? If this is the case, is it then possible that they expect to realize their western values in China?

To answer this question one must first take note of the cultural influences which have been present in Japan. Western influence, as the most powerful force in contemporary Japan has been evident since the opening policy initiated by the Meiji government in 1867. Since that time Japan has attempted to catch up with advanced Western political and social systems. Post-war Japanese culture during and after American occupation (1945-1952) has been strongly dominated by American culture. However, this western cultural domination has recently encountered a competitive power in the rising visibility of Asian influences in Japan. This manifests itself in numerous ways, from the fact that China has become the biggest Japanese trade partner after surpassing the United States in 2007, to the growing popularity of Korean television drama series and pop music groups in Japan. Moreover, it cannot be dismissed that Chinese people form the largest foreign body in Japan, followed by Koreans. In other words, in the 21st century, Western influence in Japan is losing its dominant power to Asian countries, much in the same way British colonial power lost its dominance to American global influence (Appadurai 1996).

With this in mind, is it justified to conclude that China is joining the ranks of the core, which so far has been reserved for the Western powers, and in that way is attracting people from semi-peripheries such as Japan? Or does China remain part of the semi-periphery?

As mentioned, the people who make the decision about migrating abroad are often driven out of Japan by their dissatisfaction with various socio-economic circumstances dominating Japanese life, and their feeling of not fitting in. This, in general, is common for those who settle in North America and Europe as well as those who come to China. However, as the influence and image of China become ever stronger in Japanese minds, it is unlikely that newcomers to China from Japan expect to pursue Western values there. Moreover, many Japanese still choose to move to the developed countries every year, which reaffirms their position as the core. As a result, Japanese attraction to China cannot be convincingly accounted for through the theories applicable to the drawing power of the West.

Mainstream migration theories also fall short of providing sufficient explanation for transnational flows that go from developed countries to developing countries as is the case with Japanese migration to China. This is because they emphasize economic reasons behind individual decisions to move to another country. Consequently, both Push-Pull models and Dual Labor Market theories seem to be inapplicable as Japanese migrants in China often accept income decrease but are not drawn to low status jobs typical of Dual Labor Market.

## **Nostalgia**

Unlike migrants in Western countries who generally regard their hosts with a sense of admiration, Japanese migrants in China emphasize different sorts of feelings when confronted with the task of describing their new home. One term which appears particularly often in these accounts is *natsukashi* - feeling nostalgia. This may seem quite unexpected and even puzzling at first, but for the majority of my informants China represents a place where they can find certain aspects of 'good old Japan' (i.e. Japan during the Showa period from 1926 to 1989) from their actual or made up memories. In this spirit, when asked to describe what China means to them, the informants recall their memories of studying classical Chinese literature in secondary school and reading favorite Chinese historical novels such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* or *Water Margin*. Many also point to Chinese economic growth and energetic business attitude of

Chinese people as elements that have been lost in Japan for a long time. Strong family ties distinct in China also get an evocative mention as something that was present in their parents' or grandparents' generation. Amazingly, even some very young informants who could not possibly have firsthand familiarity with the circumstances of the decades past describe their Chinese friendships as the kind of close relationships that are no longer likely to be found in contemporary Japan, but could be had in Japan of the past.

Low birth rate and long life expectancy have led Japan to a problem of aging population. As more and more Japanese turn old it comes as no surprise that the imaginary of the past has come to gain a significant place in contemporary Japan. Nowadays, there is no shortage of media productions romanticizing the Showa period; plenty of television programs and books set in, or reminiscing about that period come out every year. A romantically nostalgic film titled *Always: Sunset on Third Street (2005)*, whose action is set in 1950s' Tokyo, met with a huge commercial success and won numerous awards including the best film at the 2006 Japanese Academy Awards. All this is a mark of the yearning commonly shared by retiring baby-boomers to look back on their youth, to which the media happily cater, feeding the audiences with the beautified version of their past. Sentimental fondness for the past is not limited to the baby-boom generation. Younger age groups with no personal experience of that time enjoy consuming the stereotypical nostalgic images associated with the Showa period just as well (Ichikawa 2010). Many scholars who analyze this phenomenon point out the specific romanticized narratives which can be found in the Showa-inspired imagery; e.g. 'even though we were poor, our hearts were brimming with hopes and dreams' or 'in the Showa period the world was beautiful and we enjoyed warm relationships with others; this is gone now'. They also argue how these selective memories of the Showa period represent not the past but the present (Asaoka 2004, 2005; Asaba 2008; Katagiri 2007).

For many people the appeal of the past stretches out beyond Japan. In fact, nostalgia for China is not uncommon either and it is fuelled by the special connection that Japan has had with China over the centuries. Anyone who takes an interest in Japanese history is invariably confronted with the power of Chinese influence on various aspects of Japanese traditional culture. Historically, multiple technological, religious and cultural ideas were imported to Japan from China; many Japanese traditional arts such as tea ceremony and calligraphy developed in Japan as a result of Chinese cultural impact. It was not until the Meiji restoration that Japan started looking up to the Western powers, which not only redefined its relationship with Europe, but also forced Japan to look for a reinterpretation of its ties with other Asian countries, including China. As the Meiji government tried to modernize Japan, many scholars and politicians were sent to Europe to study industrial and political systems, visiting Asian ports on the way, of which Shanghai was among the most significant.

Japan's efforts to remodel the country in a European way inevitably complicated its relationship with other Asian countries. There is a vast body of scholarly work dedicated to this issue. Yukichi Fukuzawa proposed in *Datsu-A Ron*, or *Escape from Asia*, that transforming Japan into a European style country should lead to Japan's emancipation from the confines of 'backward' Asian traditions. Yoshimi Takeuchi who studied Japan's *Ajia Shugi*, or Asianism, argued that seemingly incompatible ideas of equal cooperation with Asian countries and expansionism became so misrepresented and fused together in the minds of the period's scholars that they eventually lead to the violent colonization of Korea and Manchuria (Takeuchi 1963).

Japan's turn towards the West required the country to re-examine its own position in the world often by referring to the European ideas of Asia, of which Orientalism was the most prominent. In his book *Japan's Orient*, Stephan Tanaka tackles the term *Tōyō*, or the East, and argues that it is an untranslatable concept as it manifests the ambiguity of Japan's view of itself and its position in the world (Tanaka 1993). In addition, Orientalism as it was understood in the West got a new interpretation in Japan. Drawing on the experience of being an object of European Orientalist attitudes Japan developed its own Orientalist approach towards Asia from the late 19th century. Japanese Orientalism expressed itself in the idea of Japanese superiority over other Asian people and the claims of mystifying uniqueness that distinguishes Japan from the Other, ie other Asians (Robertson 1998).

Another historical idea that can possibly play a role in shaping current Japanese attitudes towards Asia in general and China in particular is the concept of imperialist nostalgia. This kind of nostalgia can be found in the former colonial societies who feel sentimental about their one-time possessions and revolves around a paradox of deliberate destruction or transformation of a life form followed by mourning and regret that things have not remained 'pure'. In his 1989 article on the topic, *Imperialist Nostalgia*, Renato Rosaldo expressed his irritation at a wave of nostalgic films released around that time portraying white colonial societies. He argued that such nostalgic expressions serve former colonizers as a tool to mourn the passing of what they themselves had destroyed (Rosaldo 1989). It is possible that similar sentiments may exist in Japan. In the build up to and during the wartime Japanese war propaganda persistently depicted Asians as repressed by the Western domination and desperate for liberation by Japan; many parts of Asia effectively fell under Japanese occupation. As a matter of fact, in 1943 Shanghai alone was home to over a hundred thousand Japanese, including soldiers; many aspects of the city had undoubtedly been destroyed or transformed by the invasion. It is conceivable that the scarring inflicted by Japan in Asia at that time has given rise to more or less comprehended imperialist nostalgia for some Japanese.

It goes without saying that my informants' notions of China and nostalgia for the country are affected by the historical background sketched above; and eventually, so is their decision to move there. Is it then possible to throw some more light on my informants' motivation for coming to China by referring to the historical attitudes described above? Was their choice of China inspired by Orientalism; i.e. fascination with Chinese otherness and exoticism? Can it be that they came to China to realize Japan's Asianism? Or perhaps, in their decision to move to Shanghai they were nostalgic for the city's glamorous past they experienced at one time, or even because it reminded them of their 'good old Japan'? It would be very difficult to find a definitive answer to this question, except for concluding that all of these ideas played a certain but not exhaustive role. I attempt to attain more understanding of my informants' motivation for coming to Shanghai by looking at the matter from a slightly different angle.

As cosmopolitan and sophisticated as it once was, nowadays Shanghai is characterized by a somewhat changed flair. It certainly continues to be a dazzling city boasting a multitude of foreign businesses, brands, cuisines and prestigious international events; however, its foreign population stands only at less than one per cent.<sup>5</sup> A massive influx of Chinese from other parts of

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<sup>5</sup> The Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau reported that in 2010 Shanghai's population reached 23,026,600; but the city had only 152,050 officially registered foreigners a year earlier, including 31,490 Japanese, 21,284 Americans and 20,700 Koreans ranking as the first, second and third largest foreign body respectively. The discrepancy between the

the country, seeking work in Shanghai, has transformed the city. One can still easily find traces of Shanghai's cosmopolitan past in the historical and tourist areas of the city, but a typical neighborhood of today looks and feels undeniably Chinese. It is certainly probable that some Japanese migrants, especially those with interest in history, may feel drawn to the city because of its past. My informants, as indicated earlier, frequently mentioned the feeling of nostalgia as well. Yet, it does not seem likely that they feel sentimental about Shanghai from days gone by as it would be in fact very hard for them to engage in such nostalgia in the modern and transformed city that Shanghai has become.

At the same time my informants emphasized their frustration with the current reality in Japan and expressed strong disappointment with perceived deterioration over the years of many aspects of their life. They regularly compared their own situation with outcomes likely to occur had they taken place in more favorable times. Typically, young people criticized the rigid recruitment style and seniority wage system at companies, women complained about the difficulty of balancing motherhood with a career without enough support from their husbands and the government, singles objected to the family pressure to marry, and retirees pointed to the feeling of uselessness after leaving their jobs. In their narratives they contrasted this with the idealized version of life in the decades of economic success. This suggests that the object of my informants' nostalgia is not really Showa Japan, as very few of them would be willing to actually relive it in Shanghai, but rather an invented vision of their life, had it been more Showa-like perfect.

My informants' frustration with the current Japanese lifestyle which, by their account, places too much stress on hard work and social reputation, forces them to look for ways of improving their life or, in other words, of pursuing the fantasy of what it could be like in the past and therefore should be like in the present. China, because of its historical connection with Japan and its economic boom which in many ways parallels that experienced by Japan in the Showa period, stimulates my informants' imagination to pursue that ideal vision of life. As a result, coming to Shanghai allows them to negotiate their search for happiness much more easily than in Japan. It also becomes apparent from their interviews that the object of nostalgia is not Shanghai's or Japan's past, but rather their own imagined past.

### **Japanese in Shanghai from historical perspective**

The history of pre-war Shanghai traditionally evokes associations with illicit affairs, opium dens and prostitution. This image of the city was extensively exploited and reinforced in the many artistic works inspired by Shanghai's allure and notoriety. One of the most famous books written about the city was G. E. Miller's *Shanghai, the Paradise of Adventurers* depicting the 1930s exploits of foreigners protected by the extraterritoriality right (Miller 1937). Japanese authors also offered their artistic accounts of the Japanese presence in the city. Many renowned novelists who visited Shanghai in the first decades of the 20th century - among them Ryūnosuke Akutagawa and Jyunichirō Tanizaki - wrote about it with fascination. Riichi Yokomitsu's novel *Shanghai* depicted Japanese men's romantic relationships with Chinese, Russian, and Japanese women (Yokomitsu 1932); while Shōfū Muramatsu's work *Mato*, based on his own experiences

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Japanese and Chinese official sources regarding the number of Japanese residents in Shanghai is a result of different criteria used by each authority to account for this figure.

in Shanghai, described the thrill of life without rules (Muramatsu 1924). The term *mato* – demon’s city – is still used today to denote Shanghai.

The facts about Japanese endeavors in the city are interesting as well. First Japanese nationals started moving to Shanghai after the Sino-Japanese Friendship and Trade Treaty of 1871. After the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and Russo-Japanese War in 1904 Japanese began investing there in flour milling and machinery. In 1905 Shanghai had 4,400 Japanese nationals - about 30 per cent of the whole foreign population - second only to the British. The political clout of the Japanese in the international community, however, was limited as they arrived in the city later than the British, French and Americans. After World War I broke out and many British and French soldiers and citizens returned to Europe, Japanese became the largest foreign body in Shanghai in 1915; in 1927 Japanese comprised half of the foreign population with 26,000 people (Enomoto 2009). Japanese inflow in the period between the 1910s and 1930s was a result of the expansion of Japanese cotton spinning industry and its demand for skilled managers and workers. Following the military aggression, the Japanese population increased dramatically after the Battle of Shanghai in 1937 and exceeded 100,000 in 1943. After the surrender of Japan in 1945, most of the Japanese nationals were repatriated to Japan with the help of the Allied Powers.

A new chapter in the Japanese presence in Shanghai began in the 1980s, soon after China had launched its opening policy. According to the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), most of the companies which came to Shanghai in that decade were developers constructing commercial buildings and hotels. In the 1990s more and more manufacturers arrived in the city to take advantage of cheap local labor, and recently, service industry companies have gone there to target the rapidly growing Chinese market.

Just like the scandalous novels of the past, the media today continue to construct the image of Shanghai in the Japanese minds as an alluring and risky place. The coverage of the young Japanese migrants in the city usually depicts them as adventurers pursuing their ‘Shanghai dream’ (Sudo 2007; Newsweek 2004, NHK 2009). Undoubtedly, this imagery informed my subjects’ notion of Shanghai and their decision to go there as well.

### **Composition of Japanese community in today’s Shanghai**

Today’s Shanghai is home to fifty thousand Japanese – the largest number of long-term Japanese residents not only in China but also in the world. The make-up of the Japanese community has also become significantly more diverse than it used to be in the 1980s and the 1990s when it was hugely dominated by business expatriates. Nowadays business expatriates still continue to be a major migrant group in Shanghai, but they have been joined by large numbers of Japanese from other walks of life. Graduates come to the city to study Chinese, singles to find career opportunities, retirees to take up teaching and consulting jobs, and expatriate wives to join their husbands. As suggested earlier their decision about moving to China is usually triggered by the discomfort with various demands of the Japanese lifestyle and motivated by the pursuit of happiness, their idea of which is shaped by nostalgia for the life they will never have a chance to live in Japan as the country’s prime days are seemingly gone. Accordingly, business expats who come to Shanghai get to play out their nostalgia for the bustle of the booming market while their wives entertain their nostalgia for the prosperity and domestic harmony. By coming to Shanghai young, single and retired Japanese get a chance to

preserve the lifestyle they have enjoyed, while in Japan they would be expected to make progression to the roles imposed on them by the strict social norms and difficult economic situation of the present day.

Since the Japanese community in Shanghai comprises a huge mix of people, categorizing them into distinct groups can be rather challenging. The most practical method of classification, however, appears to be based on their occupation. That being the case, Japanese in Shanghai can be classified into four groups: business expatriates, local Japanese hires, entrepreneurs, and students.

Business expatriates together with their family members make up the majority of the Japanese population in Shanghai; this is corroborated by the number of Japanese companies doing business in the city which approached eight thousand in 2010.<sup>6</sup> Apart from its size this group of migrants is easily noticeable because the expats tend to concentrate in two of Shanghai's districts, Hongqiao and Pudong. An overwhelming majority of them are men, which makes the expatriate spouse category distinctly female dominated. Their children go to Japanese and, sometimes, international schools. Typically, after 3-5 years the whole family returns to Japan. As opposed to business expats who are posted to Shanghai by their Japanese corporations, local Japanese hires find their Shanghai jobs by themselves. Most of the time, they get employment with Japanese companies. Entrepreneurs start their own businesses in Shanghai, usually after first staying there as either business expatriates or local hires. Local hires and entrepreneurs both settle in various parts of the city. Students are mostly Chinese language learners (i.e. they do not pursue a degree) enrolled on Chinese language programs offered by universities; they live in dormitories or move in with other students in rented apartments close to campus.

It should be emphasized that this classification is only one of many possible and should not be read too rigidly as some migrants move between occupations very flexibly or fall into more than one category; e.g. companies of many business expats make arrangements for them to learn Chinese as full time students for a couple of semesters before they are actually required to take up their positions; and some entrepreneurs launch their own businesses while still holding full time jobs. Moreover, some business expatriates call themselves local hires.

Classifying the migrants on the basis of their occupation is only a starting point to begin the analysis of their phenomenon. Japanese nationals in Shanghai are hugely diverse. Their age, gender, education and social class vary. These factors have inevitable implications for their narratives and for their perceptions of themselves and Japan. I apply the age and the gender dichotomies as well as the dichotomy between expatriates and local hires to analyze this complex group of people. My informants' gender, age and other unique circumstances, as they shape the content of their narratives, are highlighted in the context of their occupations.

### **Expatriates and local hires**

In recent years, growing inequalities in income and decreasing prospects for secure lifetime employment for young people have become a focus of social and economic concern in Japan. The term 'gap society' (*kakusa shakai*) popularized by Masahiro Yamada, characterizes these growing disparities (Yamada 2007). Those who enjoy lifetime employment are referred to as

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<sup>6</sup> The data compiled by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) indicates that there were 7994 Japanese companies in Shanghai in June 2010; the number was based on the survey conducted by the Consulate General of Japan in Shanghai.

‘winners’ (*kachigumi*) and those who work part-time, contract jobs, or take on otherwise temporary employment are known as ‘freeters’ (*furitā*), or simply, ‘losers’ (*makegumi*). Recent revivals of these sociological terms within popular cultural discourse may reflect a deepening anxiety within Japanese society about the rapidly changing social landscape. Freeters are looked down upon for their employment situations, or at least regarded with suspicion by mainstream Japanese society. Indeed, the very idea of straying from the well-worn path from university to secure employment is regarded by many in Japanese society as a grave error, or at best, a risky gamble with one’s life plan. As such, freeters are under tremendous social pressure to pursue the security of more regular work, even as the prospects of such regular employment, let alone lifetime employment in Japan are growing ever more elusive.

Among the Japanese community in Shanghai, a similar dichotomy between the expatriates (*chūzaiin*) and local Japanese hires (*genchi-saiyō*) is also present. Expatriates who have been sent abroad by their companies enjoy lifetime-employment and high salaries, while local Japanese hires who found their Shanghai employment by themselves work on short-term contracts for relatively less salary and job security. A similar split can also be found in other global cities with sizeable Japanese communities; e.g. Hong Kong and Singapore (Wong 1999; Mathews and Sone 2003; Ben-Ari and Yong 2000).

Interestingly, a very similar dichotomy between business expatriates sent over from Japan and local Japanese hires who arrived in Shanghai on their own could be found in the Japanese community in the city before World War II (Yamamura 1997, Takatsuna 2009). In ways that can also be observed today, the pre-war expatriates, also known as the ‘company school’ (*kaisha-ha*), enjoyed privileged positions, while the local Japanese hires, called the ‘local school’ (*dochaku-ha*), experienced marginalization.

The dynamic local market and expat status, with all its advantages, were important factors in my expatriate informants’ decision to come to Shanghai. Many of them admitted that in the 1980s and 1990s, they would have definitely preferred to have been posted in the United States or Western Europe, as living standards in China were too poor. In the 2000s, however, the quality of life in the city improved dramatically and foreign communities expanded; as a result, all of my expatriate informants came to Shanghai by deliberate choice. One male expatriate said:

Shanghai is a great opportunity for me to learn about emerging economies. I had been asking my company to send me here for many years. When I started out in this industry [a trading business in Japan] the economy was not so bad. I thought I could make it as a director some day, so I worked hard in my twenties and brought in many good deals. But [now in Japan] customers’ demands are so high and bosses so cost conscious that I cannot get ahead. Here in Shanghai, our business has plenty of development opportunities; and I bring in new ideas from Japan. My Chinese staff are young and energetic; it is fun to work with them. ...I feel motivated to work here. Plus, I enjoy playing golf at weekends a lot.

In the past migrants cited inadequate living standards, poor hygiene and customer service, and language barriers as the main deterrents to coming to China. As the Japanese community expanded since the 1990s and the quality of life has improved, my informants can now enjoy a wide range and high standard of services catering specifically to Japanese customers’ needs. Local services also become more and more available as many businesses improved their hygiene

and customer service and standardize their offerings. Some of my informants admitted that the range of services which they can enjoy is even better in Shanghai than in Japan. This impression, however, is most likely related to the higher affordability of such services in Shanghai.

In addition to lifetime-employment and high salaries, business expatriates often enjoy additional company sponsored benefits in the form of allowances for housing and transportation, child education, family health insurance, domestic help, etc. With housing affordability not a constraint, many expatriate families choose to live in upmarket guarded compounds surrounded by Japanese stores, restaurants, kindergartens and supplementary schools. There are even several upscale apartment buildings in Shanghai that accommodate exclusively expatriate Japanese tenants. They attract mostly senior staff with families. Since complexes like this draw in a lot of expatriate Japanese tenants they become the domain of Japanese expat wives who enjoy the sense of familiarity, convenience and security that they offer. One woman in her forties explained:

When I take children out to the city, I worry about traffic and pollution. I actually have to clean our nails after getting home. But inside our compound there is no traffic and guards are watching the gates; so I can let the children play outside. I am too afraid to let them do it in Japan because there we hear about criminal incidents in the news every day [and because we cannot afford to live in a gated compound like in Shanghai].

My research found that younger expatriates, on the other hand, often prefer living in more heterogeneous communities. They choose areas and residential complexes that are more international to enjoy greater freedom from Japanese social norms. The need to distance themselves from tight Japanese communities can be especially important for the junior executive wives, as they often find the atmosphere of the Japanese expat wife circles to be too strict and competitive. Instead, they usually prefer having international friends. One male expatriate who moved into a midrange apartment in an international compound justified it by saying:

Living here is my choice. It is close to my company and my child's school, which is very important. I did not want to spend more on rent than the allowance my company offers for junior employees like me. Also, my wife can socialize easily because many westerners live here as well.

While business expatriates tend to be well taken care of by their companies, a great majority of local hires work for relatively low salaries, are vulnerable to sudden dismissals, and receive none of the expatriate fringe benefits. Previous research has documented some of the recent tensions between these two groups. Japanese local-hires were said to reject the premises of the postwar Japanese social order, characterized by a belief in the superiority of the male gender, a seniority-based pay system, and a distrust of institutions and values outside of Japan (Mathews and Sone 2003).

It should be noted that the distinction between expatriates and local hires is clear, not only in anthropological and sociological circles, but also to the Japanese themselves.<sup>7</sup> One general

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<sup>7</sup> Previous work has also described the complexity of relations between Japanese expatriates and local-hires in other traditional business locales such as London and Singapore; see Ben-Ari 2000; Ben-Ari and Yong 2000; Sakai 2000.

observation made in the interviews was that when I explained the purpose of the research, my informants were readily aware of the terms *chūzaiin* and *genchi-saiyō* and the typical characteristics of each group. My informants' comments also suggested they had an awareness of the implicit hierarchy in place between these two groups. One young expatriate ironically described his situation:

As my salary is so low, I am almost *genchi-saiyō*.

While a female local hire in her 30s said:

When I was studying Chinese in Shanghai, I was surprised to find out that there were so many Japanese expatriates working in the city. Their lives are so different from us [local hires]. They never enter local Chinese restaurants, and only eat at high-end Japanese restaurants. They think I act strange [in a very non-Japanese manner], because I say things plainly and openly.

In Shanghai branch offices of Japanese companies, expatriates sent over from Japan usually occupy managerial positions while local Japanese hires take up supporting roles. It is still very rare for local Japanese hires or local Chinese staff to become the office head. Some local Japanese hires have worked for their companies for over a decade and have a deep understanding of the local staff and market, unlike their expatriate managers. One of them admitted:

...It is hard for me to imagine how to find a job in Shanghai on my own. I think they [local hires] are tough and experienced. They speak Chinese better than us [expatriates] and have a good relationship with local staff.

The local hires' role has also evolved from serving as a mere interpreter to being a marketer or negotiator. However, they rarely have a chance to be promoted to a position with decision-making authority. My informants expressed their frustration with the slow decision-making style and rigid hierarchical system common at their companies.

I also found out that my interviewees echoed sentiments presented by Sone's informants – that there was a distinct separation between expatriate and local hire groups, not only in the workplace but also socially. Expatriates suggested that they were concentrating on their work, and participated in business related activities and socialized with business contacts even in their spare time. Local hires, on the other hand, stressed the importance of work-life balance and socializing with friends. They also reported rarely associating with the expatriates in social occasions, preferring spending time with a mix of other local Japanese hires, foreigners and Chinese. They cited hierarchy of status, and the resulting income and geographical gaps as barriers to integration. Female local hires admitted to not wanting to associate with expat wives for the lack of common topics and interests.

It should be noted that the economic gap between expatriates and local hires has been gradually shrinking, at least in some cases, over the last few years. After years of minimal growth and hampering recession back in Japan, many companies simply cannot afford to offer double salaries, housing allowances and child education benefits for their expatriate employees. These

days they often prefer posting unmarried employees abroad as a way of cutting down on expenses.

### Relations with local Chinese staff

Local hires do not only have to deal with the uncertainties of their status as 'losers' but also with challenges of working with the local Chinese staff. One female local hire explained:

They [expatriates] say that I am too tough and strict – I understand what they mean. But I have to take care of many things at my company because my [expatriate] boss does not speak Chinese and has little understanding of our local staff.

Because of their language ability, experience, and knowledge of both worlds, they virtually become trainers to the local staff and are responsible for that staff's results. A female informant in her 20s recounted:

To avoid mistakes, I have to repeat my instructions to the local staff many times over. ...My subordinate is very young. He does not understand well the Japanese business way. He had not reported to me on the project's progress until the due date. At the last moment, I found out that he completely ignored the customer's requests regarding the project. It was me, however, who got scolded by our boss.

Local Japanese hires and local Chinese staff are also competitors in Japanese companies. In the 1990s and the early 2000s, Chinese speaking Japanese were in strong demand since there were not many of them in the market, nor were there many Japanese-speaking Chinese. Japanese local hires, even those with zero experience, could at that time earn a starting salary of RMB15,000. In 2012, at least 10 universities in Shanghai offered Japanese major, and Japanese language schools competed for students everywhere in the city. Chinese fresh graduates enter Japanese corporations with salaries starting at less than RMB5,000. As a result, starting salaries of local Japanese hires' have been driven down to RMB7,000-10,000. These circumstances have led to increasing insecurity among my informants about their positions and sometimes complicated relationships with local employees.

### Male expats vs female local hires

My research found that the dichotomy between expatriates and local hires is mirrored by gender division; this is consistent with the trends documented by previous research of Japanese communities in the other global cities, as well as my own observations conducted in Hong Kong (Ben-Ari and Yong 2000; Wong 1999; Aoyama and Sabo 2011). For reasons discussed further below, Japanese companies choose to send only their male employees abroad; therefore the expatriate body in Shanghai is made up almost exclusively of men. The vast majority of local Japanese hires, on the other hand, are former Chinese language learners who came to Shanghai for the purpose of their study. Since learning foreign languages is especially popular among women, most local Japanese hires are female.

Although many of my informants mentioned the emergence of female expatriates in recent years, especially in the media and service industries, it was, in fact, very hard for me to find female expatriate informants in the course of my research. Japanese companies appear to still

prefer sending exclusively male employees abroad, often justifying it with potential safety or hardship concerns, and the odd consideration that living abroad would delay or damage women's chances of starting a family.

My informants' narratives imply that many senior managers in Japanese companies still treat their female staff only as potential marriage candidates for their male employees. Sexist attitudes like this reduce women's training and promotion prospects, and in effect ruin their chances of getting an overseas posting. One young male expatriate commented:

I was sent here because I am a man. Our senior managers think that young women taking a chance on working in China is not a good idea. They may miss their best time for marriage as there are not many Japanese men available abroad. I do not have to hurry because I am a man. Even if I spend 5 years here, I will be only 32; and it will not be too late to find a wife in Japan. Besides, it is too risky for young women to work here. There are many rough places outside the city.

Another factor that discriminates against women, also reported by my informants, is the out-dated sales style, still practiced in some industries, involving drinking and visiting 'entertainment' venues in order to appeal to potential customers or cultivate relationships with the existing ones. From a senior manager's perspective there would hardly be a place for female employees in business negotiations of this type.

Japanese companies' arguments for not sending female employees abroad seem preconceived and discriminatory. It is hardly true that living in Shanghai would pose a threat to women's safety. In fact, my female informants reported feeling very safe in the city. As expatriates they would mostly be able to enjoy life in prestigious guarded compounds, which contradicts the companies' logic of raising safety concerns. The argument about missing marriage opportunity does not seem fully justified either, as Japanese women can look for potential partners among the large number of unmarried Japanese male expatriates.<sup>8</sup> Many also find partners among local Chinese, who in turn are often willing to marry a foreigner as they too face a shortage of Chinese females to pick from.

In fact, my research revealed an interesting change in Japanese migrants' demography in recent years – more unmarried male expatriates arrive now in Shanghai, whereas in the past the great majority of expats were married and were often followed to Shanghai by their families. This shift can be attributed to the ongoing recession in Japan and the pressure on Japanese companies to save costs.

### Expatriate housewives

The narratives of expatriate wives offer some interesting insights into the Japanese community in Shanghai as well. Their situation is quite unique. The status that they gain after coming to Shanghai buys them a chance to perfect their homemaking skills while at the same time enjoying more freedom to pursue their own hobbies and interests. An expatriate wife in her 40s explained:

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<sup>8</sup> Statistically, Japanese men outstrip women in Shanghai; the data published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan indicates that in 2010 the city had 43,034 Japanese males against 22,380 females.

I do not have to go to work so I spend all of my time with my children and husband. I can even review my children's homework every day.

Another one in her 30s said:

After an argument with my husband I always go to a bar to have some drinks alone. There are fashionable bars in Shanghai and women drinking alone are nothing strange. Since the helpers take care of my children and do all the cooking and washing, I have plenty of time to take up different courses. I started learning French two years ago and took up dancing last year. My Japanese classmates and I spent a lot of time chatting after classes. Looking back on my busy days of balancing work and homemaking in Japan, [my current situation] is like paradise. I don't want to go back to Japan, but if my husbands' company decides to, we will have no choice.

Some of my informants implied that expatriate circles were too hermetic and self-absorbed. They criticized expatriates for having greater interest in maintaining the social conventions of Japanese life rather than trying to assimilate more into international or local culture. Female informants, even those who were expatriate wives themselves, complained that they felt restricted around other expatriate housewives whose lives revolved only around their families and their small community.

Many women, who gave up their jobs in Japan to follow their husbands to China admitted that they tried to take advantage of their work experience by looking for job opportunities in Shanghai. Although they usually were able to obtain part-time positions through their husbands' connections, many did not find working attractive as the jobs were usually unrelated to their expertise and offered very low income compared to their husbands' salaries.

### Single mothers

A special group of local hires which has emerged and has been growing in Shanghai in recent years are single mothers. Their situation in Japan is usually not an easy one. Due to out-dated child custody laws, only one of the divorced parents - almost always the mother - gains custody of children. The challenges of combining work with the role of sole caregiver, additionally complicated by the social distrust towards single mothers, drive some of them towards the extremely difficult decision of leaving Japan. One of my informants - a woman in her mid-30s and a mother of two - reported her difficulties in earning sufficient income to cover the cost of her family's life in Japan. After re-entering the workforce upon ending her seven-year marriage, she was able to find only contract jobs offering very low salaries. She said:

I was so worried about the future that I could not sleep for several days when I had to make up my mind about taking a job in Shanghai. I had no work experience abroad and spoke no foreign languages. But my friend, who is a single mother working in Shanghai too, really urged me to come. I work as a floor manager at a high-end Japanese restaurant in Hongqiao [a district of Shanghai]. My salary is much less than I used to earn in Japan, but I can even save some of it here! ...Besides, I feel almost like I am in my 20s again when I go out for drinks with other single mothers after work.

My informants frequently emphasized that meeting people in similar situations comforted them and formed an important part of living in a foreign city. In my research I came across various communities organized by women with an objective of providing help and support; e.g. a career ladies group, a group for mothers with children, a children's book reading and lending group, a group aiming to help Chinese children in poverty, or online support communities. Such communities, besides assisting their own members, often hold charity events with an aim of helping the broader society. After the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, many collected donations for the people in the disaster areas.

### From local hire to expatriate

The border between expatriates and local hires can be sometimes blurred – for example when junior expatriates are sent to Shanghai on relatively low salary and with minimum benefits. Conversely, some employees working for Japanese corporations as local hires get a chance to become expatriates. Along with expanding operations of their Shanghai branch offices, some Japanese corporations started recruiting 'prospective expatriates' among their own local hires. One of my informants had been employed at a branch office of a major Japanese bank in Guangzhou. After working there for several years as a local hire, she was officially recruited by the Tokyo headquarters and sent for necessary training in Japan for a year. She was then sent back to the bank's branch office in Shanghai on a full expatriate package. She recounted:

I was very lucky. I thought I had no chance to be an expat after being a local hire for so many years in China. I studied Chinese and wanted to live in China; but I also wanted to have a good life. I seriously considered going back to Japan after graduating from Chinese university. My parents urged me to job hunt (*shūkatsu*) in Japan too. But I had a boyfriend in Guangzhou at that time; and wanted to further improve my Chinese. Finding a position at a Japanese company as a local hire was not difficult, so I decided to take it. I never imagined I would come back to China as an expat.

Many of my informants who were local hires suggested, however, that although they envy the salary and benefits that expatriates enjoy, they would not want to be an expatriate themselves. When asked whether she wanted to be an expatriate or not, one female local hire said:

No, I do not want to be an expatriate. They work too hard and have to drink with co-workers and customers after work and at weekends. They also have to come to the office on Chinese holidays because the head office in Japan is open. After my [expatriate] boss [and his wife] had moved to Shanghai [from Japan] four years ago, his wife felt very lonely and fell into a bad depression. He seriously wanted to go back to Japan, but he could not. ...Then, they had to return to Japan because our company decided to. His wife and he had finally adjusted [to their life in Shanghai] and really wanted to stay. I wondered how they had felt when all this was happening.

### **Young Japanese**

The youngest Japanese migrants in Shanghai are usually students who enroll at the city's universities to study Chinese. The majority of them are still in the midst of their degree studies

in Japan, others have just completed their graduate programs there. They usually do not pursue a degree in Shanghai. The importance of the Chinese language has been widely acknowledged in Japan in the last decade as China has become Japan's largest trade partner. Where an ability to speak English is now regarded as a basic requirement, students have to be able to demonstrate other skills. In these circumstances many young Japanese now view the ability to speak Chinese as a significant advantage in their battle to enter the right company and avoid the fate of becoming a 'loser'. A female student said:

I came here [to Shanghai] to study Chinese after my graduation [in Japan]. My classmates [in Japan] either found jobs before graduation or at least started looking; but I did not. Instead, I looked at a possibility of going abroad. ...Through an agency, I found a language course at this university [in Shanghai].

In the context of the unforgiving recruitment style practiced by the Japanese corporations, graduates' decision about coming to China is never an easy one to make. They have to be very careful about not overstaying their 'gap year' in China as corporations often allow only fresh graduates or those who graduated within the previous year to submit their job applications. In fact, students in their final years start attending information sessions and job fairs long before their graduation. The best ones can secure positions at the most coveted companies months before actually completing their studies. In such a rigid system, losing a chance to attend job interviews as a fresh graduate can be a critical mistake. Not having a job waiting at graduation amounts to risking getting stuck with a lifetime of low-paying, dead-end employment. A female informant expressed her dismay at the fact that she was unable to submit an application to a popular corporation after apparently overstaying her time in Shanghai:

It is so awkward that they will not let me apply. While still a university student in Japan I did not feel ready to work because I had nothing special to offer. All interviews I took went badly because I did not have a clear vision of myself. So I have spent three years in Shanghai learning Chinese, which I now speak fluently. Besides, having made many international friends and travelled so much outside Japan, I have gained confidence in myself. I do not demand higher salary [from the company that I wished to apply for] for this; my experience is a reward in its own right. All I want is just a chance to apply.

Both students who wish to work in Shanghai after completing their Chinese language programs as well as those who want to find a job in China while they are still in Japan typically use the services of recruitment agencies. These agencies specialize in looking for candidates for Chinese offices of Japanese companies, and there are several of them in Shanghai - all well known among the Japanese community. Their range of services is very comprehensive too - they interview and match candidates with the employers, negotiate employment contracts, handle the immigration procedures, and even help successful candidates find accommodation in the city. My informants who used such recruitment agencies agreed that it greatly simplified the challenge of finding employment in Shanghai and making the transition to life abroad.

The narratives of many of my informants implied that they used coming to Shanghai as a method of getting away from the common challenges facing young people in Japan - decreasing prospects for secure lifetime employment, rigorous entrance requirements and the inflexible recruitment style of the corporations, social stigma attached to working as 'freeters', and

immense pressure to pursue the security of regular work. Young people in Japan have been dealing with these pressures in various ways, sometimes extreme. The phenomenon of socially withdrawn individuals (*hikikomori*), who lock themselves in and refuse to participate in any form of social interaction, has been known in Japan for years (Saito 1998). The media and the scholars have recently drawn attention to a new occurrence – Japanese individuals who pursue less severe forms of social withdrawal outside Japan (*sotokomori*) (Shimokawa 2007, Yasuda 2008). Relocating to other Asian countries such as Thailand, Malaysia or Vietnam, where the cost of living is lower than in Japan, allows them to break out of the confines of Japanese social norms at acceptable expense.

Although I did not come across *sotokomori* in Shanghai, many of my informants suggested that moving there was a way of avoiding progression to the next, socially expected, stage of their life. This corresponds with the existing research which indicates that societies of many other developed countries have been dealing with issues related to the growing diversity of the paths to adulthood and the lengthening of the adolescent transition (Mortimer and Larsson 2002). My student informants, for instance, found Shanghai a perfect place to prolong their education. A male student said:

I dedicated myself to track and field competitions in high school. I did not know what to do after graduation other than I wanted to neither work nor go to Japanese university. So I came here [to Shanghai]. My parents think that Chinese language is important so they are happy with my choice.

And local hires explained that as long as they were in Shanghai they could avoid a stressful work environment and the pressure to find regular job. A male informant put it this way:

The chances of mid-career recruitment (*chūto-saiyō*) are slim. My friend got a regular job in Tokyo, but he has to work really hard, make phone calls at night and drink with customers at weekends. I have worked in Shanghai for 7 years selling special design stationary. I have gotten to know the market and maintained the connections with customers. My boss [who is Japanese] appreciates my work. My Chinese co-workers are very nice too – they take me to good restaurants and sometimes even invite me to their homes.

A male informant who had worked for an IT company in Japan for several years and arrived in Shanghai after quitting that job said:

Working for an IT company in Japan was too tough. In the first few years I managed to work overtime, even overnight before deadlines. But then I became a project leader and had to force fresh graduates who had just entered the company to do the same. I felt sorry for them and could not do it well. Then I quit. I wanted to be away from Osaka, and Shanghai seemed the best place to find an IT related job. I feel more relaxed here than in Osaka. Yes, the salary is not good, and I have to put in extra hours too. But at least I do not have to force others to work overtime.

Young people in Japan are exposed not only to the pressure of securing lifetime employment but also, especially in the case of women, to get married. Junko Sakai sarcastically described

herself and single women aged over 30 as 'loser dogs' in her book (Sakai 2003). Strategically using the dominant traditional point of view toward single women, she introduced the achievements of women who pursue careers to wider readers and successfully expressed the opinion that marriage was not an institution that suits everyone. Similarly, many of my young female informants did not denounce the traditional point of view, but said that they personally did not want to marry or at least wanted to avoid the pressure to get married for the time being. Many pointed out that this is a privilege of being a foreigner. One female informant put it this way:

Nobody here asks me why I am not married. I live with two other Japanese women. They are both single and they understand me well. All of my Chinese friends also have jobs. So we do not have to think about [marriage]. Even my parents do not suggest I marry anymore when I call them. I now feel like calling them more often than when I was in Japan.

The majority of the data I collected indicate that young migrants value interpersonal relationships, self-realization, and professional advancement. Most of them have other Japanese and locals as intimate friends and enjoy very close relationships with them. Although living on foreign soil relieves them from many social expectations typical of Japan, it also confronts them with other types of difficulties. Simple everyday tasks and affairs from cooking to legal matters need to be tackled and may become a problem, in particular for those migrants who do not speak basic Chinese. My informants frequently emphasized the reassuring role of the advice and support they were able to receive throughout their stay in Shanghai from others. Shared experience and the feeling of loneliness, which at some point after moving to Shanghai affected almost every person I interviewed, often persuaded migrants to move in with fellow single Japanese. According to my informants, some of them regularly spent almost 24 hours with each other. A female student described:

Now I live with my classmates in an apartment outside campus and spend most of the time with them. We talk a lot every day. Sometimes we talk about things like our future, friends, hobbies and love for the entire day. I have never had this experience in Japan.

A single male local-hire said:

Actually, my co-worker and I share a flat to lower our living costs. We cook and eat together. Last week we went on a trip to Suzhou with other friends. It was real fun; I never feel lonely now.

The kind of close relationship as the one described by my informants above is referred to in Japan as dependence (*amae*) (Doi 1971). Cherished in the past, it has acquired rather negative connotations after Japan became westernized. However, precisely because relationships based on such specific dependence are nowadays hard to come by in Japan, they have become strongly valued by my informants.

The biggest concern repeatedly mentioned in the narratives of my young informants was their dilemma regarding the possibility of returning to Japan, informed by the notion that they should finally give in to the expectations, live closer to their families and find secure

employment. It naturally did not appear as an attractive prospect relative to the ease and contentment of their life in Shanghai. I observed, however, that the force of this concern faded proportionally to the length of time they have spent in Shanghai. For one thing, the idea of returning to Japan appeared less and less attractive as their chances of getting regular employment declined the older they became. Another fundamental reason was the change of perspective brought on by the experience of having lived outside Japanese social conventions. My informants declared that they were able to re-evaluate the role of career in their lives and stop comparing their situation with the circumstances of other, more 'successful' Japanese. A male informant said:

I am already 26 years old. Sometimes I feel like going back to Japan and becoming a 'regular' worker. But I am not confident that I can make it. I might be too old. If I work as a 'freeter' [in Japan], people will look down on me and the life will be so hard financially. Here, nobody has a 'regular' job. My Chinese friends work for companies on short-term contracts. They change their jobs almost every year and get better salary each time.

#### Different generations, common theme

On the other end of the age spectrum are retirees. This group of Japanese migrants, although not as numerous as expats or students, is clearly noticeable. Many Japanese retirees come to Shanghai to learn Chinese as a hobby. Some of them, attracted by the opportunities they notice in the city, stay on after completing the language course; others find employment in China through the recruitment agencies in Japan. They take up consulting and training positions at Chinese and Japanese companies; there is also a huge demand for high skilled engineers in Chinese manufacturing industries. Fast growing Chinese factories are extremely interested in recruiting highly experienced senior managers who can train young local engineers and provide technological know-how. Many Japanese men in their 50s and 60s find work opportunities in the factories scattered in the city's outskirts. One such informant said:

For 45 years, I had worked for a company [a leading electric power corporation in Japan], and mastered quality control skills required in liquid crystal technology through that experience. After retirement, I felt bored as I did not have any special hobbies like hiking or painting. My health deteriorated as well. I decided to try a major change. My factory [of the Chinese company I currently work for] did not have any experts, so I was hired. ...I am happy that I took the chance to come to Shanghai. Even though I have to live far away from my wife and daughters, I can go back to Fukuoka every 2 months. I can also send them money. So they are happy too, I guess. I have also started teaching at a university at weekends and I play mahjong with young people.

This informant, along with many other retired Japanese from my research, emphasized how much working life meant to them and implied their pride and confidence in Japanese work ethics and technical skills. They spoke with sentiment about the sense of purpose and camaraderie derived from work. Retirees' narratives reveal not only their nostalgia but also exemplify their refusal to make a transition from employment to retirement. Taking up a job in Shanghai gives them a chance to preserve the lifestyle they had enjoyed before leaving the

workforce. The resistance to being placed into the role designed for them by society parallels the experiences of the young Japanese migrants. Despite fundamental differences in age, priorities, and considerations of life, retirees and young migrants share a common feature – both wish to delay their progression to what society has established as the next stage of their life.

## **Entrepreneurs**

The ranks of Japanese entrepreneurs in Shanghai comprise people - mostly men - of different backgrounds. Many of them are those who already ran businesses in Japan and expanded or moved their operations to China after noticing business opportunity there; additionally, a significant group of Japanese entrepreneurs is formed by former expatriates and local hires who decided to work on their own account. Knowledge of the local market and business connections build during the course of their employment work to their definite advantage. Entrepreneurs manage a wide range of business operations varying from subcontractor to Japanese companies, to business development consultant, to Japanese supplementary school or restaurant owner.

It is common for Japanese entrepreneurs abroad to set up informal trade associations where they can network, share business knowledge, organize lectures; etc. These bodies are typically referred to as *wakyōkai* – overseas Japanese societies – a play on the very similar term denoting successful overseas Chinese – *kakyō*. Similar associations are also formed around other themes; e.g. by college graduates, by migrants from the same prefecture or people pursuing a certain hobby. Shanghai, too, is home to many such organizations and a strong *wakyōkai*. The entrepreneurs who belong to that trade association generally share a keen business spirit and an enterprising attitude. In my research I noticed that it was often the members of *wakyōkai* and sometimes other societies who made the most unconventional and inventive comments about Japanese affairs. A male entrepreneur said:

Japan needs change, everybody knows it. They need heroes like Takamori Saigō, Kogorō Katsura and Ryōma Sakamoto.<sup>9</sup> But Japan cannot find them from within. We, Japanese people abroad, can be like them [the aforementioned heroes] and change Japan.

My informant compared the relationship between Edo as center and the remote prefectures - the heroes' birthplace - as periphery to the relationship between Japanese people in Japan and Japanese migrants abroad. He suggested that Japan's transformation should take place via decentralization and rely on an external driving force as embodied by Japanese migrants, whose unique perspective and experiences can benefit Japan in the same way in which early foreign contacts enlightened the future revolutionaries in Japan's peripheries.

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Although this article attempts to give a comprehensive account of Japanese migrants in Shanghai, it is possible to research and discuss only so many migrant categories in a limited

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<sup>9</sup> The historical figures referred to by my informant are the initiators of the Meiji restoration and founders of the Meiji government. They emerged in the far-flung prefectures of Satsuma, Chōshū and Tosa, and overthrew the Tokugawa shogunate in Edo. Coming into contact with foreign powers via events such as Anglo-Satsuma War (1863) and the Battles for Shimonoseki (1863, 1864) provided an instructive experience and influenced their success.

space like this. Japanese groups visible in the city but omitted in this paper include, for instance, long-term residents married to Chinese nationals or short-term students enrolled on summer language programs. Tourists, though technically not qualifying as migrants, are another distinct group. They can be particularly interesting as a usually accurate representation of economic and social trends in Japan, and also because of their impact on the Chinese hospitality industry and, indirectly, on long-term Japanese migrants serving in it.

## **Conclusion**

Data collected in my research indicate a strong inclination among Japanese migrants in Shanghai to preserve the lifestyle they have enjoyed, and delay or reverse progression into the predetermined roles established for them by the society and imposed by the economic situation in Japan. Accordingly, young Japanese continue studying in order to postpone employment. Retirees remain salarymen to avoid becoming pension receivers. Single women and men are able to keep the lifestyle they like and avoid pressure to marry. Businessmen enter the rapidly growing Shanghai market driven by 'bubble nostalgia', while their 'Showa nostalgic' wives dedicate themselves to taking care of their Shanghai households.

Their frustration with current Japanese reality, with its rigid social conventions and elusive prospects of a satisfying career and self-fulfillment gives rise to growing sentimentality about the old days when 'life was better, and relationships between people, deeper'. This nostalgia for the idealized vision of life they once 'had' but cannot have in Japan anymore drives them to search for a home away from home in Shanghai. What they feel nostalgic for, however, is neither Japan's nor Shanghai's (or China's) past but rather their own imagined past.

In his book, *Global Culture/Individual Identity*, Gordon Mathews explains how people in affluent developed countries choose food, the arts and beliefs from a global cultural supermarket (Mathews 2000). Through the narratives of Japanese artists, American religious seekers and Hong Kong intellectuals, he depicts their efforts to re-imagine home in today's world where roots are becoming a mere consumer choice in a cultural supermarket of readily available information and identities.

The case of Japanese migrants in Shanghai echoes these ideas. Their choice of Shanghai - one of the many possible destinations - is a subjective decision reflecting individual notions of the city and the purposes to be pursued there. Moving to Shanghai helps my informants to re-negotiate their social roles and find suitable lifestyles. They are able to re-imagine home on foreign soil where they can exploit their cultural capital of being Japanese for work and social life. The great majority of migrants use Japanese language at work and at home, follow Japanese media and watch Japanese entertainment shows online, socialize predominantly with fellow Japanese, or brand their products as distinctly Japanese if they are entrepreneurs. Thanks to Japanese cultural diffusion in East Asia, finding Japanese products and information is extremely easy. Indeed, Shanghai makes for a very attractive choice where migrants can play up their Japaneseness when it works to their favor and claim a foreigner identity when being Japanese is inconvenient, e.g. to avoid pressures of Japanese social conventions.

The availability of different means of self-realization, as well as the reasonable ease of pursuing them mean that many Japanese migrants keep comparing their current circumstances with possibilities offered by other foreign cities, or, in other words, they try to relativize their life. For

them, the place to live is becoming a choice, a product in a global cultural supermarket. For selected people from affluent countries like Japan, migration in the 21st century is gaining a new meaning as it becomes less of an all-defining, once-in-a-lifetime event, and more of an alternative means of self-expression. As my informant summed up:

My life in Shanghai makes me feel that I am like 'floating weeds'. The city is so cheap, convenient and comfortable, yet I cannot help the feeling of transience. If I find a nicer place somewhere, I might move again.

## Notes

### 1. Methodology

My previous research on recent Japanese migrants in China and my interactions with Japanese migrants in many cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong since 2002 have provided me with background knowledge of the informants. The research for this paper employed a combination of methods including interviews, questionnaires and short life histories.

The interviews were conducted in 2010 to 2011, at various locations including restaurants, bars, and informants' homes. I interviewed 47 informants. 21 of them were female and 26 of them were male. They all had been living in Shanghai more than one year. To encourage the informants to share their experiences and disclose their feelings, I expressed my own opinions and shared my own experiences.

The questionnaires were designed to gain basic information about the informants. They contained questions about age and sex, length of stay in Shanghai or other foreign countries, level of foreign language skills, occupation, and family make-up. The questionnaires were distributed to the informants before or during the interview sessions together with the abstract of the research. The purpose of providing the abstract was to familiarize the informants with the research topic and its objective.

I also asked the informants to write short life histories. This provided me with appropriate background information to better understand the comments and opinions expressed by the informants in the interviews by analyzing them within the context of the informants' overall life experience. It also helped me identify subjective viewpoints of the informants. To be fair to the informants and encourage them to write, I also wrote my own short life history and provided it to the informants at the close of each of the interviews.

### 2. Acknowledgements

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