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メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2010-07-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 小野, 真由美 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.15021/00002545

Long-stay Tourism: Elderly Japanese Tourists in the Cameron Highlands, Malaysia

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1. Introduction

Long-stay tourism, which has been known as a Japanese term “*rongsutei*”, is a new type of domestic /international tourism in which people stay at their destinations for a long period of time to experience living their lives there. Although long-stay tourism includes domestic tourism destinations as well as international, it is generally used with reference to Japanese outbound tourism where people stay overseas for a long term. Long-stay is ambiguous in terms of its length. How long tourists need to stay at their destination to be considered long-stay and what they do during that time are matters of general concern.

Most Japanese retirees and pensioners do not plan to settle down at their chosen destination permanently and do not feel reluctant to come back to Japan because they have family there. Some are tentative migrants who do not have any concrete plan on where they are going to be in their later lives, others have made up their minds that they won't go back to Japan even when they need to receive elderly care or highly skilled medical treatment. The mobility of retirement migrants or long-stay tourists is therefore pendulum-like between Japan and their destinations.

“*Rongusutei*” has come to be a widely used term, however. It is indeed a commercial term which was originally a registered trademark created by the Long Stay Foundation in 1992. While the Long Stay Foundation made a definition of what “*rongsutei*” is and oversees its use, long-stay tourism has developed as a form of Japanese international retirement migration (IRM)¹. The Long Stay Foundation defines long-stay tourism in detail as follows: it is staying overseas for a relatively long time but not migration or permanent residence in a foreign country, with the premise of returning to Japan; it is not staying in a hotel but owning a property or renting a residence; it is to be voluntary and aims to make use of one's leisure time; it aims to seek “life” (ordinary experience) rather than “travel” (excursion package tour); and the source of income should be from Japan (pension, interest in a bank account, dividends, remittances, etc.) and income from working at the destination should not be necessary (Zaidanhôjin Rongusutei Zaidan 2002). It also encourages people to participate in activities which promote international exchange and to contribute to the local host society. With the retirement of baby-boomers, increasing numbers of Japanese retirees or pensioners are moving overseas in order to seek a better quality of retirement life.

According to the statistical data of the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO), 1.7 million Japanese traveled overseas in 2007. It is also reported that Japanese overseas travelers above the age of sixty have increased²⁾. In 2005 the number of Japanese overseas tourists above the age of fifty rose above six million³⁾. These tourists of middle-age and over are a significant potential market in international tourism.

The objective of this paper is to examine long-stay tourism, which has become a new trend in Japanese outbound tourism, and its overlap with international retirement migration (IRM) in the case of Japanese elders in the Cameron Highlands, Malaysia.⁴⁾ Malaysia is a recipient of the flow of foreign retirees and those who do not seek employment opportunities, as a host country under the 'Malaysia My Second Home' (MM2H) program. This program welcomes foreign retirees to reside in Malaysia by issuing a social visit pass with multiple entries valid for ten years as a new tourism policy. This study explores how the Cameron Highlands, one of the most popular long-stay destinations among Japanese elders, hosts the flow of Japanese elderly long-stay tourists. Apart from conventional international tourism in which people visit several sites for a short period of time, long-stay tourism puts an emphasis on aiming not at "sightseeing" but at "staying" and experiencing "life" in their destinations whereby the distinction between tourism and migration is blurred.

2. The aged society and long-stay tourism

Japanese international retirement migration and long-stay tourism have occurred within the context of Japan being an aged society after experiencing post-war economic growth. Although Japanese international retirement migration has been developed as an extension of residential-type tourism, namely long-stay tourism, the Japanese government once tried to institutionalize international retirement migration with the "Silver Columbia Plan '92" launched by the former Ministry of International Trade and Industry in 1986. This project aimed at building Japanese villages in foreign countries with a lower cost of living, a nicer climate, and better living environments for retirees (Tsûshôsangyôshô 1986). However, the Japanese government decided to abolish the plan the following year because it received such severe domestic and international criticisms that the country was "exporting" its elderly abroad. Therefore, the private sector took the initiative to reform the project, proposing not permanent migration but a new style of leisure activity abroad, targeting a wider variety of people including seasonal visitors, artists, and volunteers (Tsûshôsangyôshô Sangyôseisakukyoku 1988). Six years after "Silver Columbia Plan '92", the Long Stay Foundation was established as a public interest corporation authorized by the former Ministry of International Trade and Industry in 1992, when "*rongusutei*", as a simplified term for "residential-type overseas leisure" (*kaigai taizaigata yoka*) was introduced to Japanese society instead of international retirement migration.

Long-stay tourism has been commoditized as one of the desired retirement lifestyles where pensioners are able to live an active life by participating in various leisure activities. According to the White Paper on Leisure 2006, leisure itself had been aging as well as leisure activities in the previous ten years. Leisure activities such as golfing, dancing and domestic/overseas tourism are listed as aging or potentially aging activities. Moreover,



Picture 1 “LONGSTAY” booth exhibited by the Long Stay Foundation at ‘JATA (Japan Association of Travel Agents) World Travel Fair 2005’ held in Tokyo Big Site, September 2005.

middle aged and older people are so motivated to study that the tourism industry is aiming to cultivate the market by collaborating with lifetime study enterprises⁵). In addition to related businesses such as tourism and property development which facilitate and promote long-stay tourism, many non-profit organizations and associations for long-stay tourism have been established since the latter half of the 1990’s. Such organizations have contributed to the development and acceptance of long-stay tourism by their activities. In the early 2000’s especially, the commercialization of long-stay tourism has become more and more active. Foreseeing long-stay tourism as a growing market with the retirement of baby boomers, the tourism industry began to commercialize experimental long-stay package tours.

The development of long-stay tourism adds to the meaning of individual retirement life. Longevity is exerting a considerable effect on individual lifestyles and life-courses in contemporary Japanese society. The increase in life expectancy has stretched the span of individual retirement lives in which retired people have a tremendous amount of free time. Long-stay tourism thus provides the retirees with an opportunity to pursue their own “*ikigai*”, which Gordon Mathews (1996), translated as “what makes a life worth living.” The Long Stay Foundation claims that long-stay tourism is effective for self-actualization and creating “*ikigai*” (Zaidanhôjin Rongusutei Zaidan 2005: 18). Moreover, increasing numbers of people are retiring earlier. Retirement migration or long-stay tourism is indeed a cultural phenomenon. In this sense, long-stay tourism and IRM is part of what Machiko Sato (2001) has called

“lifestyle migration” whereby people settle overseas to improve their quality of life in various spheres (cf. Benson and O’Reilly 2009).

Long-stay tourism is not only a cultural but also a socio-economic phenomenon caused by the rapid aging of Japanese society. The falling birth rate and longevity are having a serious impact on the demographic structure of Japanese society. Estimates show that those aged sixty-five and over reached 20.8 percent, a record-high rate, of the total population in 2006⁶⁾ and this percentage will increase to 35.7 percent by 2050⁷⁾. The increased percentage of elders within the overall population has caused demographic changes in the labor force, particularly a shortage of young laborers who pay tax and support the aged. Such a change has also generated anxiety about the long-term viability of post-war social welfare system in Japan. The financial crisis of the national pension scheme has been reported in various media. The current pension system and social welfare policies for elderly people will not be able to deal with the entire population of elders, and these problems have become serious issues for individuals as well as for the government. Therefore, much public concern among the upper middle-aged revolves around how they can survive on their limited pensions. According to a survey obtained by the Research Institute for Senior Life, quite a few pensioners are motivated to move overseas so that they can live a financially comfortable life within the range of their pension (Zaidanhôjin Shinia Puran Kaihatsu Kikô 2005: 107). Under such socio-economic conditions, current pensioners and people retiring soon may consider living in foreign countries, where the cost of living is lower than that of Japan, as an alternative strategy to secure their retirement lives.

Moreover, a flow of Japanese elders seeking care abroad is emerging in the process of the development of long-stay tourism. The care crisis in Japan is also raising an issue regarding who will care for older relatives and where among those who are middle aged and above. In 2006, the Japanese government accepted Indonesian and Filipino students for training as care-givers after the agreement of the EPA. This was intended to supply a foreign labor force in the medical care service sector, which is suffering a shortage of labor. Nursing care facilities both public and private in Japan are fully occupied and have long waiting lists. Before the official acceptance of such trainees, Japanese elders had gradually begun to move to countries like the Philippines and Thailand where nursing care facilities are available for Japanese elders although still very few in number.

The Japanese mass media have played a significant role in expanding the publicity of long-stay tourism. Television companies have broadcast shows about long-stay tourism in the Cameron Highlands quite a few times for promotional purposes. Moreover, since the 1990’s there have been many publications such as travel magazines and handbooks regarding long-stay tourism or overseas retirement migration. For example, Ikarosu Publications Ltd. has been publishing a quarterly magazine, *Rasin*, that focuses on the promotion of long-stay tourism at various destinations since 2003. According to an interview with Tourism Malaysia, the telephones in their Tokyo office keep ringing non-stop for inquiries the day after such a TV show. However, since so much emphasis is put on the economic aspects, that the cost of living is so low that it is possible to live in Malaysia within the range of a pension, this has also resulted in receiving inquiries from households on welfare. Besides ‘pension’ as an economic aspect, “*ikigai*” as a cliché has often appeared in these media discourses to

inspire retirees to have a meaningful retirement life abroad through long-stay tourism.

The term “*rongusutei*” however, does not refer to international retirement migration exclusively. The Long Stay foundation intends to promote long-stay tourism among the younger generation as well, although it is not common for the working younger generation to have extended holidays to enable them to experience long-stay tourism. Therefore long-stay tourism is actually conceived as one of retirement lifestyle in Japanese society. Participants of seminars on long-stay tourism held by tourism and property agents or by the tourism authorities of host countries are usually almost entirely middle aged and older Japanese.

3. Malaysia as a long-stay tourism destination

Malaysia has become a popular long-stay destination among Japanese retirees these days. Various media widely reported that Malaysia took first place in the top 10 ranking of long-stay destinations according to a survey by the Long Stay Foundation in 2006, and has remained the most desired destination for long-stay tourism. The survey data shows that the ranking in 1992 had Hawaii as the most desired long-stay tourism destination, followed by Canada, Australia, the West coast of the U.S., and then New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and the East coast of the U.S. There was no Asian destination in the ranking at that time. 2000 still showed the popularity of Western destinations, but Malaysia appeared in the top 10 as a non-Western destination for the first time, became the second most desired destination in 2004, and finally the most desired in 2006. In addition to Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia have also grown in popularity since 2005. Thailand was placed in the top three, the Philippines in the top seven, and Indonesia in the top 8 in 2007. It is therefore noteworthy that these Asian destinations are getting more attention in the development of long-stay tourism. While the survey shows an upward trend in Malaysia being the most desired destination for long-stay tourism, Hawaii and other Western destinations are declining in popularity. Statistical data from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism in 2005 shows that the percentage of Southeast and East Asian destinations for Japanese outbound tourism accounts for more than 50 percent of all destinations⁸⁾. ASEAN countries amount to 16.4% of those. With the recent glowing popularity of Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, the survey foresees that the popularity of Southeast Asian countries, which are often described as “cheap, near, warm (安・近・暖)” tourist destinations, is going to grow with the penetration of the long-stay visa system (The Long Stay Foundation 2008).

The destinations of Japanese long-stay tourism often reflect Japanese economic expansion as well as the growth of Japanese international tourism. In destinations such as Kuala Lumpur and Penang in Malaysia, overseas Japanese expatriate communities have set up an infrastructure for accepting Japanese long-stay tourists. Overseas Japanese associations like the Japan Club, which is a facility for expatriate workers and their families, has been functioning as a center for Japanese long-stay tourists and retired migrants. Moreover, the motives of Japanese long-stay tourists and international retirement migrants lie in the extension of their pre-retirement lives. Many of them choose their place of settlement based

on their travel careers and expatriate experiences.

Furthermore, expecting a growing market in international tourism, host countries have provided a special kind of retirement visa such as “non-immigrant ‘o-a’ (long stay)” and “non-immigrant ‘o’ (pension)” in Thailand, multiple-entry visas under the ‘MM2H’ in Malaysia, ‘Special Resident Retiree’s Visa (SRRV)’ in the Philippines, and “*lansia* or *lanjut usia* (retirement)” visas in Indonesia. These countries have also begun to develop new types of tourism, “health tourism” and “medical tourism,” after taking into consideration the worldwide demand for medical treatment and elderly care. In host countries new facilities, such as nursing homes and condominiums at golf resorts, are being developed, and hospitals are partnering with hotels, resorts, or other residents, to provide increasing services for long-stay tourists.

The Malaysian government launched the ‘Silver Hair’ program, an inbound migration policy for foreign retired people above fifty years old, in 1988. Under this program, applicants were not allowed to work or earn income inside Malaysia, and were required to deposit a certain amount of money (150,000 Malaysian ringgit) in Malaysian banks. It aimed to increase the income from tourism and to stimulate the economy by active foreign investment and earning foreign currency. Although the Malaysian government anticipated 20,000 applications, by 2000 they had received fewer than 900 (New Straits Times 2002). Consequently, the government shifted the authorization of the program from the Immigration Department to the Ministry of Tourism in 2002, renamed it ‘Malaysia My Second Home’ (MM2H) , and reformed the visa system to improve it. The terms and conditions of the program have been reformed and improved several times since 2002. Specifically, limitations based on nationality and age have been abolished and the required monetary deposit has been changed. According to statistical data obtained from the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia consequently received more than 11 thousand (11,096) participants from more than 75 countries by the end of 2006. Following China (2190), Bangladesh (1628), and the United Kingdom (1439), there were 855 applicants from Japan by August 2008.

Furthermore, Southeast Asian countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia have become receiving countries for an international flow of patients through promoting health/medical tourism. The governments of these countries, as well as private hospitals, have developed this type of tourism in response to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. According to Chee Heng Leng’s study on medical tourism in Malaysia (Chee 2007), the stream of elderly seeking healthcare abroad will possibly grow in the future because the Malaysian Ministry of Health, for example, includes, as one of the ways in which the country can leverage itself, the provision of healthcare specifically aimed at the elderly and retirees from overseas. Although the current linkage between the medical tourism industry and the overseas retirement program does not appear strong, it is obvious that each could potentially gain from the other even though potential negative impacts on the public healthcare sector can be anticipated (Chee 2007). Medical tourists to Malaysia so far do not include a big flow of Japanese patients, although it is noteworthy that the Malaysian government intends to attract not only participants of the MM2H program but also patients from foreign countries so as to boost its economy. With reference to Japanese medical tourism, *onsen* (hot springs) have been conventionally used for cure and treatment among Japanese people, and thus are

regarded as a traditional form of Japanese health/medical tourism. Yet either the Japanese medical tourism business does not take a part in facilitating long-stay tourism, or long-stay tourists do not include patients who intensively utilize medical facilities in Malaysia. However, some Japanese long-stay tourists are motivated to stay in Malaysia for health reasons. Some are wheelchair-bound and some suffer from hay fever, and they find that the warmer climate of Malaysia alleviates their conditions.

In the next section, cases of Japanese long-stay tourists in the Cameron Highlands in Malaysia are presented. There are other popular long stay destinations such as Penang and Kuala Lumpur, but these destinations tend to attract people who intend to stay for more than three months, applicants and potential applicants for MM2H, who want to experience living there to prepare themselves for visa application. On the other hand, the majority of Japanese long-stay tourists to the Cameron Highlands stay there for less than three months on tourist visas, while the applicants for MM2H are still limited in number. The data and findings are based on fieldwork which I have conducted since 2006 in Malaysia.

4. Long-stay tourists in the Cameron Highlands, Malaysia

The Cameron Highlands is a tropical highland resort located about 150 km north of Kuala Lumpur, in the state of Pahang, Malaysia. At 1,500m above sea level it enjoys a cool climate, with temperatures no higher than 25 and rarely falling below 12 degrees Celsius all year round. The Cameron Highlands consists of a series of small townships including Tanah Rata, Brinchang, and Ringlet. The best tourist amenities are sited in or around Tanah Rata with a number of apartments and restaurants. Visitors enjoy a change of climate and pace. As such, activities are nature-based and relaxing with a variety of attractions. Tanah Rata, the main town in the Cameron Highlands, has a population of approximately 7,000, mostly involved in the hospitality and service sector.

The Cameron Highlands witnessed a unique development as a long-stay destination by hosting Japanese retirees. Since a Japanese retiree, Mr. Yutaka Kubota, “discovered” the Cameron Highlands in the late 1990’s, it has been well known as a long-stay tourism destination in Japanese society. Kubota used to work for a big trading firm and had a lot of experience traveling overseas. In 1993 he visited the Cameron Highlands for recovery from a heart attack and liked the place. However, he felt it would be lonely to stay in the Cameron Highlands alone for a long period because there were no Japanese tourists. So he decided to set up an association for Japanese long-stay tourists to the Cameron Highlands, called the Cameron Long Stay Club, and recruited fellow members through newspapers and magazines in Japan. He also published a guidebook entitled “Overseas Resort Livable on a Monthly Pension of 150,000 yen: For Ever Spring Cameron Highlands, Malaysia.” In this book, Kubota describes the Cameron Highlands as a place where Japanese retirees can live within the range of a modest monthly pension. A non-profit organization, the Cameron Highland Club, is another organization for long-stay tourists, especially those who want to participate in volunteering Japanese language lessons. Owing to the promotional activities of these long-stay organizations, the Cameron Highlands has become one of the most popular long-stay destinations among elderly Japanese since the late 1990’s. About 400 Japanese

members of the Cameron Long Stay Club stayed there for one to three months in 2003 and the number of long-stay tourists is still growing. Currently the Cameron Long Stay Club has about 2,000 members and the Cameron Highland Club about 500. From January to March 2008, there were approximately 300 Japanese long-stay tourists. The majority of them stay in Tanah Rata especially in and around the Heritage Hotel. Their presence is quite significant during high seasons.

Long-stay tourists staying in the Cameron Highlands enjoy interacting with local people. The Cameron Long Stay Club organizes cultural exchanges during high seasons when more than 100 members are staying in the Heritage Hotel, Tanah Rata. Events such as the Japanese tea ceremony and *origami* lessons are organized by its members and local people are invited. Moreover, the club has also been associated with a local non-governmental organization which works on environmental issues and collaborates in planting trees in the Cameron Highlands. Moreover, the Cameron Highland Club offers free Japanese language lessons to local Malaysians as a volunteer activity. Volunteers teach the Japanese language from July to August and from mid-January to mid-March, the high seasons for Japanese long-stay tourists. One of the biggest events organized by long-stay clubs is the *bon odori* festival in the summer high season, prepared and sponsored by the Cameron Highland Club. In this festival, Japanese long-stay tourists teach the local people how to dance *bon odori* and local people perform ethnic dances such as the Chinese line dance, Malay dances, and the Chinese dragon dance. Through these activities organized by Japanese long-stay clubs, long-stay tourists experience cultural exchanges and interactions with local people. Local people who interact with Japanese long-stay tourists through these activities, especially those who take Japanese language lessons, make use of their interaction for new business opportunities such as preparing Japanese menus in their restaurants and renting out their properties for Japanese long-stay tourists.

5. Long-stay tourism as a form of lifestyle migration

From observing the cases in Malaysia, as I have discussed elsewhere (Ono 2008), I have identified the major factors and incentives for choosing a long-stay tourism destination: economic (low cost of living), climatic and geographic, living environment, visa system, elderly care, satisfaction from *ikigai*-led activities, and the existence of Japanese communities. Furthermore, “long-stay” tourism to Malaysia tends to be the preliminary stage of migration and settlement there under the ‘MM2H.’ By transition of one’s state from being a “*rongsuteiyā* (long-stayer)” to a “*sekando hōmā* (second-homer),”⁹⁾ one’s experience of living in Malaysia shifts from “liminal experience of living abroad” to “ordinary life” (Ono 2008). By looking at the case of the Cameron Highlands, I will describe some aspects of long-stay tourism under three typologies.

5.1 Leisure migration: Traveling being a pattern of life

The growth and diversification of Japanese international tourism has brought qualitative changes in how people experience international tourism and what they are seeking on their trips. Japanese long-stay tourists including settlers under the ‘MM2H’ are seeking not for

sightseeing or tourism but for experiencing everyday life in the destination. For certain people, devoting leisure time for international “long-stay” tourism has even become a regular pattern of their life. In their retirement, they dream of living in a foreign resort on an everyday basis. This brings about a new identity for international tourists. Being a “long-stayer” or “second-homer” no longer identifies one as a tourist but a resident of the destination. Receiving countries not only make the system but also play an important role in creating an image of such a lifestyle through tourism promotion.

The majority of the Japanese long-stay tourists in the Cameron Highlands come for the purpose of leisure activities. Golfing is the most popular activity. There is only one golf course in the Cameron Highlands, but the golf fee is only 26.25 RM. The Cameron Highlands features several other attractions, with activities such as trekking, sightseeing, playing tennis, landscape painting/drawing, photography, chess, mahjong, and interacting with local people for cultural exchange such as *origami* and the Japanese tea ceremony. Volunteer work is also included as a leisure activity for retirees. Furthermore, many people regard the Cameron Highlands or Malaysia as a base and enjoy taking short trips to neighboring countries. As the report by JNTO points out, the travel demand for destinations such as Malaysia and Indonesia to which Southeast Asian budget airlines have routes has been growing because of the availability of air fares at low rates¹⁰⁾.

At the age of 67, Mr.Kuramoto¹¹⁾ began to visit the Cameron Highlands with his wife either in summer or in winter five years ago. He chose the Cameron Highlands because he finds it an easy place owing to the weather, the low cost of living, and safety. He used to be a seasonal visitor: summer in the Cameron Highlands and winter in New Zealand. He finally applied to MM2H and was approved last year, although he does not intend to settle down in the Cameron Highlands because he has to take care of a house back home. He was a salaryman and had never lived abroad. He and his wife play golf three times a week. He has also joined the mahjong class and his wife participates in a drawing class. Since traveling to the Cameron Highlands, they have traveled to New Zealand, Bali, Singapore and Thailand.

“The biggest difference between life in Cameron Highlands and in Japan is that I don’t have to worry about troublesome matters at all here. In Japan, I have to visit sick friends, or send condolences when someone dies. It is good to have no such things here. There are no social obligations here. I can only think about having fun. I don’t have to think about other things. If I feel like walking I take a walk, if I feel like cooking I cook, or if I feel like playing golf I go to the golf course. Sometimes I worry because I am having too much fun. If you receive a standard pension, you can afford it. I used to go for long-stay in New Zealand. I could enjoy staying there only for the first visit and a few times more because the activities such as walking and golfing are basically the same things that I do in the Cameron Highlands. Here you can afford it within the range of a pension but it costs 400,000 to 500,000 yen in New Zealand.”

He has been renting an apartment with a yearly contract in the Cameron Highlands for a year and a half even though he only stays there for about five months a year. The



Picture 2 Japanese long-stay tourists playing golf on a golf course in the Cameron Highlands.

rent is 15,000 RM per month and the cost of living is about 25,000 RM per month (expenditure for food is about 13,000 RM/month) including golf fees. He said that he doesn't want to die in a Japanese nursing home in Malaysia or die surrounded by his relatives.

5.2 Seasonal migration: Transnational habitation and changing household formation

Most Japanese long-stay tourists to the Cameron Highlands are seasonal migrants avoiding summer and winter, and sometimes spring, especially those with hay fever. Moreover, there are many attractive destinations around the world through the development of various places. Along with the spread of long-stay tourism and transnational lifestyles there have developed lifestyles in which people live in multiple places, called "multi-habitation"¹²⁾ and "peripatetic life style"¹³⁾ such as Mr. Kuramoto who lives a life in three places: Japan, the Cameron Highlands, and New Zealand.

Mr. Motoki took early retirement at the age of 55 and with his wife began to stay in Chiangmai for three months twice a year, in the Cameron Highlands for three months, and three months in Japan during spring, fall, and at New Years. The couple has not applied for retirement visas in either place. While staying in Chiangmai, they go to Mae Sai for extension of their tourist visas. He told me that he could receive a substantial retirement allowance and a corporate pension of 400,000 yen per month. He said that he would continue this lifestyle as long as he can play golf.

Moreover, such transnational lifestyle choices have affected the relationships of married couples and the structure of families. A form of transnational family has emerged and is

becoming more widespread amongst Japanese. In these families different generations live in different countries but still keep one household. Mr. and Mrs. Fukuda, at the age of 60, stay in the Cameron Highlands twice a year for three months during summer and winter in Japan. They play tennis three times a week and golf twice a week. Their house in Kanagawa has been remodeled to be a comfortable place for post-retirement life. They have already purchased a cemetery plot and an urn for their bones so that they are ready to die anytime.

“My wife and I both worked very hard so we wanted to relax after retirement. We can have a slow and healthy life here in the Cameron Highlands because of the weather. Since the transportation is not convenient here I have to walk. That affects our health and my wife’s blood pressure went down. We enjoy having time together because we could not before retirement. We are willing to come to stay here maybe five more years while we are healthy. But I will be satisfied if I could live five more years. If I died today, I would have no regrets because I have lived my life as best I could. I feel that the Cameron Highlands is paradise. I feel happy to be here.”

Their son is a photographer and lives in Australia. Their daughter has been living in New York for ten years and has married a Cuban husband. No family member lives in Japan. Mrs. Fukuda said that she kept telling their children to go out of Japan and look at the world. Mrs. Fukuda does not want them to stay in Japan or to come back to Japan.

Furthermore, some cases show that elderly married couples live separately in Japan and another country but still maintain a legal marriage in a form of “upper-middle-age separation (*jukunen riju*).” Transnational habitation causes structural changes in household formation. Especially in the case of elderly Japanese migrants in Thailand, such global householding strategies are even adopted as a means of seeking welfare security for their old age (Toyota 2006). Mrs. Kagawa, at the age of 65, moved to the Cameron Highlands two years ago after spending a few years in Australia with her husband. She was a teacher at a junior high school in Tokyo, retired when she was 60 and moved to Australia. She and her husband visited the Cameron Highlands from Australia and she wanted to come back to stay. However, her husband is a businessman and does not want to retire, so she decided to make the move by herself. She started to teach Japanese voluntarily as a member of the Cameron Highland Club. The couple’s son lives in Wakayama prefecture and their married daughter lives in Tokyo. They do not keep their former house in Tokyo anymore. The Cameron Highlands is the first home for her at the moment. She said that she wants to live on her own even if she becomes old and disabled. She does not want to be any trouble to anyone else. She may have to move to the Japanese nursing home in Kuala Lumpur, but she still wants to be independent.

5.3 Economic migration: Economical plans for financial security and sustainability in retirement life

The economic aspect is an important factor in Japanese long-stay tourism. Japanese long-stay tourists to Malaysia come from various economic strata, but living within the limits of their pensions is a general concern among them. The lower cost of living in Malaysia

stretches the budget and allows the retirees to participate in many different hobbies and leisure activities they would be unable to in Japan with a limited pension. Feeling anxiety about the Japanese social security and welfare system, moving to Malaysia is an economic plan or strategy for elderly Japanese for financial security and sustainability. However, it may also attract “displaced pensioners” who cannot afford to live in Japan. Actually some of the people I interviewed in Malaysia realistically or ironically call themselves “economic migrants” or “economic refugees”¹⁴⁾ and foresee that more elderly Japanese will move to Southeast Asian countries for economic reasons. It is noteworthy that the growth of Japanese long-stay tourism has led to some negative comments from other Japanese, especially in the press, “pension refugees (*nenkin nanmin*),” “international homeless” etc.¹⁵⁾ are how some people refer to this phenomenon.

Mr. Hasegawa retired at the age of 57 and moved to the Cameron Highlands with his wife under MM2H after he became 60 years old three years ago. His daughter now lives in his house in Tokyo. His monthly pension amounts about 7,000 RM plus. His cost of living in the Cameron Highlands is about 4,000 RM including golf fees. He often plays golf and enjoys traveling with his wife.

“I am an economic refugee. I live here because I can’t live in Japan within my pension. I can’t live in Kuala Lumpur either because it is too expensive. Japanese retirees living in KL are rich people. I can’t afford it. I am willing to stay here in the Cameron Highlands until 70 but I have no idea where to go after that. Maybe to the Philippines or Indonesia. I can’t afford to live in a nursing home in Japan and I don’t want to because I am sure that I would become sick if I lived there. I don’t want more Japanese to come to the Cameron Highlands because I am afraid that the rent will rise.”

Here is another case of informants who call themselves economic refugees. Mr. Kurosawa, at the age of 61, had thought about moving overseas for twenty years and decided to move abroad for two reasons: anxiety about the Japanese economy and about earthquakes. He is the eldest son of the family and never married. His younger sisters, who also never married, followed him and moved to the Cameron Highlands. Before moving there the family had traveled to other destinations such as Fiji and Costa Rica searching for the best place to settle down and to transfer all of their assets.

“We are economic refugees and escaped from Japan. Do you know how much debt the Japanese government has now and how much more it increases day by day? The Japanese economy is not sustainable. Japan is sinking. I want to stay in the Cameron Highlands as long as possible, but prices have been rising since we moved here. For example flour used to cost 2.80 RM but now it costs 3.60 RM.”

The family still keeps a house in Shizuoka, and currently his sisters are staying there for medical treatment. He said that he wants to sell the house but it is not a valuable property so he is keeping it for now so that he and his sisters can go back to Japan when they need to. The family does not have any offspring or cemetery plot. He said that if it becomes too

expensive to live in the Cameron Highlands they may move to Bali where his cousin married a local woman and lives with her family

6. Conclusion

Japanese long-stay tourism evolved from a government-led international retirement migration project which was once criticized as a plan for the export of elders. The private sector invented long-stay tourism, where Japanese retirees settle in a foreign country or countries for several years while they are still healthy and active before passing away or returning to Japan. After leaving a workplace where they have put an enormous amount of time into their job, the pursuit of an alternative “*ikigai*” becomes an important element for a retired individual to live a rounded retirement life. Being able to have a better living environment with a nicer climate, a lower cost of living, and “*ikigai*” from the place, elderly Japanese enjoy a more active and better quality of retirement life with satisfaction. Staying in a resort hotel especially liberates women from domestic chores and allows them to have more free time for leisure activities. Overall, elderly Japanese move to Malaysia in order to seek well-being and wellness in a broad sense. However, there are a substantial number of potential care-oriented migrants who consider care for themselves in the near future, and some of them even envisage living in Malaysia for the rest of their lives. In case of elderly Japanese in Bali, some even think about dying there (cf. Yamashita 2007). However although case studies show that Japanese long-stay tourists are gradually settling down as residents in the local community on a long term basis, the Malaysian government emphasizes that the ‘MM2H’ does not mean permanent migration but a “second home.” It is noteworthy that a pattern of tourism has taken into Japanese retirement even the consideration of where to end one’s life.

This new form of international tourism is proposed as a lifestyle that becomes not only a target of consumption but also a strategy for having a better quality of life with a sense of financial sustainability in retirement life. Furthermore, it is also necessary to assess the impact on local society, because the Cameron Highlands, which was developed as a British hill station and is now one of the most popular Japanese long-stay tourist destinations, is gradually transforming into a “Japanese retirement village” and affecting the locals’ lives. The Malaysian government wants to attract more participants into the MM2H program and is keen to promote it. So far the presence of Japanese long-stay tourists and their intercultural exchanges with local people are observed to have had positive impacts on local society by both the tourists and local people, especially from the economic perspective. However, it may cause some negative impacts on the local society over a longer period of time if the population of Japanese residents continues to increase. Some of these Japanese long-stay tourists are now based in the Cameron Highlands because they are attracted by the low cost of living and the weather there. The number of families settled down in the Cameron Highlands is still small but it is increasing. Japanese long-stay tourism has been developing with the growing population of retirees, often creating a Japanese enclave in the destinations. Long-stay tourists are indeed making glocal Japan in the destination as well as enjoying local culture and life.

Notes

- 1) As precedent cases of IRM, Northern Europeans such as British and German retirees started to move to the Mediterranean in the 1970's (cf. King, Warnes and Williams 2000). After the establishment of the European Union, international retirement migration has been expanding within the EU. The international migratory movement of citizens within the EU is given as a right in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the freedom of movement has long been central to the very idea of EU citizenship (Ackers and Dwyer 2002: 1). Furthermore preceding IRM cases in the EU are identified as a stream of amenity-led moves (Williams, King, Warnes and Patterson 2000: 29).
- 2) Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) 2009. NEWS RELEASE. 28 September. Internet, <http://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/downloads/090928monthly.pdf>. 10th May 2010.
- 3) Internet, <http://www.mlit.go.jp/hakusyo/mlit/hlb/hakusho/h17/index.html>. 30 June 2009.
- 4) This paper is partially a revised version of my earlier paper (Ono 2008). For the current version I have updated the data from my fieldwork carried out in Malaysia.
- 5) Internet, <http://www.crs.or.jp/58614.htm>. 4th October 2009.
- 6) Statistics Bureau, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication. "Current Population Estimates as of October 1, 2006" (Internet, www.stat.go.jp/english/data/jinsui/index.htm). 10th October 2007).
- 7) *Naikakufu (the Cabinet Office of Japan)*. "Heisei 18 Nen Ban Kourei Shakai Hakusho [Whitepaper on aging society 2006]" (Internet, www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2005/gaiyou/17indexg.html). 10th October 2007).
- 8) Internet, <http://www.mlit.go.jp/hakusyo/mlit/h16/hakusho/h17/index.html>. 30 June 2009.
- 9) "Long-stayer" and "second-homer" are Japanized English terms. "Long-stayer (*rongusuteiyā*)" means long-stay tourists and "second-homer (*sekandohômā*)" means people under the 'MM2H' program.
- 10) Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) 2009. NEWS RELEASE. 28 September. Internet, <http://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/downloads/090928monthly.pdf>. 10th May 2010.
- 11) The personal names used in the case studies are pseudonyms.
- 12) The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transportation, Japan, defines "multi-habitation (*maruchi habitêshon*)" as a lifestyle in which people stay in the city during weekdays and spend weekends in suburbs or the countryside enjoying the benefits and attractions of both locations, in Whitepaper on Land, Infrastructure, and Transportation. 2003 "Heisei 15 Nen Ban Kokudo Kôtsû Hakusho" (internet at: www.mlit.go.jp/hakusyo/mlit/h15/hakusho/h16/html/F2051100.html). 10th October 2007). Furthermore, Toda (2000: 21) defines "multi-habitation overseas" as having a positive and meaningful life by having an additional residence overseas in order to meet various needs.
- 13) cf. Williams and Hall (2000); Williams, King, Warnes and Patterson (2000).
- 14) According to Toyota (2006), some of the elderly Japanese in Chiang Mai, Thailand, also call themselves "economic refugees."
- 15) In the journal *Rasin*, Chiba (2006: 33) mentioned that there are people emerging in Japan who sell their houses, move to Asia and fall into a situation in which they are called "nenkin nanmin (pension refugees)" or "international homeless."

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