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The Japanese Association and the Kowloon Club: A Study of the Japanese Community in Singapore from a Comparative Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Singapore is an international city in which many foreign clubs have been established to serve the needs of foreign residents. These clubs can be divided into two major types according to their nature, status, and functions.¹⁾ The foreign clubs of the advanced nations are high-class, exclusive and formal. They include the American Club, the British Club, the Hollandse Club, and the Swiss Club.²⁾ The Japanese Association (formerly the Japanese Club) also belongs to this category. The foreign clubs of the developing nations are usually plebeian, open and less formal. The Kowloon Club belongs to the latter category.³⁾ By comparing the Japanese Association with the Kowloon Club, this paper aims to deepen our understanding of the current condition of the Japanese community in Singapore in the 1990s, focusing on the issues of national and cultural identity, acculturation, cultural exchange and internationalization. It will look into these issues from three different perspectives: the clubs and the governments, the clubs and their nationals, and the clubs and Singaporeans.

There are several reasons for choosing these two organizations for comparison. First, as mentioned earlier, they represent two different types of foreign clubs in Singapore. An analysis of their differences in organization, functions, finance and networks will shed new light on the study of foreign communities and ethnic groups in Singapore. Second, the Japanese and the Hongkongers constitute two of the largest foreign groups in Singapore.⁴⁾ Nowadays, there are over 20000 Japanese and about 17000 Hongkongers living and working in Singapore.⁵⁾ They represent two different types of foreign nationals. Most Japanese work in Singapore for a few years on employment passes, whereas the majority of Hongkongers try to settle down in Singapore as permanent residents. Third, both Japan and Hong Kong have very close economic and cultural relations with Singapore. They are Singapore's major trading partners, ranking third and fourth respectively in recent years. Their youth and consumer cultures have become very popular in Singapore. The fourth is a personal reason. I am a Hongkonger who teaches Japanese studies in Singapore. Thus, this research covers the three places which have special meaning to me.⁶⁾

THE CLUBS AND THE GOVERNMENTS

In principle, both the Japanese Association and the Kowloon Club are non-government, private, non-profit, and politically neutral. Their main objective is to enrich the social, cultural and recreational life of their members. In reality, however, they work closely with the government, either their home government or the Singapore government. The Japanese Association is like the 'second Japanese Embassy' in Singapore and the Kowloon Club is like a 'division of the Ministry of Manpower' in the Singapore government.

The Japanese Association is powerful, rich, and full-fledged. It has chosen to work with the Japanese Embassy of Singapore and other Japanese government agencies on its own. In contrast, the Kowloon Club is small and weak and its survival depends on the administrative and financial support of the Singapore government. It has no choice but to cooperate with the Singapore government.

Why has the Japanese Association chosen to work closely with the Japanese government? First, the businessmen, bureaucrats and politicians form the "iron triangle" in Japan's power politics. They have established a very close working relationship to protect their interest in foreign lands as well as in Japan. The Japanese Association, though it claims to serve all Japanese nationals in Singapore, particularly represents the interest of big Japanese corporations. Businessmen monopolize its executive posts and form the majority of its members. The Association's cooperation with the Japanese Embassy and other government agencies should be understood as an extension of the 'iron triangle' abroad. Of course, this is done under the pretext of selfless devotion to the nation or serving the public. However, the businessmen are compensated one way or the other.

Second, the Japanese Association just follows the examples of its counterparts in major cities of the world. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs encourages the establishment of the Japanese Club in different parts of the world. They may have different names, such as the Japan Club, the Japanese Club or the Japanese Association. As in the case of most Japanese clubs in Asia and the West, the Japanese Embassy took the initiative in establishing the Japanese Club in Singapore. Founded in 1957 to take charge of the Japanese cemetery returned by the Singapore government, it was renamed the Japanese Association in 1965. The Association gradually became strong enough to provide social, educational, medical and recreational facilities to Japanese nationals in Singapore. Until recent years, the Japanese government provided administrative, logistic and occasionally even financial support to the Japanese Association in return for its services to the Japanese community in Singapore. Nowadays, the Japanese Association has developed into a powerful organization which can offer more to the Japanese Embassy than the other way round. The Japanese Club as a Japanese system in foreign nations has become more and more institutionalized and internationalized. In recent years, the representatives from the Japanese clubs in Singapore, Malaysia,

the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia meet once a year to promote cooperation and to discuss topics of common interest.

The Japanese Association in Singapore is one of the largest and wealthiest of its kind in the world. It works closely with different Japanese government agencies, in particular with the Information and Cultural Center of the Japanese Embassy in Singapore. The Japanese Association informs and consults with the Japanese Embassy in its policy making. The Embassy even has a member in the General Committee of the Japanese Association as observer. Its clubhouse (opened in 1998) is larger and more impressive than the embassy building, offering comprehensive facilities for Japanese nationals.⁷⁾ The Japanese Association has the resources to help the Embassy implement its cultural diplomacy in Singapore. It has a huge ball room and auditorium that can accommodate 300 and 200 people respectively, ideal for use by the Japanese Embassy and government agencies in carrying out their functions and activities. For instance, the Japanese Embassy used the auditorium as the venue for the 1998 Japanese film festival.

The Japanese Association also maintains close contact with the Ministry of Education in Japan. It runs two Japanese primary schools and one secondary school under the Ministry's supervision and sponsorship.⁸⁾ There are more than 3000 Japanese children attending Japanese schools in Singapore.⁹⁾ The Japanese government provided generous funding for the construction of a recently-built primary school (\$17 out of \$40 billion) and delivered textbooks for all students of Singapore Japanese schools for free. Not only do the Japanese schools adopt official textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, they also follow the regulations and teaching guidelines prepared by the Ministry.

The clubhouse of the Japanese Association is perhaps the most beautiful and well-equipped Japanese-owned building in Singapore, and the Japanese schools represent the largest Japanese educational system outside Japan. Visiting the Japanese Association and its affiliated Japanese schools has become a standard schedule for the members of the royal family, the prime minister and important visitors from Japan.

Unlike the Japanese Association which has been institutionalized and internationalized, the Kowloon Club is a unique organization and there is only one Kowloon Club on earth. Although there are many Hong Kong immigrants in Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and other countries, they have not formed any formal organization like the Kowloon Club. This differentiates them from the early Chinese immigrants who founded their own sub-ethnic organizations, such as clan associations, religious establishments and professional groups in foreign lands.

The Kowloon Club was initiated and founded by the Singapore government in 1990 to double its efforts to lure Hong Kong immigrants and help them settle down in Singapore. From the beginning, its semi-official status has been very obvious. It is directly or indirectly controlled, financed and supervised by the Singapore government, associated with the Social Integration Management Services (SIMS,

recently renamed 'Contact Singapore'), a branch of the Ministry of Manpower which aims to help the immigrants settle down in Singapore. The Kowloon Club is the only organization set up by the Singapore government to cater to the needs of a particular group of new immigrants.

The Kowloon Club is financially and organizationally weak, and its survival depends on the support from the Singapore government. The government offers the Club a small office (about 1000 square feet) and charges only symbolic rent. The Kowloon Club is located at the People's Association, a government facility which houses many official and semi-official organizations. The Singapore government is the largest buyer of the Club's quarterly, Kowloon Link (34000 copies an issue) and the monthly bulletin, distributing them for free to thousands of potential immigrants in Hong Kong and new Hong Kong immigrants who have just moved to Singapore. This constitutes a major source of revenue for the Club to balance its budget.¹⁰⁾

The Kowloon Club provides services for the Singapore government and supports the government's policies. For instance, under the instruction and sponsorship of the Singapore government, the Kowloon Club organizes two or three seminars in Hong Kong annually to lure prospective immigrants. This has been one of the Club's most important and persistent activities. The Club has been very enthusiastic about promoting the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' orchestrated by the government, offering 3-5 Mandarin courses at various levels for its members. It works with the Social Development Board of the government to create opportunities for the single Hong Kong immigrants to meet Singaporeans.

In brief, both the Japanese Association and the Kowloon Club are politically neutral, but they have important political implications. The former enjoys a high level of autonomy and independence, being on an equal footing with Japanese officials. The Kowloon Club is no more than a pseudo-branch of the government, serving the Singapore government as well as the Hong Kong immigrants.

THE CLUBS AND THEIR NATIONALS

The Japanese Association and the Kowloon Club share the same goal in helping their members live a better life in Singapore by providing social, cultural and recreational activities. The membership of the two organizations, however, shows some fundamental differences which have an important impact on the relationships between the clubs and their members. First, they have a different identity and objectives in Singapore. The members of the Japanese Association come to Singapore for a few years as expatriates, but the members of the Kowloon Club come on a permanent basis as new immigrants. Second, they have different social, educational and financial backgrounds. The bulk of the members of the Japanese Association are executives or career employees of Japanese corporations. They are professional, educated, and well-paid. The members of the Kowloon Club are not the cream of Hong Kong. Most do not have a university degree and work as non-career employees, such as factory workers, teachers, secretaries, sales persons

and technicians. They earn about \$1500-3000 a month, which is less than half of that of the Japanese expatriates.¹¹⁾ Third, culturally, the Japanese are more exclusive and group-oriented, whereas the Hongkongers are more open and individualistic.

Let us first examine a number of questions regarding the ties between the Japanese Association and its members, such as “Why do so many Japanese join the Japanese Association?” “Who is the main force in the Association?” “What is the nature of the Association?”

There are two major types of members in the Japanese Association: corporate members and individual members. They join the Association for different purposes. The former is mainly for prestige and business connections and the latter for educational and social facilities.

Corporate members are much more important than the individual members. Their ratio is about 1/4 but the corporate members basically monopolize the administration of the Association and offer the lion's share of its finance. There are more than 1000 corporate members (1061 as of February 1999). Basically all large and medium-size Japanese companies which have their offices or factories in Singapore join the Association as corporate members.¹²⁾ Corporate members are classified into five grades. The rights, privileges and obligations and the number of the representatives of corporate members are determined by the Japanese Association according to their grade and contribution. The entrance fee for corporate members is \$3000-10000 and the monthly fee varies according to the number of representatives who can enjoy the privileges of club members. A top company (Grade A cooperate member) pays a \$10000 entrance fee and about \$2230 as the monthly fee for subscription and contribution. It can nominate 50 persons from the company to enjoy the privileges of club members. These representatives are usually the bosses, regional bosses and executives of the corporations. Thousands of Japanese businessmen became club members through their companies, reinforcing the image that the Japanese Association is for Japanese businessmen.

The unofficial ranking of Japanese companies in Singapore is determined by their relative strength in the Japanese Association. As a result, the big companies compete with each other in offering contributions and in increasing the number of representatives to the Association. The first tier companies (Grades A1, A2, A3 & A4) have 20-50 representatives and pay a monthly fee of \$1240-2230. The second tier companies (Grade B) have 10-19 representatives and pay a \$860-1040 monthly fee. The third tier companies (Grades C, D, E) have 1-9 representatives and pay a monthly fee of \$130-660. Those Japanese companies which do not join the Japanese Association are looked down upon as fragile and unreliable.¹³⁾ Membership is not only a status symbol for the Japanese companies, but also provides them with business opportunities. Businessmen mingle with other businessmen and bureaucrats through its functions.

Grade A corporate members control almost 100% of the Association's

administration. The posts of the General Committee, the decision-making organ of the Association, are more or less allotted according to the relative strength of the big companies in the Association. There are 15-17 committee members. The president of the General Committee will naturally be the president of the Association. This post is always held by the head of a big company. Mitsui, the Bank of Tokyo (now Tokyo-Mitsubishi Bank), and Mitsubishi are the 'Big Three' which have provided most of the presidents for the Association since its establishment.

Financially, the Japanese Association also relies on the corporate members. Besides the entrance fee and the subscription fee, big companies also make various contributions. For instance, they donated generously in building the new clubhouse and a new Japanese primary school. The Association is rich, but due to the economic turmoil in Asia since 1998, some Japanese companies have withdrawn from Singapore and most of the rest are not in good shape. Hence, the number of corporate members and their donations has been dropping at a moderate rate.

The ordinary members are Japanese residents in Singapore who join the Japanese Association on their own. They have to fulfill two basic requirements. First, they must pay an entrance fee (\$1000) and the monthly fee (\$45 for family, and \$40 for singles). Second, they must acquire recommendations from two members of the Association. There are about 4000 (4307 as of February 1999) ordinary members. In other words, about 1/5 to 1/6 of Japanese residents in Singapore are ordinary members. The majority of these members are male, married, and medium-ranking employees of Japanese companies. They are not senior enough in the companies to be included as the representatives of the corporate members.

The Japanese residents have mixed feelings about the Japanese Association. I am quite surprised to find out that many ordinary members and non-members are very critical of it. I interviewed a dozen ordinary members and most of them told me that the primary reason for them to join the Japanese Association is for their children to enter the Japanese schools. A membership in the Japanese Association is a requisite for getting a place in the Japanese schools.¹⁴⁾ If this were not the case, at least half of them would not have joined the Association. Some ordinary members told me that they regard this requisite as unconstitutional, but they have no choice. Very few Japanese families send their children to international or local schools.¹⁵⁾

I raised this issue during the interview on 16 November 1998. The spokesman of the Association explained that the Association has already set the fees for ordinary members at a very low level so that everyone can afford to send their children to school. There is some truth in this. Compared with the clubs for Western expatriates in Singapore, the Japanese Association is very affordable. The entrance fee is about ten times and the monthly subscription 4-5 times lower.¹⁶⁾

Nonetheless, the fees are still substantial. For instance, a male Japanese expatriate usually spends about three years in Singapore. It costs him \$2620 if he is

married and \$2440 if he is single for the membership. No wonder the majority of singles or couples without children do not join the Japanese Association.

Who are the users of the clubhouse? The clubhouse opens daily from 9 am to midnight. During the daytime, most of the users are the housewives and their children. In the evening, many Japanese male employees come for a drink, supper or karaoke with their families or colleagues. Females use the clubhouse more on weekdays, whereas the males come on the weekend. Females use the library, classroom, ball room, clinic, and language lab more often than males, whereas males use the mahjong room, jackpot room, lounge and the karaoke room more often than females.

Covered by their husband's membership, housewives are the most frequent users of the clubhouse facilities and the most active participants of the Association's activities (such as classes in English, Mandarin, cooking, and social dance.).¹⁷⁾ These classes are quite expensive, usually about \$250 per course, and each class has 20-30 persons.

Besides the privilege of using the clubhouse and participating in its functions, all members receive a monthly newsletter and a quarterly magazine, the Southern Cross, in which much useful information about the Association's activities and life in Singapore is posted.

Singapore is a very convenient and modern city. Membership in the Japanese Association is no longer a must for the Japanese in Singapore. In the 1950s and 1960s, almost every Japanese expatriate joined the Japan Club because the Japanese Club served as the center of the small Japanese community. It also offered unique facilities such as Japanese restaurants. Nowadays all the facilities, with the exception of the Japanese schools, are available outside the Japanese Association. Thus the percentage of Japanese nationals joining the Association has declined.

About half of the Japanese nationals in Singapore do not join the Japanese Association. Most of them are singles (males and females), Japanese females married to Singaporeans, Mandarin and exchange students from Japan, Japanese businessmen on short-term sojourn, the employees of small Japanese firms, and Japanese professions who do not belong to the business world, such as Japanese teachers, doctors, and engineers. They do not join the Association because there is no need or because it is too expensive. Most of them have never visited the Association or participated in its activities. Actually, for a Japanese who is not a member to visit the Association without the company of a member, he or she has to pay a visitor fee. The Association tries to maintain its status as an exclusive social and recreational club and its spokesman told me that it has no plan to recruit every Japanese person in Singapore.

If we compare the Japanese Association to a country club, then the Kowloon Club is like a community center. Despite its down-to-earth character, the Kowloon Club has been less successful in recruiting members than the Japanese Association. No more than 1/3 of Hong Kong immigrants in Singapore have joined the Kowloon Club.¹⁸⁾

Unlike the Japanese Association, the Kowloon Club targets ordinary people rather than companies or businessmen. Most of the Hong Kong immigrants are ordinary workers. Singapore sets relatively low criteria for prospective immigrants from Hong Kong, compared with those for immigrants from other countries. Since 1989, the Singapore government has offered permanent residence status to more than 25000 Hong Kong workers and their families where the breadwinner had secondary education, earned at least \$1500 per month and had five years of work experience or a trade certificate. About 1/5, or 4000-5000 families, have actually moved to Singapore.¹⁹⁾ Less than half, or about 2000 families (2200 in 1998), of these new immigrants have joined the Kowloon Club. The number of Hongkongers moving to Singapore began to drop after 1997 and the Singapore government has also met its target and slowed down its campaign to lure Hong Kong immigrants.

The task for the Kowloon Club is tough not only because of its limited resources and the unclear future, but also because of the non-committed attitudes of Hong Kong immigrants. Most do not see Singapore as the top choice for immigration. Adopting a 'wait and see' approach, they do not try hard enough to settle down and integrate into Singapore society.²⁰⁾ Most of the successful applicants did not even come to take up residence at all and many came and left after a few years. The sense of belonging is not strong. In this respect, their mentality is not far from that of the Japanese residents, who also see Singapore as a temporary place to stay. Of course, eventually more than half of the Hong Kong immigrants will stay and almost all of the Japanese will leave.

Compared with the management, finance, and facilities of the Japanese Association, the Kowloon Club looks pathetic. The Kowloon Club is not really a social and recreational club but a small office. It opens only eight hours a day from 9:30 am to 6:30 pm, with an hour lunch break. It does not make much sense for its members to rush to the Kowloon Club after work. Running on a small budget, it only employs three full-time staff and does not have the ability to offer attractive facilities or organize a variety of activities for its members. Its office is smaller than the apartments of most members, offering basically no facilities for its members except a classroom and a book shelf. The Kowloon Club rents rooms in schools or hotels for most of its functions. Its ability to organize courses and activities is thus very limited. Most of the functions are not very formal and attract a relatively small number of participants. For instance, a Mandarin class which attracts 10-20 participants is considered big by the Club's standards. Most courses charge about \$40-100, which is several times cheaper than those organized by the Japanese Association.

Unlike the Japanese Association, the Club's main revenue comes from the ordinary members and the Singapore government. It has no property or investment. Its entire capital is less than the wealth of a single well-to-do member. Any Hongkonger can join. The fees are very affordable and recommendations are not required. Ordinary members pay only a \$20 entrance fee, and a \$25 annual fee. Unlike the Japanese Association which runs on a surplus, the Kowloon Club has

just been able to balance its budget, and it does not have the resources for further improvement and expansion.²¹⁾

The Kowloon Club provides a place to meet other Hongkongers and to exchange information or seek advice in finding apartments, schools and jobs. Besides study and interest groups, other activities include seminars on the Central Provident Fund or on education and housing in Singapore, charity activities and voluntary work. The Club's quarterly and newsletter provide useful information on accommodation, education, taxation, business and successful stories of famous Hong Kong immigrants.

Club members also organize informal activities on their own, such as dim sum gatherings, hiking and sports.²²⁾ In the past, the Club also tried to introduce jobs to the unemployed and friends for the singles. These activities were not well received and became inactive.

Recently the Club is trying its best to provide welfare for its members. It has convinced some shops and restaurants to offer discounts to its members. The Club also set up scholarships for children of its members who do well in primary six and secondary four.²³⁾ Occasionally, it also raises fund for its members who are in trouble.²⁴⁾

Unlike the Japanese Association, the Kowloon Club has little to do with businessmen.²⁵⁾ It has only three corporate members: two are local banks and one is the Hong Kong Bank. Each pays a \$5000 entrance fee and an annual fee of \$500. The corporate members are entitled to place their advertisements in the Club's newsletter for six issues free of charge and subsequent issues at discounted rates. Unlike their counterparts in the Japanese Association, they can neither hold office nor vote in the General Meeting. The members of the Executive Committee are all ordinary members. The Club's character as a community center for ordinary people from Hong Kong is obvious.

From my interviews with a number of Hong Kong immigrants in Singapore, including both members and non-members of the Kowloon Club, I find that most of them hold quite positive views of the Club. They praise the Club as very approachable and friendly, and says that it plays a role in helping newcomers settle down during their first few weeks or months. However, they also point out that the Club is not very important to their social or cultural life. Many seldom participate in its activities or do not join it for a number of reasons. First, it does not offer tangible help to the newcomers, such as offering loans and introducing apartments or jobs. Second, they do not see Singapore as their home and thus are less interested in the Club's activities which put emphasis on settling down and social integration. A large number of them leave Singapore after a few years when they acquire a Singapore passport.²⁶⁾ Third, they do not find the activities and functions of the Club interesting and useful. They can find better alternatives in churches, clan organizations or community centers.

The Japanese Association and the Kowloon Club form a contrast. The former is less open but it has the resources and facilities to attract many Japanese residents

to join, whereas the latter is open but is not very popular among Hong Kong immigrants.

THE CLUBS AND SINGAPOREANS

Although both organizations claim that they want to promote friendship between their nationals and the Singaporeans, they are primarily concerned with the well-being of its members and do not target Singaporeans. Despite their efforts in organizing some activities in which Singaporeans can participate, most Singaporeans do not even know of their existence. Their connections with Singapore society are not particularly strong. The Japanese Association is more exclusive and keeps most of its activities strictly to its members. It, however, has the resources to organize some large-scale, high-profile activities to promote its image in Singapore. On the contrary, the Kowloon Club is open, and even Singaporeans and non-members can participate in almost all of the club's activities. Due to its lack of resources, however, very few Singaporeans are interested in its activities.

Although a main objective of the Japanese Association, as written in the Rules, is "to contribute to the mutual understanding and benefit of Japan and Singapore," the Japanese Association is ambivalent towards mingling with Singaporeans.²⁷⁾ It has the conflicting identities of being an exclusive club for well-to-do Japanese and a place for cultural exchange between Japanese and Singaporeans. Over the years, the General Committee has been discussing ways to enhance communication with Singaporeans and to encourage the participation of Singaporeans in some of the Association's functions. In reality, the doors of the Association are largely closed to Singaporeans. The Japanese Association is a cultural, social, and recreational club exclusively for its Japanese members. Only Japanese nationals can become corporate members or ordinary members and the homepage is only in Japanese.

The doors are sometimes ajar for a small number of Singaporeans whose business or activities are closely related to Japan. A few prominent Singaporeans (nine as of February 1999) including political, social and cultural figures are invited to become honorary members. The current honorary members are mostly politicians (such as Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong) and diplomats (including former and current Singapore ambassadors to Japan). There are about three to four hundred (362 as of February 1999) associate members (*kaiin*) and most are Singaporeans who work for the Japanese or have business connections with the Japanese.²⁸⁾ The honorary members do not have to pay the entrance fee or annual fee, but the associate members pay \$600 a year. Meanwhile the Japanese Association has temporarily frozen the recruitment of associate members before it decides the new annual fee following the opening of the new clubhouse in 1998.

The unwritten policy of the Association is to promote Japanese culture and cultural exchange if possible outside the clubhouse, because it sees the clubhouse as a high-class gathering place for its members. Most of the activities in the

clubhouse are for members only, excluding the Japanese who are not members, not to mention the Singaporean public. In principle, without special permission, Singaporeans are not allowed to visit the clubhouse, except to attend public functions and performances held there.

Of the major functions and activities of the Association, the only ones that bring Singaporeans to the clubhouse on a regular basis are the Japanese conversation club (*Nihongo o hanasukai*) and the Japanese classes. Since 1992, every first and third Saturday, about a hundred Singaporeans practice their Japanese with the some Japanese volunteers (mostly housewives) in the classrooms in the clubhouse. The admission is free. Since 1997, the Japanese Association has also organized Japanese language classes for about 160 Singaporeans (11 classes), they are either associate members or the staff of corporate members. The tuition fee is \$150-240 for a four-month course. 4-5 housewives teach as volunteer teachers.

Another small step in opening the clubhouse was the participation in the 1998 Japanese Film Festival organized by the Japanese Embassy. It was however a one-time and maybe a somewhat reluctant opening. In the past, the Japanese Embassy usually showed films in the hotel. Upon the request of the Embassy, the auditorium of the clubhouse, which can accommodate an audiences of 200, was used for nine consecutive days in September 1998. However, the film showing time slots for Singaporeans and the Japanese were different. They did not watch the movies together. Singaporeans were not allowed to park their cars at the huge two-story underground car park in the clubhouse and had to park their cars on the street.²⁹⁾ This reflects the dilemma of the Association regarding whether to be an exclusive club or a melting pot for cultural exchange.

Other regular activities or annual events in which Singaporeans can participate are mostly held outside the clubhouse. These include the Japan Festival (*Nihon matsuri*) held every January at the National University of Singapore to demonstrate the tea ceremony and to make sushi, and the Summer Festival (*Natsu matsuri*) in August at the National Stadium, at which Singaporeans are invited to learn *Obon odori* (mid-summer dance for the dead). About 30000-40000 persons participate each time in recent years. The Association also participates in the annual Japanese speech contest, the Japanese essay writing contest and the Japanese Cultural Festival, supporting the Japanese Embassy and the Japanese Cultural Society. In some years, the Japanese essay writing contest has been conducted at the Japanese Association.

The Association does not have strong connections with Singaporean organizations, with the exception of a few pro-Japanese and Japan-related groups, such as the Japanese Cultural Society, the Japanese University Graduate Association of Singapore, and the Japanese Studies Department at the National University of Singapore.

The Women's Committee (*fujinkai*) is perhaps the only committee inside the Japanese Association which interacts regularly with Singaporeans through its charity and volunteer work. The Women's Committee visits more than a hundred

Singaporean organizations a year, most of which are nurseries, centers or special schools for the handicapped, hospitals, hospices, the Salvation Army, etc. They raise funds for them by organizing bazaars and a charity draw. Every year, they raise more than \$100000 for the Community Chest (\$152000 in 1998). They perform their singing, dancing and cooking skills in cultural fairs, parties and other occasions. Although women have little influence on the Association's administration and their activities are not high-profile, they have done a lot of meaningful things to cultivate friendship between Japanese and Singaporeans.³⁰⁾

In general, the Japanese Association, despite its wealth, offers little to Singapore society. In some years, during Singapore's National Day, the Association donated fireworks to show its goodwill. Unlike JCCI, it offers no scholarships for Singaporean students. As an exclusive club, its contact with Singaporeans is mostly confined to politicians, prominent businessmen and some pro-Japanese academic and social figures. It has few interactions with the ordinary people.

Unlike the Japanese Association, the resources of the Kowloon Club are very limited and thus it has to focus on serving new immigrants from Hong Kong. Although one of the objectives of the club is "to promote friendship and understanding among the members and other Singaporeans," it has few connections with local organizations and has attracted few Singaporeans to participate in its activities.³¹⁾ The majority of the interest groups and activities of the Kowloon Club are open to everyone, members and non-members. Singaporeans can join these functions as non-members by paying a slightly higher fee than the members. However, in reality, not many Singaporeans participate in the Club's activities because similar activities and courses such as calligraphy, Mandarin, computer, Cantonese opera, *feng shui*, sports, visiting factories and sight-seeing, can be found everywhere. Some Singaporeans participate because their parents are Cantonese or former Hong Kong residents and they want to brush up their Cantonese or make some Hong Kong friends. The Club takes part in the Community Fund, the Lung Foundation and other charity campaigns, but the amounts it gathers are insignificant.

Unlike the Japanese Association, which wants to promote Japanese culture in Singapore, the Kowloon Club has no mission to promote Hong Kong to Singaporeans but to help new immigrants make Singapore their home.

In the past, some Singaporeans, particularly the young ones, have joined the Friends of the Kowloon Club. In reality, this has become a place for unmarried immigrants to meet prospective Singaporean partners. However, this activity has ceased to function and the job has been taken by the Social Development Board. Its Industry and Commerce Committee provides an informal forum for the Hong Kong and Singaporean businessmen to communicate. Most of the participants are Hong Kong immigrants who do business in Singapore.

Hence, both the Japanese Association and the Kowloon Club do not have close contact with Singaporeans. They create a mini-Japan and mini-Hong Kong in Singapore and keep their distance from mainstream society. On the individual

level, the Hongkongers mix more with Singaporeans because of the racial and cultural proximity. Nevertheless, more than half of the people in their social circle are other Hong Kong immigrants or Cantonese speakers.³²⁾ Because of the language and cultural barriers, the Japanese basically mingle only with their own countrymen in their social life. This kind of cultural detachment make the Japanese and Hongkongers distinctive ethnic groups in Singapore. While maintaining their national and cultural identity, they should be more active in cultural interchange and participation. A certain degree of assimilation or acculturation should be encouraged. This will strengthen the status of Singapore as a multi-cultural and multi-racial society.

CHANGING CHARACTERS OF THE JAPANESE COMMUNITY IN SINGAPORE

In general, the Japanese community is large, strong, rich, influential and united. The Japanese are famous for their collectivism and they have a very strong tradition of participating in voluntary organizations.³³⁾ The percentage of Japanese nationals joining the Japanese Association is higher than that of any other foreign club. They find comfort, security and recognition, as well as friends with common language and interest in the Japanese Association. For the majority of Japanese expatriates, Singapore is just another country to work in for a couple of good years before they move on to the next posting or move back to Japan. Many keep a distance from the local culture and society and want to maintain a Japanese way of life in Singapore. The Japanese Association, Japanese department stores, Japanese restaurants, Japanese shops and companies, and Japanese programs on the television and radio make cultural isolation possible. This is not the best attitude for promoting international cooperation and cultural exchange.

Japanese companies and the Japanese government have a very strong influence on the Japanese community in Singapore. They are the largest employees of the Japanese in Singapore. They also have the resources to provide a lot of things for Japanese nationals. They penetrate voluntary and non-government organizations like the Japan Association. The leading businessmen take control of the Japanese Association which works closely with the Japanese Embassy. Of course, the businessmen and the government cannot put everything under their control. There are some Japanese religious and women's groups in Singapore which are less influenced by businessmen or the government. For instance, the *Sōka gakkai* (Value Creation Society) and a women's rights group, the Network of Asian Women, are very active in Singapore. However, they are somewhat discriminated against by the mainstream Japanese community in Singapore.³⁴⁾

The role of the Japanese Association in the life of the Japanese in Singapore has lessened with the growth and diversification of the Japanese community. The Japanese community is fast-growing. Its size grew by more than three times from 1985 to 1996, from 8000 to 25000.³⁵⁾ The growth of the membership of the

Japanese Association has been much slower. There were about 7000 members in 1985 and about 10000 in 1996.³⁶⁾ In terms of percentage, it actually dropped from 87.5% to 40%.

More importantly, the Japanese community is becoming more and more diversified. Until the late 1970s, the absolute majority of Japanese residents in Singapore were male businessmen sent by their parent companies in Japan to work in the branch office or regional headquarters in Singapore for a few years.³⁷⁾ The number of Japanese expatriates has increased dramatically since the late 1980s. The average Japanese expatriate is relatively young, mostly in the late 30s and the 40s, married, well-educated and with some international exposure. Some have lived in other nations and many speak some English. Since they brought the families with them, the percentage of females and children have increased. The establishment of the Japanese secondary school in 1984 makes a longer stay in Singapore possible.

The most striking development in the 1980s and 1990s was, however, the emergence of a new generation of Japanese residents in Singapore who are not businessmen working in Japanese companies. They are a variety of people who include Japanese females married to Singaporeans, Japanese language teachers, Mandarin students, researchers, scientists, technicians, artists, doctors, engineers, architects, accountants, sales persons, and Japanese working for local or international companies. They are usually young (mostly in the 20s and 30s), single, and adventurous. Many come to Singapore on their own and find the jobs by themselves. Some marry Singaporeans and decide to stay for good. Some come to study Mandarin or to work for a few months or a year in order to experience a foreign way of life. These new generation of Japanese residents differ greatly in values, way of life, and attitude from the typical Japanese businessmen. They are quite independent and most do not join the Japanese Association.

The Japanese like to talk about internationalization (*kokusaika*) these days. However, the Japanese style of internationalization is more or less a one-way street. Both the Japanese Association and the Japanese Embassy are more eager to promote Japanese culture, or, *Nihonjinron* (Discourse on the uniqueness of the Japanese), in Singapore, than to learn from each other. This is Japanism in the guise of internationalization, not real internationalization.

In contrast, the new generation of Japanese residents are the pioneers of internationalization. They are more interested in Singapore culture. They make and hang around with Singaporean friends, eat local foods at the hawker center, and study Mandarin and English. While still maintaining their national and cultural identity, they are very much localized. They usually have a deeper feeling for Singapore. To Singaporeans, Japanese businessmen are rich but arrogant, whereas the new-generation Japanese residents are much more friendly and down-to-earth. The Japanese community in Singapore is a microcosm of the changing social values and cultural patterns in contemporary Japan.

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Notes

- 1) There are different criteria in classifying voluntary associations, such as place of origin, blood, profession, academic backgrounds, common interests, religion, etc. A classic classification is suggested by Gilles Pronovost who lists three criteria: the orientation of the organization, their history of creation and change and the fields of intervention. See Gilles Pronovost, "Voluntary Organizations," in *Current Sociology*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (July 1998, Edmonton): 65-66.
- 2) Most of these Western clubs charge over \$10000 (all amounts in this paper are in Singapore dollars) for membership and have less than 2000 members. See "Gaikokujin kurabu o tazunete," (Visiting Foreign Clubs) in Japanese Association, ed., *Minami jūjisei* (The Southern Cross), 1996, No. 2, pp. 1-10. See also Lee Ju Song, ed., *Expatriate Living Costs in Singapore*, 1998/99 Edition (Singapore: Singapore International Chamber of Commerce, 1998), pp. 22-24.
- 3) Compared with Western clubs and the Japanese Association, the Kowloon Club is less formal. Nevertheless, it is a registered organization with an office staffed with full-time employees. There are a large number of informal organizations representing foreign workers and residents in Singapore. Most do not even register and do not have an office.
- 4) In this paper, I use the concepts of nationality and ethnicity in a broad sense. In the strict sense, the Hongkongers of course represent a sub-ethnic or cultural group rather than a national group in the Chinese-dominated Singapore.
- 5) I acquired these figures from interviews with the representatives of the Kowloon Club and the Japanese Association on 16 November and 17 November 1998 respectively. These figures are somewhat conservative. According to data provided by the Japanese Association in 1997, there were 24003 Japanese (13800 males and 10293 females) in Singapore. See *The Southern Cross, Thirtieth Anniversary Issue*, 1997, p. 581. The homepage of the Japanese chamber of Commerce and Industry, Singapore records the number of Japanese residing in Singapore at 23063 in 2000 (12863 males and 10200 females).
- 6) Very few studies have been done on the foreign communities in Singapore. This research relies more on fieldwork than reading materials. I have conducted interviews with the representatives of the two organizations and a considerable number of the Japanese and the Hongkongers in Singapore, including both members and non-members. I have also used the libraries of the two organizations.
- 7) The Japanese Embassy in Singapore has 68 full-time staff, whereas the Japanese Association employs 56 full-time staff.
- 8) The Japanese Association also runs a supplementary school which is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather than the Ministry of Education.
- 9) Regarding the history, structure, management and teaching at the Japanese schools in Singapore, see Kawano Yutaka, ed., *Shingapōru Nihonjin gakkō nijūnen no ayumi* (Twenty-year History of the Japanese Schools in Singapore) (Singapore: The Japanese School, 1986).
- 10) Due to the recent economic downturn, the Singapore government might cut its financial support. For instance, it will reduce its subscription of the *Kowloon Link* and will only send it to potential immigrants in Hong Kong.

- 11) According to a survey conducted in 1993 on 102 members of the Kowloon Club, more than 60% of them lived in public housing estates (HDB) (p. 43), more than 40% have university degree (p. 44), about half are professionals (p. 45), more than 80% are married (p. 43) and about half of the married females worked full-time. (p. 43.) See Wee Puay Hwa, *A Study of Hong Kong Immigrants in Singapore* (BA honors thesis: National University of Singapore, 1993), pp. 39-61.
- 12) Surprisingly enough, more Japanese companies joined the Japanese Association than the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) in Singapore. JCCI, like the Japan Club, is an internationalized Japanese system. In Singapore, it was established in 1969 to promote Japanese business interest. It has about 800 members (801 as of July 2001).
- 13) Mr and Mrs F are corporate members. Mr F is the boss of a small company. Mrs F told me that the membership is regarded a symbol of social and economic status among the Japanese business circle in Singapore. Her husband only trusts those companies which have joined the Japanese Association. (Interview on 29 November 1998)
- 14) *Rules, the Japanese Association*, Singapore, Article 5, Clause 2, Section B, p. 3.
- 15) Mr H is an ordinary member. He told me that he does not like the Japanese Association at all and had an argument with it in two occasions before he became a member. First, during his first visit to the clubhouse, he was treated coldly because he was not a member. Second, he took his two daughters to a festival organized by the Association and left because he refused to pay the entrance fee. He later joined the Association so that his two daughters could enter the Japanese primary school. (Interview on 15 October 1998).
 Mr M is not a member. He said he could not afford the fees and condemned the Association for discriminating against the poor and for depriving their children of the right to receive education as guaranteed by the Japanese Constitution. He sent his two sons to international school using his educational allowance. (Interview on 22 November 1998)
 According to a survey conducted in 1998, about 27% of Japanese families send their children to international or local schools. See Lua Kah Lay, *Creating a Mini Japan: Japanese Women in Singapore* (BA honors thesis: National University of Singapore, 1988), pp. 26-27. However, this figure is higher than the actual number because it includes kindergardens and childcare centers. Many Japanese parents do not mind sending their small children to non-Japanese run childcare centers or kindergardens, but insist sending them to Japanese primary and secondary schools.
- 16) See *Expatriate Living Costs in Singapore*, 1998/99 Edition, pp. 22-24.
- 17) For a study of social and family life of the Japanese housewives in Singapore, see Tan Ching Mei, *The Social Roles and Status of Expatriate Japanese Women* (BA honors thesis: National University of Singapore, 1994) and *Creating a Mini-Japan: Japanese Women in Singapore*.
- 18) If we trust the figures provided by the spokeswoman of the Kowloon Club, there are 17000 Hongkongers in Singapore and about 2000 families are members. 2000 families can be translated into about 6000 people (on the average, a family has one child). It seems that 17000 is an underestimate, and therefore the actual ratio should be less than 1/3.
- 19) See Chan Kwok Bun, "The Ethnicity Paradox: Hong Kong Immigrants in Singapore," in Ronald Skeldon, ed., *Reluctant Exiles? Migration from Hong Kong and the New Overseas Chinese* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 308-09.
- 20) See Ng Lai Fun, *Hong Kong Immigrants in Singapore* (BA honors thesis, National University of Singapore, 1991), pp. 21-30.
- 21) The Japanese Association is running on a surplus. For instance, its surplus in the fiscal year 1997 was \$1.4 million which was larger than the profit of many big companies. See

- Newsletter, The Japanese Association*, Singapore (March 1998), p. 7.
- 22) I have been participating in one of these informal subgroups since early 1997. It does not have a name, organization, rules or formal leaders. It does not formally belong to the Kowloon Club, although most of its participants are its members. Most of the participants are young singles and the ratio between males and females is about 4 to 1. They are well educated professionals. I met about 50 people in this subgroup and about 20 of them are very active. This subgroup organizes activities almost every weekend, including dim sum gatherings, mahjong, karaoke, house visits, movies, shopping and sports.
 - 23) See Kowloon Club, *Newsletter*, December 1998, p. 1 and April 1999, p. 1.
 - 24) For instance, in 1998, Mr Lau had a stroke and could not work to support his family. The Kowloon Club gathered more than \$30000 donation for him. See *Kowloon Link*, No. 13, March 1998, p. 37.
 - 25) Hong Kong companies in Singapore usually join the Hong Kong-Singapore Business Association and are associated with the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Singapore. The Kowloon Club has little business value to them.
 - 26) There are no official figures. A conservative count would be a least 1/3 or 1/4. The Singapore government has granted permanent residence to more than 25000 Hong Kong families since 1989, but now there are only about 17000 Hongkongers living in Singapore. Of course, many did not even make the trip to Singapore, and some came and returned after a few years. In the subgroup in which I participate, we have a farewell party almost every month for our members, and most of us have no plan to stay on a permanent basis.
 - 27) *Rules, The Japanese Association*, Singapore, revised 1998, p. 1.
 - 28) *Newsletter, The Japanese Association*, Singapore, December 1998, p. 2.
 - 29) *Newsletter, The Japanese Association*, Singapore, September 1998, p. 40.
 - 30) Japanese housewives seem to get involved more in volunteer activities in Singapore than in Japan. See *Creating a Mini-Japan: Japanese Women in Singapore*, pp. 35-37.
 - 31) *Constitution of Kowloon Club*, Article 3, Clause B1, p. 1.
 - 32) See Chan Kwok Bun, "The Ethnicity Paradox: Hong Kong Immigrants in Singapore," p. 313. Regarding the identity of Hong Kong immigrants in the host countries and their attitudes toward the host culture and society, see Chan Kwok Bun, "A Family Affair: Migration, Dispersal, and the Emergent Identity of the Chinese Cosmopolitan," *Diaspora*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1997): 203-209.
 - 33) Many Japanese join *kōenkai* (support organizations for politicians), citizen groups, students' groups and women's groups in Japan. The rate of participation in voluntary organizations in Japan is higher than the European and American counterparts. Regarding the tradition of voluntary organizations in the West, see Gilles Pronovost, "Voluntary Organizations," p. 66.
 - 34) The Network of Asian Women promotes women's rights and attacks sexual harassment and discrimination in Japanese society. Key members of the group have been at odds with the Japanese Association.
 - 35) There were only about 8000 Japanese in Singapore in 1985, about 10000 in 1988, about 15000 in 1991, about 20000 in 1993, and about 25000 in 1996. See *The Southern Cross, Thirty Anniversary Issue*, 1997, p. 19, & 581.
 - 36) *Ibid.*, p. 19.
 - 37) Regarding the Japanese community and their relationship with the Japanese Club and Singaporeans in the 1970s, see Kwok Pek Har, *The Japanese Community in Singapore: A Study in Social Geography* (Honors thesis, 1979, National University of Singapore), pp. 1-83. According to Kwok, most of the Japanese in this period spent about 3-4 years in Singapore and most were expatriates sent by their companies in Japan (pp. 45-46). Their

apartments concentrated in certain private condominiums (pp. 61-63). Most of them spoke some English, but few were fluent (pp. 66-67). Japanese housewives did not work. Japanese expatriates and their families basically did not socialize with the locals (pp. 67-71). The absolute majority of them joined the Japanese Club. About 40% of them visited the Club at least once a week (p. 72). It seems that the Japan Club had a more important role in the social life of the Japanese nationals in the 1970s than that of the Japanese Association in the 1980s and 1990s.

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