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Japanese in the Modern History of Singapore

– Voices of Long-term Japanese Residents in Singapore –

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本原稿は、2020年1月31日から2月1日にかけてアテネオ・デ・ダバオ大学（ダバオ、フィリピン）で開催された第18回日本研究学会（Annual International Conference in Japanese Studies）に報告原稿として提出したものである。研究報告は2月1日に共同研究者の藤田仁子先生（南洋理工大學非常勤講師）と一緒に英語で行った。もうお1人の共同研究者であり、本学会の理事でもある国立シンガポール大学日本研究科の Thang Leng Leng 准教授には厚くお礼申し上げる。

Modern Singapore-Japan relations dawned in 1952, when the Japanese Consulate General set up operations in Singapore. At that time, memories of the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) lingered, and anti-Japanese sentiment was strong. However, after Singapore became an independent republic in 1965, the Singapore government pushed uniformly for pro-Japanese policies in the form of a “Learn from Japan” campaign, facilitating the rapid entry of Japanese conglomerates during the 1970s. Singapore became one of Japan’s most invested countries outside the West, and trade expanded. After the end of the “Learn from Japan” campaign, the Singapore government continued with its pro-Japanese policies, and the relations between both countries took an exceedingly favorable turn.

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Over the years, research and studies have been conducted on bilateral relations, Singapore-based Japanese corporations and foreign policies between both countries, as well as more recently, on Japanese popular culture in Singapore, but little research has been carried out focusing on the experiences of long-term Japanese residents in Singapore in connection to understanding the history and relationship between both countries. This research adopted a qualitative oral history research method to solicit the life stories of Japanese who have at least a 15-year relationship with Singaporeans and Singapore society. In most cases, expatriates from Japanese firms return to Japan after a period of three to five years; however, there are a large number of Japanese who have lived over 15 years in Singapore. They have either left the companies that originally dispatched them to Singapore to seek employment in other local companies or start up their own businesses, are self-employed, or have married Singaporeans, thereby establishing roots in Singapore. These migrant Japanese—together with Singaporeans who lived through the painful experiences of the Japanese occupation, as well as those raised by parents who survived the war—have also had varied experiences working and living in Singapore as Japanese nationals.

The objective of the research is thus to highlight the “social history of people” which has not been a focus of research on the history of modern Japan-Singapore relations. This research centers on understanding informal bilateral relations, adopting a “bottom-up history” approach that focuses on “people” as history’s actors, juxtaposing with diplomatic, political, economic and social/cultural exchange (known as “top-down history”) to provide richer insights into the historical relations and exchanges, as well as the social and cultural differences between both countries.

In-depth interviews with interviewees were conducted on a face-to-face basis, mostly one-on-one in locations chosen by the interviewees themselves. The interviews lasted an average of 90 minutes and were carried out from July 2019 to September 2019 during the author’s stay in Singapore as a visiting researcher

at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Dr. Thang Leng Leng⁽¹⁾, an anthropologist and associate professor at the Department of Japanese Studies of NUS, and Dr. Hiroko Fujita, a sociologist and instructor at Nanyang Technological University, were also involved in this study as co-researchers.

I Profile of Interviewees

As shown in Table 1, the 28 interviewees in this study ranged in age from 40s to 85, with a diverse selection of occupations, ranging from researchers, musicians, lawyers, company managers and housewives. “Citizen” in Table 1 indicates those who have acquired Singaporean citizenship, “PR” stands for Permanent Resident and “EP” is an acronym for Employment Pass holder. EP is permission granted to foreign nationals with specialized skills and a certain level of income in Singapore.

Twenty-five out of the 28 interviewees were women. The reason for this was that women responded more positively to interview requests than men. According to the basic data about the Republic of Singapore issued by Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁽²⁾, the number of Japanese nationals residing in Singapore as reported to the Embassy in October 2017 was 36,423 (19,250 men and 17,173 women). Of these residents, 1,068 men and 1,521 women were PR holders. This figure indicates that more women than men obtained PR status, most likely by marrying Singaporeans.

The number of Japanese companies registered to the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Singapore was 825 in 2018.

(1) Dr. Thang has published several papers on Japanese women married to Balinese men and on older Japanese migrants to Australia.

(2) https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/page22_000043.html (accessed October 26, 2019).
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/singapore/data.html#section6> (accessed October 26, 2019).

Table 1 Profile of Informants

Interviewee (initials), sex, age, pass type	Year arrived	Motive for coming to Singapore / Present occupation
C.Y F 85 Citizen	1959	Married Singaporean / Housewife
G.U F 81 Citizen	1967	Married Singaporean / Tour guide
N.A F 51 EP	1972	Father's transfer to a foreign company in Singapore / Consultant
M.H M 76 PR	1973	Expatriate of a Japanese company / Advisor for a local company
M.I F 60 PR	1985	Married Singaporean / Employed at an institution
O.A F 54 PR	1985	Hired by a local company / Married Singaporean, Housewife
U.I F 62 Citizen	1985	Married Singaporean / Lawyer
S.A F 60 PR	1987	Married Singaporean / Teaches at a foreign school
F.U F 60s PR	1989	Expatriate of a Japanese company / Runs own company
M.A F 54 PR	1989	Married Singaporean / Runs own company
I.O F 59 PR	1989	Married Malaysian / Both work in Singapore
U.O F 59 PR	1990	Moved with husband dispatched from a Japanese company / Employed at a local company
Y.I F 60 PR	1992	Expatriate of a Japanese company / Married Singaporean, Housewife
S.E F 49 PR	1993	Arrived as a student / Married Singaporean, Employed at an institution
N.O F 60 PR	1994	Moved with husband dispatched from a Japanese company / Musician
H.A F 53 PR	1994	Married Singaporean / Housewife
Y.K F 55 PR	1994	Married Singaporean / Kindergarten teacher
N.A F 50 PR	1995	Married Singaporean / Employed at a local company
M.O F 49 PR	1995	Hired by a local company / Married Singaporean, Japanese school instructor
K.A F 49 PR	1995	Hired by a local company / Married Singaporean, Japanese language teacher
Y.A M 63 PR	1996	Hired by a local company / Married Singaporean, Runs own company
O.O F 59 PR	1998	Moved with husband dispatched from a Japanese company / Housewife
H.A F 50s PR	1999	Married Singaporean / Employed at a local company
G.A F 40s PR	1999	Hired by a local company / Married Singaporean, Graduate doctoral student
K.I F 40s PR	2000	Moved with husband dispatched from a Japanese company / Employed at a local company
I.O M 80 PR	2002	Hired by a research institution / Researcher
A.O F 65 PR	2004	Moved with husband dispatched from a Japanese company / Housewife
M.M F 52 PR	2004	Moved with American husband who was hired for a position in Singapore / Researcher

II Feelings and Family Reactions about Visiting Singapore

Most interviewees knew little to nothing about Singapore before arriving in the country, including those planning to marry Singaporeans. Even in the 1980s when Singapore was attracting global attention as one of the “Four Asian Tigers” with South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan, one interviewee considered Singapore to be a part of China.

Some informants however told us that they knew a little about Singapore from friends who had visited, that they had visited the area on holiday, had written about Singapore when it was occupied by Japan for a graduate thesis, and had an image of Singapore as a vibrant country.

Most of their families were, if not in favor of, at least were not in opposition to their move to Singapore. Some family members however objected to marriage with a foreign national. Some of the interviewees said that they needed to move because of their career or their husband’s career

G.U’s father opposed her move to Singapore, worrying that her daughter would be bullied because he knew the history of the Japanese occupation in Singapore. Y.K’s parents also opposed her move for the same reasons. She ended up running away from her parents to come to Singapore.

III Singaporean Image of Japan until the Early 1990s

(1) Remembering the Japanese occupation

In 1959 when C.Y arrived in Singapore, the city state had gained autonomy from the United Kingdom. G.U landed in Singapore in 1965, two years after it had separated from Malaysia and became independent. N.A and M.H arrived in the 1970s when Singapore started export-oriented industrialization.

G.U worried about her ability to live in Singapore because her first view from

the airplane was of a jungle. N.A who moved with her parents when her father was transferred to a foreign company had the impression that Singapore was still underdeveloped and her mother was anxious about the type of lifestyle they would be able to lead while they were there.

In the 1960s, Singapore's GDP per capita was USD 926 while at USD 9,714, Japan's GDP per capita was almost 10 times higher⁽³⁾. Although Japan was more economically developed than Singapore, Singaporeans who had survived the arduous Japanese military era were not attracted by the economic riches Japan had to offer.

Singapore had been renamed "Syonan-to", meaning "Light of the South", under Japanese occupation from February 15, 1942 to August 15, 1945. Many Allied prisoners-of-war, Malays and Indians were drafted as forced labor to construct the Thai-Burma railway. Rampant diseases such as malaria and food shortages shortened the lives of many. Sook Ching, a systematic massacre by the Japanese military during the occupation to eliminate suspected anti-Japanese elements within the Chinese community, was a shocking development for Singaporeans. All Chinese men between the ages of 18 and 50 were told to report at certain centers where they were "examined" by the Japanese. Those who were identified as anti-Japanese were taken away in lorries to beaches on the east coast and massacred. The number of victims from the Sook Ching massacre is estimated at between 6,000 and 40,000.

In October 1952, when the first post-war Consul-General of Japan arrived in Singapore, he was not greeted by government officials and was not provided the same level of treatment as other diplomats for a period of time⁽⁴⁾.

Even by the 1960s and 1970s, the views held by Singaporeans towards Japan and Japanese were harsh. G.U was doused with water as she walked on the road and her child was bullied almost every day at kindergarten because his mother

(3) "Singapore Department of Statistics 1960-2018," Global Database

<https://www.ceicdata.com/ja/indicator/singapore/gdp-per-capita> (accessed Oct 10, 2019).

(4) The Japanese Association of Singapore (2016) p.108.

was Japanese. N.A had a lot of painful experiences as well; she was pelted with eggs, forced to get out of taxis and requested to leave by her friend's grandparents during a visit to their house. A security guard in her condominium also told her his earlobe had been cut off by the Japanese during the occupation.

I.O informed the authors that K Golf Club, the most prestigious golf club in Singapore, has three types of members: Singaporean, foreign nationals, and Japanese. Japanese members were required to pay the highest membership fees. He believes that "this was related to the Japanese occupation" and that "the club still does not want Japanese nationals to become members."

Singaporeans continued to relive the painful memory of the Japanese occupation even into the 1990s. When F.U went to her friend's house in the early 1990s, some of her friend's family members avoided her. S.E who married a Singaporean soon after she came to Singapore in 1993 was called "potong kepala" by a relative for a joke, which translates as "beheading" in Malay. Some Singaporeans retained the image of the cruelty of the Japanese such as a Japanese soldier had beheaded a POW and placed his head in a busy area where it could be easily seen. Y.K who married a Singaporean in 1994 was told by her grandmother-in-law that her grandfather-in-law would have strongly opposed the marriage if he had been alive because he had been "examined" during the Sook Ching massacre.

When A.O joined a cooking class at the community center on Cairn Hill road, she was told by a Singaporean not to touch the lotus leaves that would be used as ingredients for the dish that the class would be making. A.O told the authors that the "lotus leaves were to be baked in the oven, so I wasn't yelled at because it wasn't hygienic. I think it was only because I am Japanese." This bias may have been due to the fact that Cairn Hill road was the location of a brothel for Japanese officers during the occupation or the person who shouted at her may have had to wrestle with her own memories.

C.Y whose Singaporean husband had studied Japanese during the occupation however was told by his family that she was not responsible for what had

happened during that time and was treated very kindly.

February 15 is Total Defence Day in Singapore as the British surrendered to Japan on February 15, 1942. School children learn about the fall of Singapore and eat only biscuits and water for lunch to recall the hard life of the people during the Japanese occupation. The children of those interviewed are bullied by schoolmates on that day.

S.E's child was also teased by being called "potong kepala", and O.A's daughter came home crying after her classmates said to her "We only have biscuits and water because of you." M.E's child had his uniform and bicycle stolen. K.A's and M.A's children were singled out by their classmates on this day.

(2) Japanese society in Singapore and the memory of the Japanese occupation

In the 1960s and 1970s when the memory of the Japanese occupation was still fresh in the minds of many Singaporeans, the Japanese living in Singapore moved carefully through society in consideration of the emotions of the local people. G.U told herself before going to work every morning that she was allowed to stay there even though she was Japanese. N.A told the authors that the "Singaporean business community at that time asked the Japanese community to donate money every time an incident related to Japan happened", and that "Japanese school teachers were willing to do an extracurricular class to teach what had happened during the Japanese occupation." N.A. was often asked by her parents to "consider the feelings of the local people because of what Japan did there."

A well-known example about donations requested by the Singaporean business community was the "Yoshimitsu-maru incident" of 1975. The ship, Yoshimitsu-maru, chartered by a shipping agent called Koyama Shipping Company, began sailing with produce and other items to Singapore, but threw the produce into the sea so they could return to Japan as Koyama had gone bankrupt. The Singapore Chinese business community criticized this action and

demanded compensation from the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Singapore. Although this incident was the direct result of Koyama's bankruptcy and not a problem brought on by the entire Japanese community, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Singapore offered a monetary gift to appease the people's anger⁽⁵⁾. Similar to this, donations and compensation were requested by the Singaporean side whenever an incident or accident related to Japan occurred.

(3) “Learn from Japan” Campaign: The Singapore Government’s practical policy towards Japan

The above-mentioned situation underwent a transformation after the Singapore government started a campaign to learn from Japan in the 1980s. The first Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, launched a pro-Japanese policy to strengthen economic relations with Japan in the 1970s. In the 1980s, he asked Singaporeans to learn about the Japanese work ethic, in other words, to consider their work as a vocation. At the same time, he adopted some uniquely-Japanese systems, such as Japanese-style management, labor union groups organized within individual companies and the police box system closely connected to the community⁽⁶⁾. The Department of Japanese Studies of NUS was founded in 1981 financially supported by the Japanese government to help students devote themselves to studying about Japan.

Thanks to Mr. Lee's pro-Japanese policy, Singapore's “Learn from Japan” campaign and the strong yen following the Plaza Accord in 1985, Japan's direct investment and trade in Singapore increased, as well as the number of Japanese tourists and residents. Singaporeans not only became interested in Japanese and Japanese-related subjects but also took interest in Japanese products, popular

(5) The Japanese Association of Singapore (1978) p.133.

(6) Shimizu (2004) pp.220-221.

culture and cuisine. Japan's influence and presence in Singapore has grown as a result. Japan became one of Singapore's largest trading partners in 1990 as shown in Table 2, with Singapore becoming one of Japan's most invested countries outside the West.

The number of Japanese nationals residing in Singapore exceeded 20,000 in 1994 and 25,000 in 2006, and the number of Japanese companies registered with the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Singapore surpassed 800 in 1996⁽⁷⁾.

Behind such intensified bilateral relations was the realistic policy of the Singapore government to ensure that the painful memories from the Japanese occupation do not lead to anti-Japanese sentiment. Between the time of independence to the early 1980s, the Singapore school educational system taught little about World War II because the government's stance was that "studying history is useless for economic development" and that Singapore "has no past to look back on, only a future to create."⁽⁸⁾ Prime Minister Lee stressed to Singaporeans the importance of building good relations with Japan, under the belief that the country would need Japan's help to grow⁽⁹⁾.

The interviewees had similar experiences. M.H's parents-in-law said to him that they "can forgive and move forward without forgetting the Japanese occupation." A taxi driver said to N.O that Singaporeans "don't care about the past" and that they "are moving forward." M.H and N.O told the authors that the "government's realistic education policy was nothing short of amazing."

S.E who had been the subject of ridicule by her relative who called her "potong kepala" said that "Singapore could not develop unless it forgives, and the Singapore government has realistically educated people on the history of the Japanese occupation to help them move on." S.E also told the authors that "even

(7) The Japan Association of Singapore (2016) pp.287-288.

(8) Tamura-Tsuji (2016) pp.2-7.

(9) Lee (2000) p.503.

if children in Singapore bully the children of mixed Japanese and Singaporean parentage, they do not care the history of the Japanese occupation when they become adults.” U.I said that “for Singapore, relations with Japan are a pillar of economic growth, so history is taught in such a way that will not hinder diplomatic relations with Japan.”

Table 2 Singapore’s Major Trading Partners, 1967–2018 (Total Imports and Exports)

	1967	1980	1990	2000	2018
Southeast Asia	37.0%	18.2%	18.8%	25.7%	25.6%
(Malaysia)	(27.4%)	(14.4%)	(13.3%)	(17.6%)	(11.2%)
(Indonesia)	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	(6.2%)
Northeast Asia	19.3%	21.5%	24.6%	25.8%	34.9%
(Japan)	(8.9%)	(13.5%)	(14.9%)	(12.3%)	(5.4%)
(China)	(6.1%)	(2.1%)	(2.5%)	(4.6%)	(12.8%)
(Hong Kong)	(3.1%)	(4.6%)	(4.7%)	(5.9%)	(6.9%)
*Europe	14.8%	14.1%	16.2%	14.5%	13.5%
USA	6.2%	13.5%	18.5%	16.2%	9.3%

Source: Annual versions of the *Yearbook of Statistics Singapore*

Statistics on Singapore’s trade with Indonesia were not published from 1964 to 2003.

*Europe in 1986 and 1980 includes France, West Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, and the U.K. In 1990 and 2000, the definition includes France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland and the U.K. In 2018, Europe includes the above-mentioned six countries and Sweden.

(4) Longing for Japan

The “Learn from Japan” campaign subsided in the early 1990s and then disappeared because, according to the Singapore government, “Singaporeans do not have a culture where employees feel strong loyalty to their company and most large companies in Singapore are Western multinationals that have a different corporate culture from Japanese companies.”⁽¹⁰⁾ A more important reason however is the appointment of a new prime minister and the slow decline of the Japanese economy since the early 1990s.

(10) Lee (2000) p.528.

But Japan's increased presence and spread of the country's popular culture have spurred a desire in Singapore's youth to learn about Japan. A 1990 survey by a sociologist at the NUS on Singaporean identity showed that 12% of high school and university students wanted to be Caucasian, and 10% of them wanted to be Japanese⁽¹⁾.

Looking back on a visit she made to Singapore in 1987, S.A recounted that "at that time, Singaporeans admired Japan." K.A also recalled that "there were many Singaporeans around me who longed for Japan," and G.A related that "there were many young Singaporeans who wanted to learn Japanese to find a job in Japan."

IV Shifting Image of Japan

(1) Changes in Singapore's image of Japan

The image of Japan as a country on which the young pinned their hopes and dreams has changed drastically since the early 2000s. After Singapore's GDP per capita surpassed that of Japan in 2007, Singapore's economy has continued to grow steadily, while the Japanese economy remains stagnant, which has resulted in Japan's declining economic presence in Singapore. While the entrance examination system is a reason, enrollment in the Department of Japanese Studies has decreased dramatically from 543 in 1998 to 85 in 2010. This clearly shows how Japan's image has changed. Dr. Emi Morita, associate professor at the Department of Japanese Studies remarked that "parents are opposed to the aspirations of their children to enroll in Japanese studies due to declining economic presence."

"Singaporean Students' Impressions of Japanese Companies and Their Changes", a survey of 78 undergraduate and 17 alumni conducted by Dr. Emi

(1) Tamura (2016) pp.2-7.

Morita in 2010, shows that declining economic presence is not the only reason for the shifting image⁽¹²⁾.

In response to the question, “Why are you interested in Japan?”, participants responded: “Pop culture” (89.7%), “Japanese language” (86.8%), “Japanese society” (76.5%), and “Business / economy” (20.8%). Interestingly, the answers to three questions on positive and negative impressions of Japan and the desire to work for a Japanese company change as the grade goes up. Second-year students indicate that their positive impression of Japan stems from the fact that the Japanese are “polite” (81.3%), the country is “interesting” (65.6%) and “exciting” (62.5%), that there is “high environmental awareness” (56.3%), and that society is “progressive” (53.1%). However, the percentage of students who responded that Japanese society is “progressive” falls to 25% when the question is posed to fourth years. Similarly, the percentage of alumni who responded that the country was “progressive” falls to 13.3%, and those who responded that Japan is “interesting” or “exciting” drops down to the 40% range when the same question is asked of graduate students.

In response to the question about “negative impressions of Japan”, the second years indicated that the country is “discriminatory” (59.4%), society is “competitive” (46.9%), “gender discrimination” is prevalent (40.6%), and society is “conservative” (28.1%). As the grade goes up, the percentage of students with responses of “discrimination”, “gender discrimination”, and “conservative” increases, while the percentage of graduates who indicate that they have a negative impression of Japan in terms of “gender discrimination” is more than 80%.

In response to the question about “wanting to work for a Japanese company,” second years primarily responded “yes” (58%) or it “depends on conditions” (36%), while the percentage of fourth years responded “yes” (20%), “no” (27%), and “depends on conditions” (53%). When asked what those conditions

(12) Morita (2010) and the author’s interview with Morita (September 11, 2019).

are, respondents indicated that their willingness to work for a Japanese company would be contingent on “eliminating gender discrimination”, clarification on “working conditions”, “if they could use their abilities in the work place”, the “presence or absence of discrimination towards foreigners”, and that the company “be progressive, not conservative”.

Graduates who responded to the question about “wanting to work for a Japanese company” indicated that they were “currently working at a Japanese company” (27%), “worked for a Japanese company, but quit” (53%), or that they had “no experience” (20%). The reasons given by respondents who quit working for a Japanese company were that “business had been scaled down”, they “couldn’t expect to improve their skills or be promoted”, “low salaries”, presence of a “glass ceiling”, and “all executives are Japanese and all documents are in Japanese”.

Graduates currently working for Japanese companies remarked that “Japanese and Singaporean employees do not share the same information,” “there is discrimination against foreigners”, “The companies are conservative and methods/systems are outdated”, or that the workplace is “Japan-centric”.

Dr. Morita stated that “many graduates want to work for a multinational company instead of a Japanese company and communicate with Japanese customers in Japanese.”

Students from the Department of Japanese Studies, one of the largest area studies departments devoted to the study of Japan in the Asia-Pacific region, have a good impression of Japan and want to work for a Japanese company when they are first and second years; however, the higher the grade, the more they know about Japan, the worse their impression is and the less they want to work for a Japanese company. The changing impressions of Singaporean students on Japan and Japanese companies should be considered a serious problem because these young people are expected to become a bridge between Japan and Singapore in the future.

(2) Impression of Japan by long-term Japanese residents

The interviewees expressed their concerns that Japanese students do not learn enough about modern Japanese history, especially the country's history of invasion of Southeast Asia.

Interviewee comments follow:

“I want Japanese to study more about the Japanese occupation. It's embarrassing to see young Japanese sitting on Lim Bo Seng's monument⁽¹³⁾ and taking pictures.” (G.U)

“It's a shame to see Japanese playing around and taking pictures in front of the Civilian War Memoria.”⁽¹⁴⁾ (N.A)

“Young Japanese may end up repeating history if they do not know anything about Japan's war of aggression and the Japanese occupation. In Singapore, TV and movies sometimes focus on the Japanese occupation, even showing Japanese soldiers piercing a baby with a bayonet. They also convey the importance of not repeating the same.” (M.H)

“I'm embarrassed because Singaporeans are well-informed about the Japanese occupation, but Japanese don't know anything about it.” (M.I)

“Why does Japan hide the facts of history?” (O.A)

Some interviewees criticized Japanese living in Singapore for not being aware of the local society and people. “Japanese living in Singapore are not interested in volunteer activities. Compared to Westerners who actively take part in volunteer activities, Japanese live only within the confines of their own society.” (U.I, N.O)

Those who have been active at the forefront of the business world were

(13) Lim Bo Seng (Major-General) (b. 1909 – d. 1944) was a prominent Chinese businessman who undertook active leadership in anti-Japanese activities during World War II. He is recognized as a local war hero in Singapore

(14) It was built in 1967 in memory of the civilians killed during the Japanese occupation of Singapore during World War II.

critical of the nature and culture of Japanese companies. “Only a few Japanese companies have promoted Singaporeans to the top of the ladder, and most Japanese companies are not willing to develop local talent. This is why local people end up quitting” (M.H), “Japanese companies do not trust local people” (U.I, H.A). N.T stated that “Japanese companies looked down on local people until around 1995. Recently they say that the number of talented Singaporeans has increased, but they still don’t trust local staff.”

N.T spoke about an interesting episode. She “had seen a Japanese company’s top executive negotiating directly with an audit firm after making one of the local staff who was in charge of accounting leave the room. Maybe it was because he didn’t want the local staff to know how Japanese expats and local staff are treated differently. I thought this Japanese company didn’t intend to develop local staff. In U.S. companies doing business in Singapore, about 10% of staff are expats dispatched from the U.S., and most local employees are foreigners, including Singaporeans. The salaries of local staff at these U.S. companies are higher than Japanese companies and opportunities for promotion come up faster.”

Some interviewees were critical of the deeply-rooted gender discrimination in Japanese companies. F.U contended that “male chauvinism is still very prevalent in Japanese companies. When I was working for a Japanese company, I often stayed alone in the office during the day. One day a male employee came from Japan said, ‘Oh, no one is here today’, even though I was in the office. When I worked with Singapore’s Economic Development Board, the staff was very polite to me regardless of gender or whether I was hired locally.” S.A feels that “Japanese society is still very conservative, and especially discriminatory towards women. Men and even women think that even if women work, they should also be responsible for the majority of the housework and childcare.”

V Family Networks in Japan and Singapore

The interviewees repeatedly mentioned that family ties are stronger in Singapore than in Japan even though Singapore has developed rapidly and become a wealthy society. An analysis on the reasons why this has come about will be the subject of another paper, but it is interesting to consider the differences between the two societies.

The interviewees who married Singaporeans and raised children remarked on their spouse's family network and how they help each other.

M.I and S.E noted that they “were unable to be alone when we first married because so many relatives and friends came to our homes. Relatives who had time helped us raise our children. So Singapore was a good place for moms to work.” O.A emphasized that “family bonds are stronger in Singapore than in Japan. Once a week all the children including my husband gather at their mother's house and they offer her some pocket money. I think they have a culture of helping parents, regardless of the Maintenance of Parents Act.”⁽¹⁵⁾ H.A explained that “families and relatives in Singapore are much closer than in Japan and they often get together or go on a trip.”

M.I also reasoned that “childcare support in Singapore is extensive, including day care centers open from early morning to late into the night and the availability of inexpensive foreign domestic labor.”

Large families in Singapore sometimes place a burden on Japanese wives. O.A and H.A explained that they know of “some Japanese wives who quarreled or divorced their Singaporean husbands because they did not like the large and close family network.”

(15) An Act that provides parents in Singapore with a legal avenue to pursue assistance from their children if they cannot care for themselves.

VI After Retirement

Responses to where and how they would spend time after retirement differed for each interviewee depending on the following:

- ① If they had already obtained citizenship
- ② If they or their spouses originally moved to Singapore as expatriates of Japanese firms and quit to seek employment in Singaporean companies or start up their own businesses
- ③ If they married Singaporeans or found employment in Singapore

C.Y, G.U and U.I fall under ①. All three stated that they plan to “live in Singapore forever.”

N.O, O.O, A.O all fall into the second category, thinking of returning to Japan in a few years because of health concerns. They indicated that “Singapore’s medical standards are high but very expensive. Japanese nursing homes have better quality services.” I.O, another ②, said that he “wants to meet my children and grandchildren in Japan more often.”

The remaining interviewees, excluding those who live alone or with children, fall into the third category. “I would like to lead a tranquil life with my parents in Japan” (U.O). “I prefer Japan where I was born and raised” (I.O, Y.I). Interviewees who are struggling with the issue of caring for their aging parents said that they “hope to come back to Singapore after taking care of my parents” (S.E and M.I). “I want to bring my parents who need care to Singapore because hiring a foreign domestic worker is easier and the winter here is mild” (S.A).

However, M.M stated that she “doesn’t want to go home because I can’t work in Japan where gender equality has not yet been achieved but the Japanese government has not recognized it.”

Other informants said that they have not yet decided what they want to do because they do not know where their children will live in the future.

VII Conclusion: Needs for the future of both countries

At the end of the interview, the authors asked what was needed at the government and private level to develop better bilateral relations.

As mentioned in IV(2), our interviewees expressed concern that Japanese students were not learning about modern Japanese history, especially the country's history of invasions in Southeast Asia.

Many interviewees first suggested that the younger generation of Japanese should study Japan's invasion of Southeast Asia and life during the Japanese occupation. N.A suggested that the expatriates of Japanese firms and their families should learn the history of bilateral relations before coming to Singapore.

Lectures prior to departure can be an important aspect of both business and daily life for many Japanese expatriates and their families.

Secondly, many interviewees also suggested that Japanese companies become more globally-minded by hiring local staff. H.A informed the authors that her husband who has worked for a big Japanese company for a long time is disappointed by Japanese companies that cannot cope with the increasingly global world.

The third suggestion was to increase the number of young Japanese people studying in Singapore (M.O, Y.A and A.O) because "there are many things young Japanese people can learn from Singapore, a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual global society." M.O argued that "there are too few Japanese youth studying and working in the world. Keeping young people in Japan may even be a strategy of the Japanese government because once they study or work overseas, they never return."

M.O and Y.A proposed that public support from Japan be enhanced for overseas Japanese language education. M.O also commented that "in South Korea and France, the government and public foundations support overseas

language education such as dispatching language teachers. Japan however does not recognize the importance of overseas Japanese language education. Financial assistance from the Japan Foundation to the Japanese Teachers Association in Singapore is decreasing year by year. There are still many Singaporeans who want to learn Japanese, but the number of Japanese classes is dropping due to a lack of funding sources especially in polytechnic. It's a pity that we can't offer Japanese language classes to highly skilled poly students who may work for a Japanese company if they learn Japanese."

These suggestions and proposals by interviewees who have lived in Singapore for many years, experiencing changes in bilateral relations and the societies of both countries, as well as shifts in how Singaporeans view Japanese are vitally important in building a better relationship between the two countries in the future.

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