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In Search of Fulfilment

Japan’s Lost Generation and
the Australian Working Holiday

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Declaration

I, Kumiko Kawashima, declare that this thesis is my original work, except where due acknowledgement has been made.

Signature: [Signature]
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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Temporary migration has seen tremendous growth in recent years, and a variety of forms and trends have emerged. The Working Holiday (WH) is a new and novel form of temporary, international youth migration, increasingly popular among people from developed countries. The Australian WH scheme invites young people to temporarily live, study, work and holiday in the country for up to two years. It has steadily grown to accommodate tens of thousands of youths every year. Since the reciprocal agreement was established in 1980, Japan has become one of the major source countries of Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) in Australia, which in turn has consistently maintained its status as the top destination for the young Japanese.

This thesis understands the mobility of Japanese WHMs to be a form of youth sojourn, and explores the role it plays in young people’s self-making. My focus is on the particular period called the ‘lost decade’ (ushinawareta jūnen), involving the gradual collapse of the ‘bubble’ economy since the market crash of late 1989, from which the country has never fully recovered. The Japanese WHMs in this study belong to what has been termed the ‘lost generation’ (rosuto jenerēshon, or rosujene), those whose life trajectories have been heavily influenced by the massive socio-economic changes associated with this era. My discussion draws on fieldwork conducted in Japan and Australia, where I engaged in participant observation and gathered interview narratives from people at various stages of their mobility, including prior to departure, sojourn in Australia, and return migration.

My analysis ventures into several under-researched, yet fascinating areas: The WH as an exemplar of contemporary international mobility, which challenges the dichotomy between work-as-toil and leisure-as-pleasure; youth temporary
migrants from a post-industrial society as occupying classed, gendered and
etnicised subject positions; intersection of economic and non-economic factors in
migratory decision-making and experience; and the treatment of different phases of
migration as a cumulative whole, as well as part of a wider life trajectory. In
particular, I bring to the fore the issue of labour in an unlikely context of youth
mobility between developed economies. Through a micro-level study of
motivations, desires and agency, this thesis highlights the ways in which certain
discourses and socio-economic practices are shaped by global forces, and how
individual WHMs reproduce, conform to and resist such forces. My case study is a
portrayal of how young people proactively and continuously seek to explore and
develop their selves, as they search for an elusive sense of fulfilment in the late
modern neoliberal world.
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Abbreviations and acronyms

APEC  Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
DFAT  Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DIAC  Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIMA  Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
DIMIA  Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
DPJ  Democratic Party of Japan
JAWHM  Japan Association for Working Holiday Makers
JET (Program)  Japan Exchange and Teaching (Program)
JICA  Japan International Cooperation Agency
WH  Working Holiday
WHM  Working Holiday Makers
LDP  Liberal Democratic Party
MEXT  Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology
MHLW  Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Japan)
MOFA  Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan)
NGO  Non-Government Organisation
NHLIS  National Harvest Line Information Service
PHPT  Public Management, Home Affairs and Post and Telecommunications
PMO  Prime Minister's Office (Japan)
RCA  Ryūgaku kyōkai-Certified-Advisor
STEP  Society for Testing English Proficiency
TOEIC  Test of English for International Communication
Language conventions

- Single quotation marks (‘ ’) are used for emphasis, as well as direct quotes from literature and interview data.
- Double quotation marks (“ ”) are used for quotes within direct quotes.
- Japanese names are listed in the order of the family name, then the given name, except where individuals follow the English-language convention to refer to themselves in English publication.
- Interlocutors are referred to by their pseudonymous first names.
- Long vowels in Japanese are marked with a macron (e.g. ‘ō’), except where the Japanese terms are commonly used in English (e.g. ‘Kyoto’), and in names where the authors romanised their names without extended vowels.
- All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
Part 1

Introduction
Chapter 1

The Working Holiday: Temporary youth migration under late modernity

Introduction

The Working Holiday (WH) is a new and novel form of temporary, international youth migration, increasingly popular among people from developed countries. WH schemes are based on bilateral arrangements that allow young people to enter another country to temporarily live, study, work and holiday. The Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) describes the official aim of the Australian scheme as follows:

The Working Holiday and Work and Holiday programs encourage cultural exchange and closer ties between arrangement countries by allowing young people to have an extended holiday supplemented by short-term employment.¹

¹ [http://www.immi.gov.au/visitors/working-holiday/](http://www.immi.gov.au/visitors/working-holiday/) (last accessed 8 November 2009). While the two visa types—Working Holiday (subclass 417) and Work and Holiday (subclass 462)—share some characteristics, the latter is for tertiary-educated, 18-30 years old youth from Chile, Thailand, Turkey and the US. My thesis solely concerns Working Holiday visa holders from Japan. Compared to the requirements for non-American Work and Holiday applicants, Working Holiday applicants go through minimal security checks during the quick and easy online application process. It is no coincidence that all countries participating in the Australian Working Holiday are classified by DIAC as posing lower risks of immigration law violations (Assessment Levels 1 and 2), for the student visa application. Information on the Assessment Levels was obtained from [http://www.immi.gov.au/students/student-visa-assessment-levels.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/students/student-visa-assessment-levels.htm) last accessed 8 November 2009).
The Australian WH visa is available to youth between the ages of 18 and 30 years old, and permits a maximum one-year stay from the date of arrival, with a possibility of a one-year extension for those who work in designated regional areas for three out of the first twelve months. It allows participants to study full-time for up to four months, and work full-time for up to six months for the same employer. Under the WH visa, there are no restrictions regarding places of residence and movements in and out of the country, allowing for flexible planning and activities all around the country, as well as trips back home or to other countries. Below is the list of participating countries in the WH scheme with Australia in 2009 with the year of signing the WH agreement in the brackets:\(^2\)

- UK (1975)
- Canada (1975)
- Japan (1980)\(^3\)
- Netherlands (1980)
- Ireland (1985)
- South Korea (1995)
- Malta (1996)
- Germany (2000)
- Hong Kong (2001)
- Denmark (2001)
- Sweden (2001)
- Norway (2001)
- Finland (2002)
- Cyprus (2002)
- Italy (2004)
- France (2004)
- Taiwan (2004)
- Belgium (2004)
- Estonia (2005)

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\(^3\) Australia remained the sole destination country for Japanese WHMs between 1981 and 1984, until New Zealand entered into the scheme with Japan in 1985. Since then, the choice of destination for Japanese WHMs has also expanded to 10 countries including Canada, South Korea, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Denmark and Taiwan (Japan Association of Working Holiday Makers, or JAWHM 2008).
The multifaceted design of the WH scheme creates, and indeed encourages, a variety of experiences in the host society where a Working Holiday Maker (WHM) may be simultaneously an overseas student, a volunteer, a skilled or unskilled worker, an intern, a tourist or simply a resident. This feature takes the previously existing overlap between different temporary migrant categories — for example, between those travelling on work visas and those on holiday visas — to a whole new level.4

The popularity of the Australian WH is staggering. When it first began in 1975, the UK was the sole participating country.5 Nearly 35 years on, 19 countries now participate in the scheme. During 2007–08, they collectively sent over 150,000 young people to the Southern continent; twice as many as ten years earlier (DIAC 2008c: 47, 53). During the same period, just over a quarter of all temporary entry visas issued were for WHMs (excluding ‘Visitors’, such as tourists and business visitors) (DIAC 2008c: 47).6 Since the agreement in 1980, Japan has become one of the major source countries of WHMs in Australia, with over 160,000 Japanese

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4 Australia’s migration program grants permanent residency to migrants via three streams: Skilled workers who pass a point system, family members of Australian permanent residents or citizens, and those with special eligibility, such as former non-citizen permanent residents wishing to return to the country. In addition, the Humanitarian Program is used to settle refugees and other displaced persons on a humanitarian basis. The temporary migration program grants entry into the country to WHMs; tourists, business and other short-term visitors; retired investors; students and their guardians; sponsored trainees; employer sponsored workers; diplomats and other foreign government workers; and others under special circumstances the Australian government recognises. The Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme is also in place to accept short-term seasonal workers from several Pacific nations http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/01backgd.htm (last accessed 28 January 2011). The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs collects its own record of Japanese residents overseas through its embassies and consulates. Japanese nationals who live in a foreign country for more than three months are obligated to submit a resident notice (zairyū todoke) to a Japanese embassy or consulate. The Ministry refers to those Japanese residents abroad as kaigai zairyū hōjin, and categorises them either as ‘long-term residents’ (chōki taizaisha) or ‘permanent residents’ (eijūsha) (MOFA 2009).

5 The scheme first began between Australia and the UK in 1975 by making reciprocal the already granted right for Australian youth to have a WH in the UK, and extending the same access to young people from Canada and Ireland (Murphy 1995: 1).

6 DIAC defines temporary entrants as “...people from overseas (who) come to Australia on a temporary basis for specific purposes which result in some benefit to Australia (DIAC 2009a: 47). There are five broad categories of temporary entrants: Visitors (mostly tourists and some short-term business visitors), WHMs, overseas students, business (short stay and temporary skilled migration of up to four years), and other temporary visas (for those who come for various social, cultural, economic, international relations, and training purposes) (DIAC 2009a: 47).
CHAPTER 1 THE WORKING HOLIDAY: TEMPORARY YOUTH MIGRATION UNDER LATE MODERNITY

youths having been granted WH visas to enter Australia (Japan Association of Working Holiday Makers, or JAWHM 2008). This is twice as many as the number of Japanese WHMs who have chosen the second most popular destination, Canada (JAWHM 2008).

Compared to the widespread and ever-increasing popularity of the Australian WH as a form of international mobility, the scheme has so far attracted very little scholarly attention. However, there is abundant potential for analysis. Firstly, the built-in diversity of the WH experience goes beyond providing interesting similarities and differences with other forms of international migration. This is because visa schemes such as the WH ‘intentionally and explicitly incorporate an overlap between different forms of movement’ (Amit 2007: 5, my italics). Why, then, do young people find the WH so attractive, and what role does such a form of international mobility play in their lives?

Secondly, the WH disturbs the dichotomy between work-as-toil and leisure-as-pleasure. How do young people experience work-as-holiday/holiday-as-work, and what does this say about the world in which they live?

Thirdly, my case study of Japanese WHMs in Australia is a step in a new direction, because WHMs from non-English-speaking countries are largely absent in the already-small literature on the topic (e.g. Clarke 2004, 2005; Conradson and Latham 2005a, 2005b; West 2006; Rice 2010). The migratory experience of the Japanese youth brings to the fore questions relating to the impact of ethnicity, gender and class on mobile youth’s social position and subjectivity. The present study, furthermore, provides a rare glimpse into the lives of Japanese youth migrants not only in their destination, but in various stages of their WH mobility. The overwhelming majority of contemporary Japanese migrants — be they expatriates, students or WHMs — are of the temporary kind, as most of them return
to their homeland after a period living overseas. However, investigation of their return has been extremely limited in existing literature, and their trajectory across national borders and back seldom treated as a whole.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will situate my study in the existing literature on youth sojourns and explain the theoretical frameworks engaged with in this thesis. I will also present my aims and research questions, and discuss the methodological issues and concerns that impacted on the research process and findings.

In chapter 2, I will introduce the social, cultural and historical factors that make the Australian WH an attractive activity for young Japanese people. My emphasis will be on shifts in the Australian WH scheme, and in Australian public perceptions towards it over time. Profiles of Japanese WHMs in Australia since the 1980s will also be introduced.

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7 The exact number of Japanese returnees for each migration category in any given year and the duration of their absence from Japan are difficult to ascertain. However, existing data strongly indicate that the majority of Japanese nationals abroad are temporary migrants, and that they return home. For example, in 2008, 1,116,993 Japanese nationals were living abroad. Only 32.3 percent of them had permanent residency in their countries of residence. In the same year, 15,905,433 Japanese nationals returned to Japan, as opposed to 15,987,250 nationals who departed from Japan. Of the returnees, 89.8 percent returned within 20 days of departure, 5.7 percent within 3 months, 2 percent within 6 months, 1.7 percent within 1 year, 0.6 percent within 2 years, 0.2 percent within 3-5 years (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications [http://www.stat.go.jp/data/nihon/02.htm](http://www.stat.go.jp/data/nihon/02.htm) last accessed 21 January 2011).
Theorising the Working Holiday

Temporary migration has seen tremendous growth in recent years. For example, by 2004, approximately 70 percent of Japanese outside Japan were temporary migrants (MOFA 2007). Among a variety of temporary movements between countries, recurring, circulatory and onward migration have emerged as increasingly widespread trends (Castles 2007: 353). Youth international mobility between developed countries has diversified in a similar fashion, opening up more avenues for young people to access new experiences outside their home countries. The WH is one such avenue.

I primarily view the WH as migration rather than tourism, even though the Australian immigration department classifies it as a ‘visitor visa’ scheme. This is firstly because the WH classification assumes a longer term stay of up to two years. Given that Australian tourist visas issued to the Japanese expire after three months, the length of the WH makes it more than a ‘short-term visit’, and satisfies ‘a certain minimum period’ of residence in the host country that constitutes migration (Castles 2000: 270). Secondly, my data contain experiences and narratives that bear the hallmark of migration. Interlocutors experienced uprooting of themselves from their familiar place by leaving their job, family, friends and most of their personal possessions. While their visa was designed to restrict the timeframe of their mobility, they were frequently open to the possibility of delaying their return home or even settling in the host country.

My study of youth temporary migration as an individual act sets itself apart from many migration studies, which treat migration as a ‘group strategy’ especially that of the household.\(^8\) I situate Japanese WH mobility to Australia as a case of youth sojourn, undertaken by individuals for the purposes of self-exploration and development. The conditions of the Australian WH scheme bar applicants with

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\(^8\) Household level analysis is predominant in the literature on network-mediated migration, which focuses on the roles played by kinship networks (Massey et al. 1993). Anthropological studies have long been contributing to the field by interpreting migration as an affair of networks of kinship and friendship. The rise of transnationalism studies has also contributed to the popular focus on migrants-as-households (Briody 1987 cited in Brettell and Hollifield 2000: 107), as such households often extend across national boundaries.
children, and even married spouses are treated as separate WHMs, who need to apply for their own visas. Also, it is extremely common for Japanese youth to undertake their Australian WH alone, as opposed to being accompanied by a friend or a family member. That the WHMs in my study provided first-person-singular descriptions of migratory experience further contributes to, and is a reflection of, the individualistic nature of Japanese WH mobility to Australia. That is not to say that this form of temporary migration is never influenced by household decisions. Indeed, as the subsequent chapters will show, my interlocutors' position in their household and (financial) support they receive from their family shape, or even make possible, their migratory decision and experience. Therefore, my aim is to situate the individual(istic) motivation and purpose of the WH mobility in a social context which gives rise to, or challenges individual agency.

There has been a steadily accumulating literature in the broad and diverse field of youth sojourn studies. For example, the 'gap year', referring to a form of youth travel traditionally for people in between education and full-time employment, has attracted the attention of various disciplines (Simpson 2004, 2005; Blackburn et al. 2005; Jones 2005; Heath 2007; Ansell 2008; Söderman and Snead 2008). The New Zealand equivalent is the big OE (Overseas Experience), which usually involves, but is no longer limited to, mobility to the UK (Bell 2002; Inkson and Myers 2003; Wilson et al. 2009). Both the gap year and the big OE are similar to the WH in the sense that they normally involve going abroad to combine leisure and paid and/or unpaid work for a prolonged period of time. Another overlapping but more established stream of literature is backpacker studies (Cohen 1973; Vogt 1976; Riley 1988; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Elsrud 1998; Sørensen 2003; Huxley 2004; Richards and Wilson 2004; D'Andrea 2007). The strong presence of tourism studies in this area is indicative of the dominant perception that backpackers are primarily tourists. However, in more recent years, the backpacker phenomenon has been examined by scholars in other disciplines, notably human geography (Allon 2004; Duncan 2004; Allon et al. 2008).

WHMs are most commonly studied alongside and in conjunction with other youth migrant categories, ranging from the gap year, the big OE, and the budget or independent traveller to the backpacker, the student and the tourist. Studies that
are explicitly and specifically about WHMs have been building up, but only slowly (Clarke 2004, 2005; Conradson and Latham 2005a, 2005b; West 2006, Rice 2010). Studies focusing specifically on Japanese WHMs in Australia are even scarcer, with Maksay (2007) from tourism studies and Fujioka (2008) from sociology being rare exceptions. Aside from these, Japanese WHMs in Australia have been categorised by Befu as the ‘drifters’ (2000: 37–38), and in studies by Piller and Takahashi (2006: 65) on female learners of English, Prideaux and Shiga (2007: 50) on backpackers, Mizukami (2007: 24, 96) on ‘sojourners’ and Nagatomo (2007: 185, 2008a: 3) on long-term residents. Furthermore, although not specifically referred to, it is possible that Japanese WHMs have been included in studies of Japanese students (Kobayashi 2007: 65) and ‘cultural migrants’ (Fujita 2009).9 While there is a non-academic report on a small survey conducted by JAWHM (2005), scholarly literature has so far largely ignored the return migration of Japanese WHMs.10

‘Work’ and ‘leisure’ in the Working Holiday

Although occupying a marginal status in migration literature, youth sojourn studies have collectively made contributions to various fields and have inspired the present study. Most notably, they have begun filling the significant gap created by a polarising characteristic of migration studies. On the one hand, the majority of migration studies have examined movements of people from developing to developed countries. On the other hand, a growing subset of migration studies view international mobility as a privilege of the élite and highly skilled. Skilled professional migrants, variously termed ‘professional transients’ (Appleyard 1991: 26), ‘the moving “expert”’ (Amit 2002) and ‘a peculiar tribe’ (Fetcher 2007: 147), have been the favourite subject of such studies. Both types of study tend to treat migration primarily as an economic issue. Poorer people on the move are depicted as ‘labour migrants’ who seek the economic survival of their families, while ‘élite’

9 Hamano’s study (2009: 15) includes former WHMs who became permanent residents of Australia through marriage with local men. University students tend to be included in studies of overseas students (Andressen and Kumagai 1996; Ono and Piper 2004), while discussions of young Japanese, usually women, who study the English language abroad also tend to view the youth as language students rather than migrants (Piller and Takahashi 2006; Kobayashi 2007).

10 There have, however, been efforts to examine the return of graduates of foreign universities (Mori 2004), kikokushijyo who are children of expatriates, and other temporary migrants who return to Japan (Goodman 1993; Pang 2000; Kanno 2003) and their families (White 1988).
migrants are considered to possess skills that nations around the world consider vital to their economic growth (Castles 2007: 360).

In contrast, studies of youth sojourns are included in a growing literature that focuses on the cultural and social aspects of temporary migration. For example, existing studies of WHMs examine forms of belonging and identity among youth that are increasingly transnational, both geographically and psychologically (Allon 2004; Clarke 2005; Conradson and Latham 2005a; Allon et al. 2008; Easthope 2009). Such a concern is shared by lifestyle migration studies, which usually view migrants as individual consumers pursuing desirable lifestyle choices (O’Reilly 2003; Nagatomo 2008b: 231–233). Empirical findings emerging from these studies are positive additions to migration research, to which the present study also hopes to contribute.

Overlapping with the distinction between poor, unskilled migrants and élite, professional, skilled migrants, a further distinction is often drawn in migration literature between labour and lifestyle migration. Existing studies commonly treat the latter as a predominantly non-economic phenomenon, and therefore within the domain of migrants from developed economies. In this dichotomy, labour migrants evoke economic hardship, and lifestyle migrants—be they ‘coastal migrants’ in the Mediterranean, seekers of ‘the rural idyll’ in Southern France, or ‘bourgeois bohemians’ in Mikonos (Benson and O’Reilly 2009: 611–613)—are portrayed as seeking a paradise away from the work demands of the home society. For these latter migrants, new career opportunities in their host societies are also framed as an issue of lifestyle choice (Benson and O’Reilly 2009: 610–611). This parallels the depiction of highly skilled migrant workers as moving as a result of their individual choice and agency, rather than economic need.11

However, youth sojourners, such as seasonally employed ski-resort workers, combining a job and a passion (Duncan 2004), and youth engaging in the gap-year or volunteer tourism to merge unpaid work and a holiday (Simpson 2004; Söderman and Snead 2008), challenge dichotomies between work and leisure, and

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11 In the context of sex tourism, Agustín (2007: 18) also points out that “the high level of agency assigned to tourists/travellers who actively seek pleasure and self-realisation, as opposed to migrants who are acted upon by the push and pull factors.”
economic need and lifestyle choice. Studies of a great many forms of contemporary youth sojourn take for granted the multifaceted nature of youth mobility, and therefore tend to avoid a simple dichotomisation between labour and lifestyle migration.

**Structural relations shaping Japanese WH mobility to Australia**

While I share the basic interests of existing studies on youth sojourns, these studies also contain a number of gaps. In this section, I will highlight these gaps and explain how this study attempts to address them. In doing so, I will also maintain a dialogue with a variety of literature, since there is a considerable overlap of empirical evidence and theoretical interests in the wider field of migration studies.

**Beyond ‘middle-class’ migrants: WHMs and their socio-economic positioning**

As I have explained, youth sojourn studies commonly fall in between the extremes created by the polarisation in migration studies between poor and élite migrants. Some such studies explicitly criticise and challenge this polarisation. For example, in a special issue of a journal, Conradson and Latham attempt to challenge the poor-rich dichotomy by advocating studies of the ‘middling forms of transnational migrant’ (2005a: 229), such as young people who engage in the gap year. Clarke, in the same issue, also argues for the importance of ‘the details of transnational lives of the middle’ (2005: 308) to shed light on this neglected group. To an extent, I welcome this, because even though WH agreements are between economically developed nations, they are not specifically designed to attract élite or privileged youth, by the home countries’ standard. However, I am highly critical of a move to call WHMs and other similar youth sojourners simply ‘middling’ or ‘middle-class’ migrants, because these terms are commonly defined only vaguely, if at all, as if there is a shared assumption as to who this group is. For example, Conradson and Latham (2005a: 229) describe New Zealand WHMs in London as ‘more often than not [...] simply middle-class. In terms of the societies they come from and those they are travelling to, they are very much of the middle.’ Such a sweeping statement, which treats the middle class as a homogenous group, is highly
problematic, given the wide variety of social and economic positions that exist in the ‘middle’ of the post-industrialised societies investigated in the literature.

In the context of skilled migration, Scott (2006) attempts to address the heterogeneity of middle-class migrants by providing a typology of the British in Paris. Summing up six types of migrants, he emphasises that the diversity among them was a result of the expansion and fragmentation of the middle class in the UK. I find useful his illustration of inter-generational and occupational differences, and agree with him that such a form of mobility is not specific to an economic élite (Scott 2006: 1107). However, his framework of first defining skilled migration as a ‘normal’ middle-class activity (2006: 117) and then treating diversity as ‘variations’ within the same group of people, is ultimately counterproductive to his effort to emphasise the diversity of this group. Rather than creating potentially endless categories within ‘one class’, it is important to ask whether it is useful or even meaningful to begin with the assumption of shared membership in a single class—whether ‘middle’ or any other class.

A closely related problem to the assumptions made about ‘middle-class’ migrants is the eclipsing of economic issues. For example, Conradson and Latham differentiate young, ‘middle-class’ backpacking migrants from labour migrants, based on the claim that the former do not arrive in the host country with the aim of ‘earning substantial sums of money’ (Conradson and Latham 2005b: 290). Even though these claims about the motives and aims of young travellers may not be untrue, I problematise the authors’ emphasis on the non-economic, which is common in a variety of studies on middle-class migrants, because it is made at the expense of the following fact: All migrants are positioned in the economies of both home and host societies, and their positioning inevitably shapes the particular forms of mobility in which they come to engage.

A corollary of treating middle-class migration as a predominantly non-economic matter has been the heavy focus on lifestyle issues. Lifestyle migration is often discussed in relation to the migrants’ search for the meaning of life, spiritual well-being and other, distinctly non-economic aspects of life. For example, Ip et al. (1998: 83–84), and Chiang and Hsu (2005: 80) stress lifestyle issues as a major part
of the motivations and/or experiences of middle-class Taiwanese migrants in Australia. Studies of Japanese migrant communities in Australia frequently share this tendency (Shiobara 2005: 406, 410; Andressen and Kumagai 1996: 7–8; Mizukami 2006: 23–28; Mizukami 2007: 175; Nagatomo 2007: 185–198, 2008a: 5–12). This tendency brings back the polarisation in migration studies between lifestyle migration of the financially comfortable and labour (economic) migration of the poor. In particular, the prominent and almost automatic focus on ‘middle-class migration as (lifestyle) choice’ implies a causal link between middle-class-ness and the ability to exercise individual agency. In the meantime, what tends to take a backseat is the impact of structural factors on individual migrants.

There is, without question, merit in these writers’ conscious departure from the dominant viewpoint that migration is about macro- and micro-economics. As Massey et al. point out:

Migrants clearly do not respond mechanically to wage differentials, if they ever did; they are not homogenous with respect to taste and motivations; and the contexts within which they make their decisions are not the same (1998: 15 cited in Pieke et al. 2004: 24).

However, I argue that economic and non-economic motivations are inseparable and always simultaneously present in all forms of migration. For example, highly skilled expatriates are often assumed to move for career and financial advantages, but Haour-Knipe (2001: 16–18) illustrates how US expatriate migrants in Geneva seek a sense of adventure and fun before ‘settling down’. Constable (1997), Mills (2002), Jacka (2005, 2006), Ngai (2005) show that those considered ‘labour migrants’ move not only for economic necessity but also because they are attracted to the chance to access new identities based on modern lifestyles. For this thesis, it is precisely the intersection of economic and non-economic facets of migrants’ lives that reveals the significance of Japanese WH mobility to Australia as a contemporary phenomenon. Second, rather than starting with the assumption that WH migrants belong to a homogenous middle class, I first ask what historical, socio-economical, cultural and material conditions shape particular migratory motivations and experiences. Furthermore, I caution against equating lifestyle choices with consumer choices. Instead, I place a strong emphasis on migrants’ positions in the labour market, and contrast them with their positions in the consumer market. I ask, ‘how are WH
migrants variously positioned in the economy as workers and consumers, and how, if at all, does their positioning influence their migratory experience?’

In attempting to answer this question, the issue of how social differentiation is understood in contemporary Japan must first be clarified. In Japan, ‘class’—\textit{kaikyū}—is rarely referred to outside the academic context. However, the term ‘social stratum’ (\textit{kaisō}) is widely used in everyday, as well as academic contexts to refer to ‘a collective of people who are placed under similar socio-economic conditions’ (Hara and Seiyama 2005: 1). For example, \textit{jakuten-sō} (youth-stratum), \textit{shinguru-sō} (singles-stratum, as in unmarried), \textit{hinkon-sō} (impoverished-stratum) and \textit{sararīman-sō} (‘salaryman’-stratum) are commonly used terms. In this thesis, I use the English term ‘class’ in a Weberian sense, in that it is a social class comprised of people who share a common situation in capitalist markets in general, and a labour market in particular (Breen and Rottman 1995: 27). Where I employ the term ‘middle class,’ I do so to refer to a conception of a ‘middle’ social category that is common in popular discourse in Australia and Japan, fully mindful, however, that this is a loose, poorly defined term.

While a variety of class positions have existed in Japan in the last three decades, class identification has rarely been a primary source of identity over this period. The economic recovery of the post-war period and the subsequent GDP growth of the 1960s saw a rise in the standard of living for most of the population. By the early 1970s, the lifestyles of blue-collar and white-collar workers converged to a great extent, especially as Americanised consumption patterns—such as eating bread, drinking beer and whisky, enjoying western-style clothing, baseball, jazz and rock music—spread widely among all Japanese (Tipton 2002: 193). Blue-collar workers could also afford what were previously considered luxury items, such as cameras, domestic vacations and homes, and their children began accessing tertiary education (Roberts 2005: 108). By the 1980s, less than 10 percent of people who responded to the Cabinet Office annual public opinion survey identified with the ‘low’ social category, as opposed to ‘high’, ‘upper middle’, ‘middle middle’ and ‘lower middle’ (Ida 2007: 59). The results of such official statistics were widely publicised at the time, and they gave rise to a claim that Japan was a ‘universal
middle-stream society’ (sōchūryū shakai). As will be described in greater detail in the following chapter, the chūryū identification of the era was embodied in the image of a nuclear family comprised of the full-time working ‘salaryman’ (salaried worker) as the breadwinner, his partner, the full-time housewife, and their children. Even though the majority lived a material life that was not congruent with this image, it was ‘the wide appeal, not universal attainment’ (Kelly 1986: 605) of this representation that induced a mass identification with the ‘middle class’.

Economic circumstances have since changed dramatically, as Japan has struggled to emerge out of the recession from the 1990s onwards. While the image of the ‘middle stream’ as financially comfortable, and therefore able to escape drudgery and explore a better quality of life may still be applicable to wealthy retirees who emigrate from Japan, my case study will vividly illustrate that such a description is increasingly out of touch with the reality of today’s Japanese youth. The shift in the economic reality of the Japanese youth population has significantly changed the way they live their lives, and WH mobility to Australia as experienced by this generation is a particularly suitable place to reflect on Japan’s changing economic practices and their impacts beyond the realm of the economy.

The significance of global power relations

The intersection of the economic and the non-economic at the macro level is also significant for the present study, because of the position of Australia and Japan in the international arena. Japan is one of the largest economies amongst OECD countries, but its status as ‘non-Western’ and non-English-speaking renders it atypical amongst wealthy countries in the ‘North’. Australia’s status as a ‘Western country’ located in the ‘South’ makes it an atypical OECD country. What factors are at play when Japanese WHMs, who come from a larger economy, become an ethnic and linguistic minority in the host nation? How does their Japanese ethnicity shape their experience in the host society, where their gender, ethnicity, class, nationality and language are given different meanings than at home?

12 See Murakami Yasusuke (1984) for arguably the most well-known argument of this kind. Murakami is well known to have closely worked with the then Prime Minister Nakasone in his advisory role.
These questions are highly relevant and urgent, because existing youth migration studies in general, and WH studies in particular, have failed to pay attention to youth sojourners from Asia, even though their number is on the increase. The finding of Hardin and Webster (2002: 5) that a typical WHM in Australia was from an English-speaking country is now completely outdated, given that over 60 percent of WHMs in Australia now come from non-English-speaking countries, half of whom are from Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan (DIAC 2009b, figures from 2008–09). In Australia, youth travellers are imagined as predominantly British or Irish, and scholars (e.g. Allon 2004; Clarke 2004, 2005) have tended to focus on these groups, mostly without mention of the rising dominance of non-European populations. In this environment, Japanese WH mobility to Australia provides a particularly interesting focus for situating contemporary youth sojourns within the power structures of ethnicity, nationality and language.

**WH mobility from home to host country and back again**

When it comes to existing individual-level youth sojourn studies, the tendency has been to segregate the period of residence in the destination as something distinct, or only partly related to prior experience in the home society. Furthermore, return migration has been under-researched. 13 It is my view that individual life circumstances and subjective understanding of these deeply shape migrants’ experience of the host society, and this in turn paves the way for their experience of return. For this reason, it is important to look at WH mobility as a cumulative whole—from the home to the host society and subsequent return home. Moreover, it is crucial to view the whole-of-mobility in the context of migrants’ life trajectories, not as an event that is something of an anomaly in the course of a ‘normal’ life. In particular, I situate WHMs’ mobility in the context of their transition to adulthood. This approach of integrating different migratory ‘stages’, and of

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13 Exceptions include Conway and Potter (2009) whose entire volume is dedicated to the topic, including young Australians (Hugo 2009a), Hugo on the issue of brain drain in the Australian context (2009b: 12, 17) and Easthope (2006, 2009: 62–64, 70–78) on Australian young temporary migrants who return to Tasmania, and. Regarding the return migration of contemporary Japanese nationals, Kelsky (2001: 203–209, 215–216) includes accounts of women returning from the US and other ‘Western’ countries, and studies on *kikokushijo* (returnee school children, usually of upper middle-class parents) have formed a small field (e.g. Goodman 1993; Kanno 2000; Pang 2000).
interpreting the period of mobility as part of a larger life course, is unique in studies of Japanese temporary migration.

Interpreting youth mobility as part of life trajectories necessarily brings up the issue of the larger structural issues associated with the home society where the migrants come from and return to. How do Japanese WHMs come to desire an Australian WH, what do they seek to achieve from it, and how does all this unfold within a particular cultural, historical and social context? In asking these questions, I pay special attention to the fact that WHMs in my study experienced massive social changes as members of one specific generation prior to their mobility to Australia, and that this continued to have an enormous impact on them individually and collectively even after their return.

**The Japanese WH to Australia as a gendered experience**

English language ability in the context of the eroticisation of ‘Western men’, both by the women themselves and by the industry promoting English language learning.

My thesis overlaps with these existing studies on Japanese female migrants in that I also identify social factors in the home society as shaping the women’s migratory decision making. However, I diverge from these studies, both by complicating the ‘escape-from-Japan’ understanding of female WHMs’ migration, and also by discussing male WHMs.

Using the existing literature as a starting point, this thesis further delves into areas still under-researched. Firstly, my whole-of-mobility approach provides clues to the crucial question of whether WHM women (and men) are seeking new happiness in Australia, whether they will find it, and how their feelings and circumstances change, or remain the same, after returning home. This approach is fruitful in that studies on the temporary migration of Japanese women (and men) have rarely looked into their actual experience of the host society, especially its impact on their return migration. Secondly, I view both female and male migrants through a gendered lens. While migrant women have become a popular subject of inquiry, migration studies in general rarely treat male migrants as gendered. In the case of Japanese migration, research findings tend to emphasise the difficulties the women face, and very few studies have examined male migrants’ gendered perspectives. The implicit assumption has been that men have it easier in Japan. But if this is the case, why are men also leaving Japan on a WH, in increasing numbers? Thirdly, I keep a firm focus on WHMs’ economic position as worker-consumers, because it is inseparable from their gendered social position. While some studies have been concerned with Japanese female migrants as consumers (e.g. Kelsky 2001), explicit exploration of class has so far been either limited, implicit, or totally omitted when it comes to youth migrants from Japan.

**The individual and the social**

Since the beginning of my investigations into the WH, I, like most other researchers of youth sojourns, have sought to understand and explain individual WHMs’ desires, motivations and behaviours, rather than undertaking a structuralist explanation of
macro-level trends in WH migration. Over the course of my research, however, the question of how and to what extent individual WHM’s agency and subjectivities are both enabled and constrained by social structures, institutions and discourses loomed ever larger. In order to illuminate the particular set of interrelationships between structure and agency which characterise Japanese WHMs’ migration to Australia, I now turn to recent theoretical discussions of agency and the self in late modernity.

While the key theorists whose work I draw on, namely Giddens and Beck, have theorised late modernity and neoliberalism based primarily on their observation of European societies, their ideas are applicable to contemporary Japan. As Rosenberger states (2001: 233), ‘Japan’s history is enmeshed with [the characteristics of modernity] through capitalist industrialization, bureaucracy and the nation-state’. The need to situate social change in Japan as part of a wider shift towards late modernity, ‘not as especially unique and different from that of the West’ was pointed out by John W. Bennett as early as 1964 (Bennett 1964: 932). The fit between European and/or American theorists’ depictions of late modernity and neoliberalism and the social circumstances faced by youth in contemporary Japan will be further explained in the next section.

‘Self’ in the individualised society: opportunities and risks for youth

Drawing on cases of young, usually unmarried migrants, existing studies of youth sojourns frequently explore how individuals seek to establish self-identity as they move across national borders. For example, Conradson and Latham (2005b: 290) described a British WH undertaken by New Zealanders as a ‘process of sustained self-experimentation, exploration and development afforded by the liminality of travel’. Such issues of identity in modernity are of great interest in the present study. ‘Youth’ are, by definition, making their transition to adulthood. As they look towards the future and engage in international mobility, their physical journey is simultaneously a journey of self-exploration. As my ethnography will show, the question of self is an important one for Japanese WHMs, and situating this question in the context of their migratory decision making and broader life trajectories reveals a great deal about the conditions under which they craft their sense of self.
The idea of self-development through international mobility is certainly not new. The Grand Tour of the 17th and 18th centuries undertaken by young European aristocrats is a famous example. Members of the élite travelled mainly around Western Europe to acquire knowledge and experience of different cultures for educational purposes, as well as for pleasure (Towner 1985). Less well-known is the working class equivalent called tramping, which allowed for learning, leisure and personal adventure (Adler 1985). In the Japanese context, privileged young men, and sometimes women and even children, travelled to the US and Europe in the 19th century, in order to cultivate understanding and new knowledge of the more technologically and militarily advanced ‘West’.  

Notwithstanding the long tradition of international travel by youth as an arena for personal growth, contemporary social characteristics create a specific environment in which such mobility takes place. One such characteristic is the individualisation of society. In modernity, the roles played in society by traditional institutions such as the local community, family and marriage have weakened (Giddens 1991: 32–34). According to Giddens, the resulting individualisation of society has impacted on the way people make transitions in their lives. Under modernity, and particularly late modernity, individuals increasingly see themselves as active agents who are responsible for their life trajectories, to the extent that their sense of self is no longer bound by birthplace or parents’ occupation. Thus, the prevailing sense is ‘We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves’ (Giddens, 1991: 75). In the absence of ritualised rites of passage, transformations of the self, such as entering into adulthood, must now occur as a result of individual reflexive processes of creating narratives of self. What to do, how to act, and who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity (Giddens, 1991: 70).

One of the major consequences of the widespread perception that ‘[the] constant thread in a changing world is self travelling a life course’ (Rosenberger 2001: 234) is the double-sided nature of opportunities/risks. The ‘freedom’ to choose one’s life

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14 A famous example is Tsuda Umeko, who was sent abroad at the age of 7 years old with four other young girls on the Iwakura Mission (Tipton 2002: 51). She later founded a girls’ school, which became today’s Tsuda College.
course can easily turn into the risk associated with navigating uncertain terrain without the guidance of tradition. Giddens (1990, 1991) thus maintains that a risk culture permeates late modernity, and people are now required to have the ability to attach meaning to their diverse, and at times fragmented experience in order to maintain a coherent life narrative.

Growing up in an individualised, self-reflexive, risk-culture society in late modernity complicates youth transition to adulthood in ways previous generations did not experience. Given that life is now perceived as a project of continuous self-fashioning, late modernity does not easily allow markers of adulthood to be accessed. At what point can young people say they have now grown up, if they are supposed to continue evolving, and if every ‘success’ is only one of the endless steps to be taken towards an ever-shifting goal post? This murkiness, in addition, occurs in the context of a prolonged period of ‘youth’. ‘Youth’ as a temporal notion has been extending as young people study longer, marry and procreate later, and as a result, remain (semi-) dependent on their birth families longer (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 8–9; Ansell 2008: 221). The increasing age of ‘youth’ is reflected by the fact that popular WH destinations such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada have all extended the age limit of applicants from 25 to 30 years old (Duncan 2004: 5). The oldest of my interlocutors was 34 years old at the time of the interview.

The shift in the late modern process of youth transition to adulthood has been metaphorically described as the railway journey being replaced by car (Roberts 1995 cited in Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 6–7). Using the example of British youths in the 1960s and 1970s, Roberts explains that joining school was akin to boarding a train, with access to a particular train depending on factors such as class, gender, ethnicity and education level. Once on the train, the destination was more or less set, and young people continued their journey along with fellow passengers. Travelling with those who shared similar characteristics allowed for an affinity and group consciousness to develop. In late modernity, the story goes, there is no more train, and young people drive cars individually. In each car, the driver faces various

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15 In a wider context, Japanese government’s statistics on ‘youth labour’ also include those between 15 and 34 years old. For example, see the research on youth employment conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare [http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/titran/roudou/koyou/young/h21/gaiyo.html](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/titran/roudou/koyou/young/h21/gaiyo.html) (last accessed 21 January 2011).
decisions alone, which highlights the importance of individual skills. But no matter how skilled a person is at driving, road conditions may change any time, so that one type of car that was reliable yesterday may become a poor choice today. The unpredictability causes a sense of risk as well as opportunity, and while drivers are generally aware of others on the road, they are taking a variety of routes to diverse destinations, and so are essentially alone on their journey.

For Giddens and his followers, this more fluid and unpredictable nature of life under late modernity means that people need to accept risks as given, ‘acknowledge that no aspects of our activities follow a predestined course...[and live] with a calculative attitude’ (Giddens 1991: 28). I am in broad agreement with the description of the late modern era as being characterised by a greater emphasis on individualised and reflexive aspects of life, and by the emergence of new risks as well as opportunities. Also, due to the availability of more diverse life courses, one’s social position such as class and gender does not necessarily determine one’s lifestyles, occupations or consumption patterns. However, some scholars, following Giddens, place excessive emphasis on individual choice and agency in late modern life. For example, in his study of lifestyle migrants, Sweetman proclaims that ‘engaging in a particular lifestyle no longer reflects our already existing status as members of a particular class, for example, but says something about what we—as individuals—have decided we want to be’ (2003: 529). Such a view over dramatises the individualisation of late modern society as if it signified a completely new trend, while ignoring the ongoing and ever-present influence of wider structural forces on the lives of individuals.

In contrast, Beck points out that although class identities have weakened in late modernity and the importance of individualised lifestyles has become more prominent, class divisions continue to mean that risks and opportunities are unevenly distributed in late modern society:

The history of risk distribution shows that, like wealth, risks adhere to the class pattern, only inversely: wealth accumulates at the top, risks are at the bottom. To that extent, risks seem to strengthen, not to abolish, the class society (1992: 35, italics in original).
Informed by Beck’s theory, I pay particular attention to structural factors that shape the physical journey of WHMs to Australia, which is simultaneously a part of their metaphorical journey towards adulthood. I echo the warning of May and Cooper (1995: 78, 79–80) that the increased visibility of images and possibilities for the self-actualisation of identity does not necessarily mean their equal availability in society. As they point out, the actualisation of the ‘self-authoring subject’ requires resources, which are not equally accessible to all (May and Cooper 1995: 79). The diversification of life courses in individualised late modern society may create new experiences and possibilities, but ‘traditionally’ influential facets of one’s identity, such as gender and ethnicity, as well as class background, still remain highly relevant. Given this, the present study inquires into the social position of Japanese WHMs and the structuring of possibilities and restrictions that they encounter as they engage in international mobility.

**Japan in the lost decade: parallel features of a late modern society**

In this thesis I am not concerned with establishing whether ‘Japanese modernity’ is the same as, or different to, ‘Western modernity’. In other words, I neither claim that Japanese modernity is unique (which runs the risk of blindly accepting ‘cultural exceptionalism’—see Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989 ‘Introduction’: xv–xvi), nor declare all modern societies to be essentially the same. Rather, it is my hope to contribute to the literature of late modernity by illustrating a set of broad, globally occurring socio-economic, political and cultural shifts through the lens of a specific society.

Most of the Japanese WHMs that I interviewed for this study belong to what has been termed the ‘lost generation,’ (ushinawareta sedai, rosuto jenerêšon, or rosujene) whose life trajectories have been heavily influenced by a period, now called the ‘lost decade’ (ushinawareta jūnen), involving the gradual collapse of the ‘bubble’ economy following the peak of the share market in December 1989. Giddens’ and Becks’ characterisations of the key features of the relationship between self-development and late modernity are strikingly apt for the ‘lost decade’ and ‘the lost generation.’
Prior to the lost decade, between the 1960s and the late 1980s Japan’s manufacturing economy thrived, living standards improved, and upward social mobility was a real possibility for a large number of youths. As will be reviewed in the next chapter, the dominant social aspirations of the time were embodied in the ideal of the ‘salaryman’, whose breadwinner role at home was supported by his housewife partner, employer and the state. During this era, the ‘rail tracks’ towards adulthood, and specifically the ideal of the ‘salaryman’ and his family, were laid out in a relatively orderly manner, and a linear pattern from education to workplace, marriage and family formation was normalised to support a particular economic system, and vice versa (Brinton 2008: 26–34, 55–59). This was certainly the case for the middle-classes, but also increasingly for the working class since the 1960s. For instance, the recruitment of new graduates, in-house job training and the lifetime employment system—all of which are important building blocks of the white-collar ‘salaryman’ style employment system—had been applied to the blue-collar workers in the expanding manufacturing sectors (Brinton 2008: 58). This is not to say that the ‘salaryman’ ideal was achieved by all. However, the ideal was clear, as were the steps required to achieve it, and the life trajectories of relatively large numbers of people were characterised by the achievements set out under the ‘salaryman’ ideal.

While a shift to a post-Fordist, post-industrial economy and a stronger emphasis on the ‘freedom’ to craft individualised and ‘unique’ life paths had already been evident since at least the mid-1980s, serious economic downturn in the lost decade exacerbated these tendencies, and increased the risks and difficulties associated with the crafting of any and all life paths. The general shift to a post-Fordist, post-industrial economy, the rise of neoliberalism, and Japan’s economic stagnation combined forces to exert great influence on the ways in which young people lived and imagined their lives. The lost generation was the first group of young people to face economic recession since the post-war period, and are associated with what is called the employment ice age (shūshoku hyōgaki).16 This popular term conveys the difficulty of finding attractive, if any, full-time graduate positions in the tight recruitment market of the lost decade. Those with a high school certificate or less suffered even more than the university graduates (see chapter 2 for a more detailed

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16 This term was invented in 1992 by a recruitment magazine Shūshoku Jānaru, and became popular to the extent that it was selected as the buzzword of the year in 1994.
discussion of the lost generation and their socio-economic circumstances). As the previously common transition to adulthood became less accessible, this generation of Japanese youths ventured into an unknown territory where past practices no longer applied in the same manner, but new patterns had not yet been established. Perceptions of risks became paramount. Thus, examining the case of lost generation WHMs from Japan is a particularly fitting way of addressing questions about the impact of specific social circumstances on youth temporary migration, because their migratory experiences cross not only the border between two late modern societies, but also between modern and late modern social practices in Japan; a shift which has hit the young generation fully and in a particular way.

For the purpose of the present study, the membership of the lost generation covers those who were born between 1970 and 1982 in the case of four-year university graduates, and between 1973 and 1985 in the case of high school leavers. For this group, sudden economic stagnation led to fundamental changes in social expectations and practices, and a simple return to past practices is unlikely. The Global Financial Crisis in 2008 has since threatened Japan’s economic recovery, and future crises are already expected. For this reason, although I use the time-specific term ‘lost generation’ and ‘lost decade’, the kind of changes and new social trends I describe and refer to in this thesis apply also to the post-lost-decade period in Japan, during which some of my interlocutors experienced their Australian WH and return to Japan.

Consumption, labour and neoliberal governmentality

The characteristics of late modernity that are central to this thesis—the individualisation of society, reflexive self-making and a risk culture—are closely intertwined with shifting practices of capitalism. As Harvey explains, under advanced capitalism, enterprises have sought to increase their profits through two distinctive means. First, they have tried to speed up and decrease the costs involved in production. Strategies such as sub-contracting, ‘outsourcing’, small-batch production, the ‘just-in-time’ inventory-flows delivery system, and relocation to under-developed areas have all contributed to cutting production costs (Harvey

\[17\] This is based on the understanding that 1992 was the first year of the employment ice age, and 2004 was the last.
1990: 147, 153, 155–156). Among a variety of strategies used, the changes made to the labour force are the most relevant to my discussion. In the context of weakening trade union influence, Japanese employers have ‘flexibilised’ the labour force. Irregular shifts, increased reliance on part-time workers, temporary contracts and sub-contracting have become a common practice (Harvey 1990: 150). In other words, the pathways to the ‘salaryman’ style permanent workforce have been reduced or dissolved. Those lucky enough to be in such a workforce are now expected to become flexible in their own roles (Harvey 1990: 150). The increased use of women’s labour as irregular employees has been another strategy (Harvey 1990: 153, 155). This aspect of capitalism combined with economic downturn had an enormous impact on the ‘lost generation’ of Japanese youth. In chapter 4, I will discuss this impact in more detail.

Second, they have sought to increase and speed up consumption. There is a close connection between this aspect of advanced capitalism and what Giddens refers to as the ‘openness’ of social life in late modernity (Giddens 1991: 5), in which lifestyle choice has increasingly become important in the constitution of identity and daily activity. As capitalist enterprises seek to maximise consumption, ‘lifestyle choice’ has come to be more or less equated with consumer choice. The market increasingly moulds what lifestyle options become available, and thus highly commodified lifestyle choices become major elements of individual narratives of self (Giddens 1991: 197). As Harvey explains, ‘rampant individualism fits into place as a necessity, though not a sufficient, condition for the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation’ (Harvey 1990: 171). Whereas early capitalism promoted individualism in terms of employment (e.g. freedom of contract and mobility), individual consumption is the driving force of capitalist markets in late modernity (Giddens 1991: 197).

It is worth noting, furthermore, that the service sector accommodates the market need for fast-moving, perpetual consumption in a way that durable material goods cannot (Harvey 1990: 157). As a ‘service product’, youth international mobility has certainly become highly commodified, notably through professionalisation and institutionalisation (Baranowski and Furlough 2001: 6, Simpson 2005: 449–455 and 464–467). It is no surprise then, that the migration industry is one of the
fastest growing international businesses (Castles 2007: 361). The proliferation of
the WH as a consumer product must be situated in this changing market context. I
will discuss in chapter 3 the tension between the diversity of lifestyles created by
the consumption patterns of advanced capitalism, and what Giddens refers to as

According to Bauman, in heavily consumption-orientated late modern society, the
nature and meanings associated with labour have also changed. Before late
modernity, he argues, the work ethic emphasised equality among jobs of all kinds,
because whatever the job, the ‘feeling of a duty fulfilled’ was valued and ultimately
brought satisfaction to workers (Bauman 1998: 33). However, the effect of
consumer culture has been that the importance of the work ethic has been de-
emphasised, in the shadow of the ‘aesthetic scrutiny and evaluation’ of work
(Bauman 1998: 33). The result is the division between two kinds of work: professions
that allow aesthetic experience (artistic, interesting, exciting, adventurous, inducing sensations) and jobs performed out of necessity (boring, monotonous, repetitive, routine, allowing for no initiatives or challenges) (Bauman
1998: 33–34). In short, different values are attached to occupations based on a new
set of criteria in late modern consumer society. This shift to the aestheticisation of
work has blurred the boundaries between labour and leisure, and those who access
‘interesting professions’ have been rewarded with the privilege of finding
satisfaction in their work (Bauman 1998: 34). Under such a condition, both
consumption and labour have become activities of entrepreneurial individuals who
seek to achieve self-actualisation.

In the Japanese social context, the new emphasis on work as an aesthetic matter
and a means of developing desirable self-identity is expressed in the discourse of
_yaritaikoto_ (literally ‘what one wishes to do’, implying, in the context relevant to
this study, personal passion for a particular vocation). As the number of non-
regular workers (_furitā_) has risen and life choices have diversified, many young

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10 For example, Kukimoto’s study (2003: 79) quotes a 21 year old female who explains ‘If
it’s a workplace or an occupation that I can make use of my passion for, I’d love to be
employed” (jibun no yaritaikoto ga ikaseru shokuba toka shokugyō deshitara, sugoku
shūshoku shitainodesu yo). The popular term _ikigai_ (‘a reason for living’) contrasts with
the term _yaritaikoto_ in that while both terms can refer to an activity, _ikigai_ can also be about a
non-activity, such as one’s children (kodomotachi dake ga watashi no ikigai desu, or ‘My
children are the only reason for living’).
workers in recent decades seem to pursue vocations or professions that are related to their passion, and to which they can fully devote themselves. The discourse of *yaritaikoto* simultaneously expresses the ‘freedom of choice’ of life paths, aestheticisation of labour, and an increasing demand for young people to find vocations, rather than simply following conventions. Some *furitās* embrace the neoliberalistic discourse of self-responsibility and self-cultivation to moralise the issue. These young casual workers divide themselves between the ‘good *furitā*’ who remain in precarious employment in order to pursue their *yaritaikoto*, and the ‘bad *furitā*’ who do not strive to find meaning in their lives (Kukimoto 2003 79–81). In other words, the discourse of *yaritaikoto* is fused with the idea of self-making through cultivation of one’s ‘unique’ life course, and indicates how ‘personal’ choice of vocation has become a moral issue for each individual youth to grapple with, as they make their transition to adulthood. Chapter 4 will further discuss this discourse in the context of the lost generation workers.

Starting in the late 1970s and more obviously so since the 1980s, the driving force behind shifting ideas and practices of consumption and labour in late modernity has been neoliberalism (Harvey 2005: 2–3, 13). Song defines neoliberalism as ‘an advanced liberal mode of social governing that idealizes efficiency and productivity by promoting people’s free will and self-sufficiency’ (Song 2009: x). This form of governance is linked to practices of advanced capitalism, and manifests in practices surrounding the commodification of international mobility, aestheticised labour, and ‘flexible’ employment markets. Below, I will discuss some key aspects of neoliberalism in order to highlight their connection to my concerns regarding young people living in individualised, self-reflexive, risk-conscious late modernity.

In the contemporary world, the late modern emphasis on identity as a continuous project of self-reflexivity has been manifested through ‘a culture of enterprise and

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19 Young Japanese workers may be trapped in moral double bind (Inui 2002: 20). They are judged as inferior or even irresponsible if they do not establish clear strategies to build their unique path towards self-actualisation. They are also damned if they persist in their pursuit of true vocational passion, because this may be seen, by those who follow expectations of the previous generation, as rejecting ‘traditional’ adult responsibilities, such as stable employment and family formation. Chapter 5 explores this tension between different social expectations that exist in Japan, and its impact on WHMs.

20 According to David Harvey (2005: 13), a neoliberal turn in political and economic thinking and practices began in the 1970s, and it was the articulation of the ‘Washington Consensus’ in the 1990s that made neoliberalism a ‘new orthodoxy’.
responsible autonomy’ strongly encouraged by neoliberalism (Dean 1999: 210). The neoliberal self is also a ‘free’ individual who makes choices regarding consumer items, occupation and lifestyle. The term ‘choice’ implies a decision-making exercise in developing a ‘unique’ life plan, which is the ‘substantial content of the reflexively organised trajectory of the self’ (Giddens 1991: 85). Not only individualistic and self-reflexive, late modern consumers are, then, also constructed as ‘autonomous, self-regulating and self-actualising individual actors [who seek] to maximise their ‘quality of life’ (du Gay 1996: 77).

The concept of ‘governmentality’ helps to further illuminate the relationship between the neoliberal brand of individual freedom and advanced capitalism driven by speedy consumption and flexible production. Called by Foucault as the ‘conduct of conduct’ (1982: 220–221), governmentality is about shaping human conduct through techniques and forms of knowledge. Such techniques and forms of discipline are non-repressive, and deployed by the state and other institutions (Ong 1999: 265). Governmentality is not only about the imposition of rules on others, but also on oneself. The neoliberal emphasis on the self-actualising, autonomous and free represents a shift in governmentality from the state’s imposition of rules on passive subjects to individual subjects who discipline themselves. While the freedom of the individual began to be an integral part of social governance under liberalism, neoliberalism has given rise to a ‘new way of understanding and acting upon human beings as subjects of freedom’ (Rose 1999: 84).

Individuals living in the age of neoliberalism are obliged to view their lives as built by a series of choices, and therefore, they must continuously choose (Rose 1999: 87). The idea of self-governing becomes a matter of morality, as individuals are required to be capable of regulating their own conduct in their daily lives. This perfectly fits the late modern treatment of life as a reflexive project, because the content of self-governing is individuals’ continuous analysis and questioning of their conduct—‘in order to better govern themselves’ (Dean 1999: 12).

In Japan, neoliberal discourse, stressing the role of the self-responsible individual, has been gaining public prominence since the 1980s (Hashimoto 1996: 166), and especially since the start of the 1990s. Thus, in discussing Japan’s future in a
globalising world, a report delivered to the then Prime Minister Obuchi in 2000 states:

In the twenty-first century, whose salient feature will be diversity in the context of the trends of globalization and the information-technology revolution, the bedrock imperative is that the Japanese empower themselves as individuals, that they possess a robust individuality. The kind of individual needed is, above all, one who acts freely and with self-responsibility, self-reliantly supporting him- or herself. This tough yet flexible individual takes risks on his or her own responsibility and tackles the challenge of achieving personal goals with a pioneer spirit.\(^{21}\)

The underlying philosophy is that, while people are ‘free’ to make use of existing opportunities, and actively cultivate new ones, each person is required to carry the burden of risks, even when these risks are structurally thrust upon them. In changing socio-economic circumstances, youth are now expected to navigate what seems like an increasingly complex and risky terrain towards adulthood, and any delay or failure is squarely blamed on their perceived lack of initiative, endurance and determination.\(^ {22}\) The moralistic and perilous nature of self-making under neoliberal late modernity affects all young people in Japan, from university graduates to full-time regular employees (Kukimoto 2003: 86). As Satsuka (2009: 79) notes:

...in post-Cold War, post-bubble economy Japan, the pursuit of individual subjectivity and freedom was taken over by the neoliberal camp, with the discourse of self-responsibility and independence from state welfare and protection.

Despite the rhetoric of individual freedom and personal choices, ‘autonomous’ subjects are, in reality, highly influenced by external pressures to adopt certain identities, most often through consumption. In discussing young people in late modernity, Ansell (2008: 221) notes that:


\(^{22}\) A similar tendency has also been found in countries such as the UK where the Blair government’s Welfare to Work policy demonised youth who seemed to lack initiatives to access job training or employment (Shibuya 2003: 51–52).
[t]ime is supposed to be used in ‘constructive’ activities, the organisation of which is increasingly commodified. Constructing a successful middle-class identity takes time, effort, and money.

In the Japanese context, the consumer market of the post-war period saw a politicised pursuit of individual pleasure as a reaction against the wartime, nationalist repression of individual interests and expressions of personal aesthetics (Oguma 2002 cited in Satsuka 2009: 75). The market flourished during the subsequent economic growth of the 1960s and 1970s, and has since shifted from material goods to quality experience (Kelly 1992: 78–79). As an attractive experience one can purchase, international mobility gained popularity. In this sense, Japanese WHMs can be seen as consuming overseas experience, both as part of the reflexive narrativisation of their life, and because travel is a valued commodity in the Japanese market.

The dominating role of consumerism has led some theorists to be highly pessimistic about self-development under late modernity. For example, Bauman likens the formation of self in late modernity to ‘shopping around in the supermarket of identities’ (2000: 83) where everything from clothes to skills is up for grabs (Bauman 2000: 74). He claims that the act of consumption can only bring fleeting satisfaction, and the consumer-individual becomes so entangled in perpetual consumption that reaching the goal of self-actualisation actually deprives people of the ‘freedom to become somebody’ (Bauman 2000: 62). My ethnographic data suggest, however, that Bauman exaggerates the extent to which self-development is driven by consumption. Interviews with Japanese WHMs indicate that they see the WH as an opportunity for development through labour and work upon the self, as much as for consumption. Consequently, I argue that close attention needs to be paid to labour as well as to consumption as sources of identity and fulfilment in life for young people in late modernity. By exploring the link between Japanese WHMs’ identity construction through international migration, and consumption and labour in the age of neoliberalism, this thesis joins accumulating works on neoliberalism in non-Western societies (Ong 1999; Shibuya 2003; Arai 2005; Honda and Hirai 2007; Song 2009; Takeyama 2010).
Cultural capital as a tool of self-advancement

I situate Japanese WHMs’ international mobility as part of a life-long project of self-making. Social, symbolic, and, in particular, cultural capital are useful concepts for further developing insights into the role of the WH in this project. Following Bourdieu, social capital is a membership in a group that is socially valued, and therefore able to provide its members certain credentials (Bourdieu 1986: 248–249). Cultural capital represents behavioural dispositions, culturally valued knowledge, and social and physical characteristics (Bourdieu 1986: 243–248). As Hage sums up (1998: 53), these things are ‘material and symbolic goods constructed as valuable within a given field’.

Like money, cultural capital is not accumulated for its absolute value—its desirability comes from the fact that it can be exchanged with symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is ‘the acquisition of an image or reputation for competence, respectability and honorability that are easily converted into political positions as a local or national notable’ (Bourdieu 1984: 291). All forms of capital can be converted into other forms of capital. For example, English language ability is a type of cultural capital popularly sought after in Japan. When this ability is used to obtain a well-paid job at a Tokyo branch of a well-known foreign corporation, this can be interpreted as conversion of cultural capital into symbolic and economic capital. The symbolic capital may further lead to the accumulation of social capital, in the form of professional networks with powerful figures.

Three important aspects of Bourdieu’s concept of capital are relevant to the concerns of this thesis. First, the acquisition of capital often entails personal investment in self-improvement that costs time and energy (Bourdieu 1986: 244). For instance, English language acquisition is a lengthy process through which one embodies a new set of linguistic, behavioural and cultural rules. In chapters 5 and 6, I will detail how my interlocutors frequently overlooked the time-consuming nature of this process, and what effects this had on their sense of self, and their plans for capital conversion. Second, capital is acquired in order to gain social distinction, such as a prestigious job, greater wealth and personal connections with powerful people. Capital can, in other words, ‘define life chances or social
trajectory’ (Ong 1999: 90). My interest centres around the role of international mobility in Japanese youth’s attempts at acquiring capital, and on how this contributes to their self-making and transition to adulthood. Third, because capital is finite and access to it is unequally distributed in society, its accumulation is competitive by nature. Struggles and manoeuvres of capital accumulation and conversion can usefully be imagined with the concept of a ‘field’. The field ‘is a market-like structure in which individual and collective subjects are involved in various competitive and conflictual struggles over the accumulation and the deployment of modalities of ‘capital’ (Hage 1998: 53). That is, the field is characterised by socially and culturally defined power relations.

A number of migration studies have discussed the ways in which migrants seek to accumulate capital through mobility. For example, Ansell (2008: 221–222) draws attention to the symbolic capital associated with ‘cultural tourism’, and how middle-class youth seek to gain social distinction based on cosmopolitan identity and increased access to certain employment options. However, as Ong (1999) illustrates, the conversion of capital is not always automatic, and can be limited. She found that the attempt of Chinese elite migrants in the US to convert their cultural capital, such as a Harvard MBA and a Mercedes-Benz, into American symbolic capital was limited, because their skin colour acted as negative cultural capital among America’s upper-class elites. This is because the symbolic capital sought by the Chinese does not match its embodiment, which makes it difficult for Asian migrants to be imagined as a socially prestigious, desired citizen (Ong 1999: 92). This example illustrates the important characteristic of cultural capital, which does not possess absolute, quantifiable value but it only possesses value in exchange and the exchange is a social struggle as much as a struggle of cultural value judgment’ (Robbins 2005: 23).

I view Japanese WHMs as people who seek, through migration, to accumulate forms of capital in the field of cosmopolitanism: a field that consists of a set of ideas, beliefs and practices relating to ‘desirable foreignness.’ As discussed further in chapter 3, I use the term cosmopolitanism with an understanding that a type of populist cosmopolitanism (Satsuka 2009: 79) operates in Japan. That is, there is an everyday desire for something that signifies the transcendence of restrictions
imposed on life possibilities by the nation. At times, the cause of one’s dissatisfaction with life is imagined as deriving from Japanese social restrictions, which constrain individuals in the narrow range of life options available to them. This gives rise to ‘the image of an ideal place elsewhere outside Japan’ and ‘the cosmopolitan dream of living in an ideal space transcending national boundaries’ (Satsuka 2990: 79). Such a longing for worldliness is in contrast with the elitist practice of freely enjoying frequent physical movements across borders. Japanese WHMs often exhibit this longing for worldliness, but they are certainly not a globetrotting ‘jet set’ (Phillips and Smith 2008: 394; Hannerz 2003). There is no directly corresponding Japanese term to ‘cosmopolitanism’ (which, as will become clear in chapter 3, is different from ‘internationalisation’ or ‘globalisation’), and my interlocutors variously described their aspirations and desires regarding worldliness, such as by saying ‘I want to speak English’ or ‘I want to make friends from all over the world’. Still, I use the term cosmopolitanism, because it best evokes, in English, the desire to be at the centre of the global activities and imaginings.

For my interlocutors, the global centre stage existed somewhere outside of Japan. At the core of this imagination is the legacy of Euro-American colonialism, symbolised by the status of the English language as an international lingua franca, and the racialised image of Euro-American whiteness. In the majority of accounts given by the youth who chose to go on an Australian WH, being cosmopolitan and Euro-American were one and the same thing. To express this tendency, I use the capitalised ‘West’ (used hereafter without the quotation marks) in this thesis to refer to the Japanese discursive construction of this imagined centre of the world stage. Similarly, I used the term ‘Westerners’ to evoke the popular image of white, English-speaking people who lead this imagined West, and who are thus associated with modernity, progress and advancement. What drives the WHMs’ pursuit of cosmopolitanism-as-Westernisation for their project of self-improvement? How does this project change as they gain lived experience of Australia? Various references that the WHMs made to the West will illustrate the power of its culturally and discursively constructed image over the youth, but also its less-than-monolithic nature.
The field of cosmopolitanism is a rich site in which to consider the nature of late modern self-making as driven by, but involving much more than, consumption. Certainly, populist or banal cosmopolitanism is often considered to be about satisfying a shallow consumer hunger for global images, products, and international travel. This perception invites criticism of an apparent lack of commitment to such things as world peace, environmental protection and other more ‘noble’ global issues (Matthews and Sidhu 2005: 53). However, my ethnographic data present a picture in which the line between seeking ‘fashionable’ cosmopolitan images and genuinely wanting to have a real impact on the world is sometimes a fine one. I argue that, rather than distinguishing between shallow and/or meaningless consumer desire and noble passion, seeing various manifestations of cosmopolitan desires and aspirations as simultaneously forming part of the self-making of young Japanese WHMs will lead to a more nuanced understanding of identity formation.

Also fundamental to my discussion is that cosmopolitanism as an object of consumption is intertwined with the attraction of cosmopolitan jobs as an aestheticised form of labour. The analysis of impediments to young people’s capital accumulation and conversion in this field brings to light their fundamentally limited position in neoliberal society as young consumers-workers. Who has the right to engage in an aesthetically valued form of labour? Why are so many Japanese WHMs excluded from such a ‘privilege’, both in Japan and Australia?

**Self-transformation and agency**

While the concept of cultural capital is a useful instrument, its heavy reliance on market logic arguably comes at the expense of other important aspects of human behaviour. In particular, Bourdieu’s main interest is in the way in which people are guided by their self-reproducing habitus—‘one’s historically acquired structure of personality’ (Hage 1998: 54)—to maximise capital accumulation. This emphasis has certain consequences on the depiction of human agency. Firstly, this idea is ‘largely utilitarian and economicist’ and the intentional subject is eclipsed by this structuralist emphasis (Ortner 1996: 4, 11). Also, the image of the self that emerges from Bourdieu’s concept of capital scarcely allows for the possibility that

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23 Ong’s study (1999) counterbalanced this tendency by highlighting the deliberate attempt of Chinese élitist migrants to accumulate certain forms of Euro-American cultural capital.
the process of capital accumulation and conversion can itself challenge and even alter the existing sense of self. When capital accumulation is considered to be part of largely unconscious (class) reproduction, this process seems too automatic and driven without the individual’s consciousness. On the other hand, when the focus is on the deliberate pursuit of capital, the individual tends to be portrayed as highly calculating, which downplays the often messy, spontaneous and improvised nature of human behaviour.

In this thesis I pay attention to the mix of diverse factors impacting on migrants’ enactment of agency, how agency plays out in practice and what it says about the world in which my interlocutors live. In order to capture both individual agency and the influence of wider factors that enable and limit the enactment of individual desires and aspirations, I draw on Ortner’s concept of agency. She argues that agency involves not only the conscious intentionality possessed by heroic individuals, but:

...the idea of agency [...] is precisely concerned with the mediation between conscious intention and embodied habituses, between conscious motives and unexpected outcomes, between historically marked individuals and events on the one hand, and the cumulative reproductions and transformations that are the results of everyday practices on the other. ( Ortner 2001: 77)

Among multiple forms of agency, she identifies two types: the agency of power and the agency of projects (Ortner 2001: 77–79, 2006: 143–147). The former is about power which people exercise to influence and have control over others and themselves, and includes domination and resistance. The latter is about people’s capacity to make and enact ‘projects’. These projects are always culturally constituted, but the pursuit of them highlights people’s desires and intentions. This type of agency often takes the form of individual ‘goals’ in life, such as having a fulfilling career or getting married (Ortner 2006: 144). Because these projects involve intentionality, Ortner also calls this type of agency the ‘agency of intentions’ (2001: 79). Intentionality is defined as ‘the ways in which people’s action is cognitively and emotionally pointed toward some purpose’ (Ortner 2006: 134).

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24 Ortner’s use of the term ‘project’ differs from Giddens, who uses the term to highlight the notion of the modern life course as entailing a series of steps mapped out by the individual (e.g. Giddens 1991: 5, 9).
It is important to grasp that this intentionality is not to be equated to planning and scheming with a high level of consciousness. That may certainly be one form of intentionality, but at other times, it can be ‘more nebulous aims, goals, and ideas’ or ‘desires, wants, and needs that may range from being deeply buried to quite consciously felt’ (Ortner 2006: 134). That is to say, the self as reflexive agent co-exists with its habitus and unconsciousness (Ortner 2006: 110–111).

To aptly imagine social life as the enactment of competing interests as embodied by individuals with varying degrees of power and diverse intentions, I rely on Ortner’s metaphor of ‘serious games’ (Ortner 1996: 12–13, 1999: 23–4, 35, 150). She explains (1999: 35) that:

the idea of the game [is] a way of thinking about the way in which people are defined and constrained by the intersections of culture, power and history in which they find themselves, and yet at the same time are active players in making (and sometimes remaking) those worlds that have made them.

The term ‘serious’ expresses that the ‘games’ people play may have profound importance to their existence (Ortner 1999: 23). The concept of games also allows room for change, because people often follow the rules and therefore reproduce the games, but they may also modify them or introduce new ones.25

‘Project’ and ‘serious games’ are useful concepts for this study. A playing field of a game is constituted by various players who are enmeshed in a web of social relations. Each player pursues their own agendas (projects), sometimes alone, and at other times with other players. Their projects are socially, culturally and historically shaped, and the ability to advance these projects (the capacity to exercise agency) is differentiated due to power relations. These power relations, in addition, may shift or persist. As diverse actors engage in a wide range of projects, their advancement inevitably creates situations of dominance and resistance (Ortner 2006: 147, 149, 151). One person’s pursuit of a project may have the effect

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25 Existing power relations among players of games can also be changed or de-stabilised by what Ortner calls “externalities” (2006: 149). Examples in the context of international migration would be the development of transport between two countries (e.g. Tanno 2003: 208–210) and changes to visa categories.
of dominating others, while another’s resistance against such a dominating force is simultaneously a pursuit of their own project. Using this imagery, the present study will investigate what projects Japanese WHMs pursue, and how their serious games of self-making ‘collide with, encompass, or are bent to the service of, other games’ (Ortner 1996: 19).

**Summary of the aim and main questions of this thesis**

Using the case of Japanese participants in the Australian WH, in this thesis I explore the role that temporary migration plays in young people’s self-making in the transition to adulthood in the late-modern, neoliberal world. Through this exploration, I venture into several under-researched, yet fascinating areas: I investigate the WH as an exemplar of contemporary international mobility. I analyse youth temporary migrants from a post-industrial society as occupying classed, gendered and ethnicised subject positions, and focus on the intersection of economic and non-economic factors in migratory decision making and experience. I bring to the fore the issue of labour in an unlikely context of youth mobility between developed economies, and I treat different ‘stages’ of migration as a cumulative whole, as well as part of a wider life trajectory. The main questions I ask are:

- What are the social, cultural and historical factors that make the Australian WH attractive to Japanese youth in the 1990s and 2000s?
- What projects do Japanese youth pursue for the purpose of self-development through the WH, and what forms of capital do they seek to accumulate while in Australia?
- What power relations characterise the social positioning of the WHMs as temporary migrants in Australia? How does this positioning affect the young people’s exercise of agency and their experience of the WHM?
- What are the main factors that impact on WHMs’ access to fulfilment through employment upon returning to the Japanese labour market? How does the limited capital accumulation and conversion that they experience affect their feelings about, and plans for the future?
By asking these questions, I illustrate the mechanisms through which certain discourses and socio-economic practices are shaped by global forces, and how individual WHMs variously reproduce, conform to and resist such forces. In other words, this thesis is a micro-level study of individual motivations, desires and agency, which highlights the ways in which structural positions both enable and constrain individual desires and agency. I now turn to the methods and approaches I employ to address my main research questions.

**Methodology**

I can broadly describe the type of ethnography conducted for this thesis as ‘documentary ethnography’, which is about ‘[entering] relatively small life-worlds and examining how large-scale social forces work themselves out in everyday life’ (Ortner 1995: 258). I conducted eight months fieldwork in Australia from January to August 2006, then in Japan from September 2006 to March 2007. Sydney and Tokyo were my main field sites. Both during the fieldwork and subsequently, additional opportunistic visits were made to a variety of places including Melbourne, Osaka, two regional towns in Japan and two rural areas in Australia.

Because my study is about Japanese WH migrants in Australia whose ‘community’ is neither geographically based nor always recognised as such by the migrants themselves, semi-structured, in-depth interviews formed the main source of information. My primary target was Japanese WHMs residing in Australia, and those who have returned to Japan. I was also interested in those preparing to leave for Australia, mainly because of curiosity as to whether retrospective accounts of the pre-departure period by those already in the destination significantly differed from those of the pre-departure group.

Participant observation also provided me with invaluable insights. It involved attending events targeting WHMs, other Japanese migrants, or returnee WHMs (e.g. an annual summer matsuri festival in Sydney, an ‘Australian party’ hosted by the Japanese Association of Working Holiday Makers in Tokyo), visiting migration agency offices and browsing their notice boards, going to interlocutors’ homes and workplaces, and generally socialising with them in their everyday environment.
Interlocutors’ selection of interview venues also gave me glimpses of the places they frequented. Throughout my fieldwork and beyond, electronic communication was a vital tool to gain insight into the ‘culture’ of WHMs, as well as starting, cultivating and maintaining relationships with them. Mobile phones and the Internet were my primary means of establishing and maintaining contact with interlocutors. I also monitored websites targeting WHMs in Australia (both non-profit ‘community’ and business), personal blogs by former and current WHMs, Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Mixi (the Japanese predecessor to, and roughly in the same category as, Facebook) and G’DayMate (for Japanese people with ties to Australia). Observing these online activities helped familiarise myself with the world of WHMs, both on and offline.

**Field sites**

Time restrictions meant that by choosing to split the fieldwork between two countries, opportunities to observe and engage in certain aspects of WHMs’ lives, such as their movements within Australia, had to be sacrificed. Hage points out in his critique of multi-sited ethnography that there is a physical and emotional limit to the number of field sites in which one can immerse oneself, if one is to research in a thorough and involved manner (2005: 466). This certainly rang true in my case. I utilised a number of factors to my advantage, so as to counter the hectic nature of conducting fieldwork in two countries that threatened superficial engagement. Firstly, the two largest cities of the two countries, Sydney and Tokyo, were specifically chosen. This was because Sydney has the largest number of Japanese residents, including WHMs (see chapter 2 below for a detailed discussion of the Japanese population in Australia). Tokyo was also a reasonable place to choose, as its sheer population meant that I had a great chance of finding returnees. By situating myself in these cities, I was able to catch stories of mobile and transient WHMs as they came and went, as well as form longer relationships with those who stayed around. Subsequent opportunistic visits to other localities, especially the rural areas where WHMs worked as seasonal workers, fleshed out the stories that I was constructing from interview narratives.
I also had a significant advantage in having called both field sites home in the past. This experience positioned me as both an insider and outsider in relation to my interlocutors, and this undoubtedly shaped the kind of data I collected.\footnote{Researchers such as Kondo (1990), Abu-Lughod (1991), Narayan (1993) and Mullings (1999) have all worked on the issue of the researcher’s position as a simultaneous insider and an outsider.} In a practical sense, my ‘insider-ness’ worked in my favour as I was already familiar with the fieldwork sites, in both geographical and cultural senses. For example, my prior knowledge of popular places and media outlets for Japanese WHMs in Sydney helped me locate major WHM ‘hotspots’ to begin my fieldwork and the recruitment process. Being a fluent user of the Japanese language was obviously an enormous advantage, for it was the strongest boundary marker of the social world of Japanese WHMs. All my communications with my interlocutors were in Japanese, and Japanese-language media in Australia, especially newspapers and websites\footnote{At the time of the fieldwork, there were four Japanese-language community newspapers. They included Nichigo Press, the only nationally-circulated monthly paper, Cheers, a newer monthly paper targeting a younger Japanese audience in Sydney, and Japaralia, a glossy monthly magazine, and Jenta, a weekly paper with ties to a newspaper in Japan. While all these papers host websites, particularly popular are http://top.25today.com/ by Nichigo Press and www.cheers.com.au/ by Cheers, www.jams.tv is another very popular website, with extensive classified sections.}, were vital sources of information.

My ‘field sites’ were neither geographically nor temporarily isolated from the ‘non-field sites’ in my life, and the boundary between the field and the non-field was further blurred by electronic communication. The consequence, unanticipated at the commencement of the research, was that my relationship with interlocutors, and my psychological presence in the field lasted long after I packed my bags to return ‘home’ to begin the writing process. This provided me with opportunities to continue my observation of the WHMs’ activities, shifting thoughts and future plans. Okely (2007: 69) discusses ethnography as an embodied experience, and uses the examples of a difficult walk through tropical forests and learning to milk cows in Normandy as a way of participating through labour. In contrast, my post-fieldwork presence in ‘the field’ via emails, text messages and phone calls felt distinctly disembodied.
**Interviews**

I recruited interviewees by placing advertisements on websites, in community publications, at migration agent offices and through the snowball method. Interviews were conducted in Japanese, and in public places chosen by the interviewees, such as cafés. Apart from collecting basic socio-demographic data and each person’s history of international movements, I asked questions concerning motivations for the WH experience in Australia, and life prior to arrival (and in the case of returnees, upon returning to Japan). Where permitted by interlocutors or by the social context, I recorded interviews. Otherwise, I engaged in vigorous note taking, and wherever I could, reproduced the exact words of my interlocutors.

I conducted interviews with 24 WHMs in Australia, 18 returnee WHMs in Japan, and two would-be WHMs in preparation. Among the total of 44 former/current/future WHMs, 10 were interviewed in both Japan and Australia. The length of time they had spent in Australia ranged from three months to eighteen months, but one year was by far the most common length of stay.\(^{28}\) All left Japan after 2003, and those who returned did so between 2004 and 2007. For this reason, my data contain both shorter and longer experiences of life after the WH, allowing me to observe various stages of return and self-reflection. Of the 44 WHM interviewees, 21 were female and 23 were male. I ensured that the gender ratio in my data was approximately equal, even though female WHMs generally outnumber men. This was because I sought to understand gender relations as perceived and experienced by the migrants of both sexes. Interviewees were typical of the overall profile of the WHMs in being in their mid-20s to early 30s (DIAC 2007). Additional interviews I conducted included six with Japanese migration agents in Australia.

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\(^{28}\) Some interlocutors who were interviewed towards the end of my study were still undertaking their second WH, and it is possible they stayed on after my fieldwork, to complete a full two years in Australia.
and Japan (three in each field), and four in Japan with former WHMs who went to Australia in the 1980s.29

I sought consent to interviews by two means. One was by asking the interlocutors to sign a consent form, and the other was to explain verbally the interlocutors’ rights to withhold any information, not answer questions and withdraw from the study at any point, without any repercussions. I recorded myself with an IC recorder while I gave the explanation. Where permitted by the interviewee, I taped the interview after explaining that the taped interview was confidential, used for my analysis only, and nobody else had access to it. In all interviews, I took notes, with the permission of the interviewee. All interlocutor names in this thesis are pseudonymous, and all interview quotes are my own translation. During the fieldwork, I had casual conversations with potential interlocutors in various settings, such as at migration agent offices, community events and known informants’ residence. When I first came into contact with individuals for the purpose of my research, I always disclosed the fact that I was conducting research so that the purpose of my interactions with them was clear. I did not seek to tape such interactions, and sometimes took notes afterwards.

The interview context in Australia frequently provided space for me to observe WHMs beyond their discursive self-representation. For example, I could observe how WHMs interacted with other people, such as waitpersons at a café, or their WHM friends on the phone. Their command of English was also observable at such times. Sometimes, our presence in public invited spontaneous interactions from a variety of people (e.g. interlocutors’ friends who were passing by; men who tried to flirt with a female interlocutor), and such occasions provided further opportunities for interaction beyond the interview dialogues. Subsequent conversations about these occasions also helped me develop my understanding of interlocutors.

29 I also interviewed a total of 18 full-time students and workers (nine in each country), because my study was initially not restricted to WHMs. Although not directly used in the present study, data from this group shaped my research, by indicating similarities among variously mobile Japanese youth, and also important differences that later highlighted the distinct environment in which WHMs find themselves. Some of those I interviewed in Sydney were former WHMs who switched to a different visa status. Their stories presented trajectories that some of my WHM interlocutors might have taken, had they stayed in Australia.
My recruitment method meant that I mostly interviewed people whom I had never met before, with a few exceptions. In hindsight, this may have meant that interlocutors were less likely to initiate frank discussions of topics falling outside of the dominant heteronormativity in Japan and Australia. The majority of my interlocutors proactively offered accounts that suggested their heterosexual orientation, and their questions and comments about me as an interviewer/migrant also assumed my heterosexuality. Only one interlocutor whom I met through the introduction of a gay Japanese friend identified as ‘possibly gay’. Had I specifically sought non-heterosexually identifying WHMs, different discussions might have emerged. Heteronormative expectations, beliefs and practices exhibited in my fieldwork data must therefore be understood in this limited context, and only as one of the discourses circulating among Japanese WHMs in Australia.

When conducting interviews, my interest was not so much in whether or not people were telling me ‘the truth’, but in how people framed and represented their life experience and themselves. This is because I agree with the view that personal narratives are one way to discursively construct identity. For example, Mason states ‘narratives are interpretive devices through which people represent themselves to themselves and to others and a means by which people connect past and present, self and other’ (2004: 165). Moreover, such representations of the self are not to be taken as stable. The interview narratives are a result of a specific dialogue between interlocutors and myself as the interviewer. Their narratives are ‘incomplete stories angled towards interview questions and each interviewee’s ever-changing sense of self and of how the world works’ (Frankenberg 1993: 41 cited in Lyons 2001: 10). What people say during interviews may be the surface of their human psychology, but my interest is in understanding this surface, the discourse people employ to talk about themselves.

The retrospective accounts interlocutors gave of their own experience were a major part of their interview narratives. I viewed the re-telling of their experience as part of the experience itself, and it was not important, for the purpose of this thesis, to separate ‘a life as led from a life as told’ (Roberts 2008: 2). Furthermore, the re-telling of interlocutors’ experience and their present assessment taught me a
great deal, both about their experiences and also how they were feeling about their past and present at the time of speaking. For example, when they were still new and hopeful, preferable features of Australian society may have been overstated. Similarly, when they were finding their life back in Japan too hectic and unfulfilling, their time in Australia was frequently recollected through rose-tinted glasses and its ‘slow-paced’ lifestyle praised. Such changing perspectives are part of how identity is reflexively constructed over the course of one’s life, and it was for this reason that, where possible, I conducted more than one interview with each interlocutor. Their changing expectations for their lives, and how they crafted their life narratives over time brought home the shifting nature of discursive representations most vividly.

My understanding of interlocutors' narratives and theoretical interest also shifted over time. This is because, while my interview notes and ‘data’ were set in stone once written/typed, I interpreted and reinterpreted them over time as I wrote and rewrote my chapters. This cycle of analysis, writing and re-interpretation influenced how I incorporated the interview data into a larger narrative (i.e. my thesis) that I developed.

**Researcher’s positionality and relationships with interlocutors**

The relationship dynamics between my interlocutors and me shaped the data I obtained, and therefore my research findings. The researcher's positionality in relation to interlocutors, in particular their simultaneous insider-ness and outsider-ness, have already been extensively discussed (Kondo 1990; Abu-Lughod 1991; Narayan 1993; Mullings 1999; Lyons 2001; Dasgupta 2004). In this last section, I will explain how the shifting positionality of my interlocutors and myself impacted on the research process and outcomes.

Age was a powerful factor that shaped how interlocutors perceived me. The majority tried to establish my age early in our first conversation, a common practice in Japanese society. Both male and female interlocutors were often age-conscious, especially about ‘already’ being in their thirties. With these WHMs, my being of a similar age had an immediate bonding effect. With younger interlocutors,
my seniority often meant that they could easily assume a position of a less experienced person. With younger *males*, I witnessed on several occasions how, upon discovering our age difference of over five years, their attitude and language suddenly shifted. Sometimes halfway through the interview, they changed from being rather brash or highly confident to more approachable and open. The linguistic shift was obvious because politeness and social distance is grammatically as well as lexically encoded in the Japanese language. The attitudinal shift frequently opened up new discussions such as their experience of difficulties. In these cases, my age overrode the gender power relation initially assumed by the interlocutors.30

When interlocutors imposed on me a certain position (such as a more experienced person), it sometimes created social distance, and caused more rigid role playing. In these cases, I used certain strategies to mitigate the distance. One was to rely on shared ground by referring to my earlier experience as a WHM in Sydney. Other similarities I frequently drew on included past occupations, birthplace, and familiar localities in both countries. Another strategy for resisting the positioning of me as an authority was to be honest about being out of touch with the latest trends among Japanese WHMs. This usually allowed interlocutors to take the role of the ‘educator’ (which they always were, from my viewpoint). However, my influence over the kind of relationship I formed with interlocutors was, of course, limited. For example, some returnees were, at least initially, suspicious of me because they were implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) wary of overseas Japanese as being staunch critics of ‘Japanese culture’. Among others who had returned to Japan against their will, my perceived status as a ‘successful defector’ seemed to cause defensiveness based on their own ‘failure’. While most such initial tensions dissolved after establishing myself as someone interested in their stories, time and again I was reminded of the fact that my interlocutors were pursuing their own ‘projects’ during our encounters, just as I was pursuing mine.

30 Sometimes, my student status, rather than age, defined my interlocutors’ approach towards me. Nevertheless, their assumptions of seniority (in life stages in this case) again moulded our relationship. One example was a 19 year-old male in Sydney who felt compelled to respond to my recruitment ad. He explained his willingness ‘to help a student complete a university assignment’, and insisted on paying for my coffee after the interview. Similar interactions occurred frequently with full-time working returnees in Japan, especially with males.
About a quarter of my interlocutors self-selected by responding to my recruitment advertisements. Others readily accepted to take part in the interview via personal introduction. The interlocutors’ tendency to be proactive had an enormous implication for my study, in ways that I did not anticipate, both in terms of the process and the outcome. Quite a number of them seemed to have their own agendas during the interview and subsequent interactions. These WHMs frequently asked questions and cast me in the role of someone who may have valuable information as a more experienced migrant. One consequence was the reversal of roles between the anthropologist and the ‘informant’. Most of them were explicit about their curiosity about my life trajectory as a Japanese migrant in Australia, and asked for personal information such as whether I dated/was married to an Australian, what visa I had, and how I had entered into a postgraduate program. These questions, moreover, often led to discussions of pragmatic issues such as Australia’s education system and immigration processes.

I was initially uneasy with how I was positioned as an informer, even though I told interlocutors that such information exchange was welcomed as a way to give something back to them. This is because, as the role reversal occurred to a greater extent than I had anticipated, I began feeling the time pressure to ask my questions. I also feared that my position as an experienced migrant might make the interlocutors doubt the usefulness of the information they offered. But whose ‘relevance’ was more important for the research? It was when I stopped resisting the particular dynamics of the researcher-informant relationship, and ceased interpreting endless discussions about ‘unrelated’ topics as a methodological limitation that I began appreciating the implications of what was happening. All interview data are obtained through interactions, and my positionality both opened up and limited the range of conversations that my interlocutors and I could have. This was inevitable, as knowledge gained through fieldwork is partial, and its content depends on the researcher’s position and the process that takes place in the field (Ganguly-Scrase 1998: 62–64).

By asking certain questions, my interlocutors were, in a sense, conducting a case study of a former WHM. Whether they wanted to emulate me was not the point. That they were interested in finding out about my ‘case’ as one possible life course
post-Australian WH, and sometimes comparing and contrasting vividly with other ‘patterns’, indicated how they were both improvising and strategising how to proceed into the future. Discussions we had stemming from the questions they asked me taught me about the messiness of becoming ‘adults’ in the world in which they lived. The co-existence of the vague hope for opportunities and the pervasive sense of risk that came out of these discussions eventually became central to the themes explored in this thesis.

**Thesis outline**

In the present chapter, I have situated my study in relation to existing literature, set out main research questions and described methodology.

In chapter 2, the second half of part 1, I will introduce the history behind the Australia-Japan agreement over the WH scheme, trace the profiles of Japanese WHMs in Australia, and summarise the shifting Australian perceptions towards the scheme.

Part 2 examines the motivations behind WHMs’ decision to leave for Australia. Chapter 3 considers the cultural capital of cosmopolitanism, and in particular, association with the West, as strongly contributing to the popularity of the Australian WH. Chapter 4 locates WHMs in the rapidly changing Japanese society with an emphasis on labour market practices. I will explore how massive socio-economic changes in the lost decade have created new ways through which young Japanese people are required to establish their adult self.

Part 3 delves into WHMs’ experience as temporary migrants in Australia. Chapter 5 is dedicated to a discussion of Japanese WHMs as exploited and ethnicised migrant workers. I inquire into the structural factors and power relations that push the youth into a certain corner of the Australian labour market. Chapter 6 is about WHMs’ social positions and social networks in Australia. I examine their gendered and ethnicised social positions, and how male and female WHMs interpret their experience as they negotiate, resist, conform to, and voice ambivalence about the power relations that surround them.
Part 4 focuses on WHMs’ experience of return migration to Japan. Chapter 7 investigates the immediate challenges that returnees face as young workers. For many, one of the main original motivations for the WH was their dissatisfaction and less-than-ideal future prospects regarding their worker status. Analyses of their experience of return to the Japanese labour market illustrate some of the unintended consequences of their WH experience. Chapter 8 highlights WHMs’ gendered expectations for the unfinished business of transition to adulthood, as they grapple with contradictory forces, such as marriage and other traditional social expectations, and the desire to carve out a ‘unique’ individual life course. Their accounts of future dreams and aspirations reveal a nuanced picture of identity formation and self-actualisation in late modernity.

The concluding chapter summarises my main findings about WHMs’ mobility between Japan and Australia. It also reflects on WHMs’ mobility as a whole and considers the extent to which individual migrants can exercise agency, and on structural factors that both enable and restrict such agency. I conclude by highlighting the impact of neoliberal capitalism on young people’s search for fulfilment.
Chapter 2

Historical context

Japan's 'economic miracle' and Australia's turn to Asia

Between the 1950s and the late 1980s, Japan made a speedy recovery from World War Two and transformed itself into an economic powerhouse. 'Economic miracle' was the term coined to describe the country's incredible economic growth in the post-war period of the 1950s through to the 1970s. In 1951, Japan's GNP was US$14.2 billion, equivalent to only 4.2 percent of the US. By 1970, the figure had increased to US$203.1 billion, overtaking European countries such as the UK and West Germany to become the world's second biggest economy (Keizai kōhō sentā 1983: 5). This stability and steady growth continued into the 1980s, with the year 1986 commonly marked as the beginning of the 'bubble' economy, characterised by skyrocketing land and stock prices.

Japan's expanding economic power in the 1980s had a profound impact on Australia, which was experiencing a recession and increasingly looking to Asia, especially Japan, for economic solutions and corporate management styles. Whether one was keen on, or afraid of Asia, there was a great interest in the region,
and as Australia increasingly depended on Japan for trade\textsuperscript{31}, investment and tourism, the Asian partner became highly visible (Mouer 1991: 2).

The establishment of the Japan Foundation in 1972 further strengthened Japan’s presence in Australia through the encouragement of the teaching of Japanese language and culture. Japanese sponsorships for sporting events and increased uses of Japanese cultural symbols in Australian advertising helped increase the Japanese presence in Australian public sphere (Mouer 1991: 2). Cultural exchange between Japan and Australia had already begun well before the 1980s. For example, various forms of assistance such as Japanese Government research funding, Japan Foundation fellowships, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, university exchange programs and various local grants were provided to foster Australian academic studies on Japan, and to engage in intellectual and cultural exchange.\textsuperscript{32} The 1980 agreement to commence the Working Holiday (WH) scheme was part of such various efforts to provide young people in the two countries with grassroots opportunities for cultural exchange and language learning.

The direct push for the WH scheme came from high-ranking officials, including John Menadue, former Ambassador to Japan (1977–80, appointed by the Fraser Government), Trevor Wilson, former head of the political section in the Australian Embassy in Japan (1979–83), and Ōkawara Yoshio, the Japanese Ambassador to Australia.\textsuperscript{33} Their lobbying efforts were rewarded when Prime Minister Ōhira registered his interest in the WH scheme during his aforementioned visit to Australia in January 1980 (Menadue 1999: 207). The proposal for the scheme was concluded in September 1980 by Menadue himself, then Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (Menadue 1999: 208). Japan was the third country to have the WH agreement with Australia.


\textsuperscript{32} Japanese language studies began at universities such as the Australian National University (1963), the University of Queensland (1964), at the University of Melbourne (1965) and Monash University (1967), while secondary schools also started offering Japanese language education in the late 1960s (Shimazu 2008: 131).

\textsuperscript{33} Menadue’s autobiography describes how he attempted to convince the Australian bureaucracy of the desirability of such a scheme (Menadue 1999: 207-208), while Japanese speaking-diplomat Wilson paid visits to the Japanese Immigration and the Foreign Ministry to persuade them (Wilson 2008: 367).
The rise of international travel and early Japanese Working Holiday Makers

The first round of Australian WH visas issued to the Japanese occurred in 1981 (884 visas: JAWHM 2007). After a sharp rise in the second year of the WH scheme (1,325 visas), further rises occurred in 1985 and 1986 (1,670 and 2,169 respectively), just as the value of the yen increased. Since then, the number of WH visas issued to Japanese youth has steadily risen (Graph 2.1).

Graph 2.1: Number of Australian WH visas issued to Japanese nationals

Source: JAWHM 2008

Japanese interest in consuming foreign goods, images and experiences had become widespread in the few decades preceding the commencement of the WH program between Japan and Australia. The end of World War Two was simultaneously a new beginning for Japan’s exposure to foreign influence in general, and Americans in particular. For example, US bases and American military personnel in Japan during the Occupation era functioned as transmitters of American pop culture, such as music and films (Yoshimi 2007: 181–183). Australians were also present in Japan as part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force until 1952 (Donnelly 2001: 210). Japan’s social interest in the English language had been present since the opening of the country in the 1850s and the period of modernisation after the Meiji
Restoration of 1868, and this presence has remained prominent up to the present, albeit in different forms.

Japanese eagerness to experience and consume foreign experience heightened with the lifting of the ban on non-official international travel in 1964 (Cooper 2007: 5). Even though Japan Air Lines first began overseas flights to Los Angeles in 1954 (Cooper 2007: 5), such travel was officially out of reach for ordinary people until this time, and only the privileged few in trade and education were permitted to travel, in the name of national benefit. Some high-profile marketing campaigns of the day promoted international travel, especially to the US, through prizes for purchasers of certain products. These marketing campaigns both expressed and contributed to a longing on the part of an expanding middle class for firsthand experience abroad, especially in the US. The next chapter will consider in more detail Japanese people’s ongoing desire for the English language, the adoption of US-style consumer desires and aspirations during this era of high economic growth, and how these processes affected Japan’s discursive relationship to the West.

Until the 1980s, the cost of international travel was prohibitive for most. In theory, there were no longer any restrictions on travel abroad for sightseeing purposes, yet even discounted package tours cost as much as three years’ income of a male university graduate (Miyaji 2001: 184). In the late 1960s, students and other young people began undertaking individual travel utilising discounted airfares, and some of them later published guidebooks (Miyaji 2001: 185). By the time the first Japanese Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) left for Australia in 1981, today’s most popular Japanese guidebook series Chikyū no arukikata (literally, ‘How to Walk on the Earth’) had been published for three years, encouraging a new generation of young budget travellers to take journeys out of Japan. Still, a survey by the National Life Center undertaken in 1981 showed that international travel remained only an ‘ambition’ for 37.7 percent of metropolitan city dwellers (PMO 1981: 12).

34 The Meiji period began in 1868 after the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate, and ended in 1912 with the death of the Meiji Emperor. The ‘Meiji restoration’ defeated the shogunate, ‘restored’ imperial rule, and reshaped the country from a feudal system to a modern nation.
35 For example, a beverage company promoted its new product in 1961 with a slogan ‘Let’s drink torisu and go to Hawaii! Torisu wo nonde hawaii ni ikō’ (Kyō 1995: 133).
36 A spending limit of US$500 was also in place until 1964, in order to control outward currency flows (Cooper 2007: 5).
The situation began to change in 1985 when the yen’s value sharply rose following the Plaza Agreement, which was put into place to lower the value of the American dollar, partly by remedying Japan’s trade imbalance with the US. One effect of this was cheaper international travel for the Japanese. In 1965, a year after the lifting of the ban on international travel, 158,827 Japanese people went abroad. The number rose to 6,828,338 (Clammer 1997: 143) in 1987, the year in which the government’s Ten Million Program further encouraged Japanese people to travel abroad (Cooper 2007: 6). By this year, 14.9 percent of all Japanese outbound travel was by individual arrangement, as opposed to group tours organised by companies (Takai-Tokunaga 2007: 69). Business-related international travel was reaching its peak around the same time, as more than a million made such trips in 1988, while some 29,000 researchers (excluding students) engaged in research activities abroad (Skeldon 1992: 42–43). The rise of international travel as a mass, rather than elite, practice coincided with the acceleration of Japanese middle-class consumption, and consuming the ‘foreign’ through travel became one way in which the Japanese sought social distinction.

As the average Japanese became richer and travelled abroad in greater numbers, Australia acquired a particular image in Japanese society. Japan’s economic success was, to a great extent, a result of hard work by individuals. For countless people who worked long hours and managed hectic schedules, Australia looked like a desirable alternative, based on the image of smaller economy with a high quality of life and abundant wildlife (Mouer 1991: 8, 15). Subsequently, Japan moved from the high economic growth era to a period of slower growth, and people became more reflective of life choices beyond material comfort. Starting in the 1970s but more prominently in the 1980s, (urban) Japanese consumer desires shifted to ‘personal, qualitative fulfilment’, to be taken care of by such things as ‘matchmaking and wedding agencies, home-delivery firms, golf club memberships, cultural activities, and travel’ (Havens 1994: 10). It was around this time that the question of ‘Why is Japan so rich and yet so poor?’ became paramount, and the issue of the quality of life became important for many (Mouer 1991: 8). The box hit success of the 1990 movie Tasumania Monogatari (‘Tasmanian Story’ Furuhata Yasuo: 1990) might have resulted from its resonance with viewers who craved an alternative
lifestyle, as the storyline centred on a young man’s visit to his Japanese father, who has divorced, resigned from a top corporation job and settled in Tasmania.

**Novel and adventurous: Japanese WHMs in Australia in the 1980s**

Who became WHMs in Japan in this era of shifting consumer desires and travel patterns? Beyond the number of visas issued and arrivals in Australia, there is hardly any public data (including the gender and age breakdowns) available regarding who went on Australia WHs in the 1980s.\(^{37}\) However, several former WHMs shared their insights about this period with me. According to their recollections, Japanese male WHMs in Australia in the 1980s were most commonly recent university graduates, or current students taking a break from their studies, whereas female WHMs tended to have some post-education work experience under their belt. This was at the time when the age limit was still 25 years, and the WH visa expired after six months, with a provision for a six-month extension if deemed appropriate at a local office of the Australian Immigration Department (*Chikyū no arukikata* 1988: 16). Until New Zealand joined in 1985, and Canada in 1986, Australia was the only country where the Japanese could take a WH during the 1980s. During interviews, the interlocutors who experienced the early period of the WH scheme emphasised the expectation for carefree adventure, and something out of the ordinary in an unfamiliar and distant land. Teruo (male, 45)\(^{38}\) fondly reflected on his experience in 1984:

> Back then, blokes like us (*oretachi mitai na yarō*) were considered unusual (*kawatteru*), for leaving Japan to travel around remote areas of Australia. We met all sorts of people, got drunk, and had a ball (laughs).

That the early Japanese image of the Australian WH was a rare and masculinised form of international adventure is also discernible from a semi-autobiographical novel by a popular novelist, Kageyama Tamio (1995 [1991]\(^ {39} \)). In his *Monki Misaki*...

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\(^{37}\) DIAC informed me that detailed data regarding arrivals of WHMs prior to 1991 would not be provided to the public (personal communication 2 June 2008).

\(^{38}\) In this thesis, the quoted age of the interlocutors was their age at the time of the last interview.

\(^{39}\) This book was serialised in a magazine before being published in a book form.
('Monkey Point'\textsuperscript{40}), he tells a story of two young members of the élite who defy social expectations by taking an adventure trip to an exotic country, Australia. Ohara Yō is a BMW-driving medical student whose career path simply followed his father's, and Anami Kōsuke is an Armani-suit-wearing employee of Japan's largest advertising agency, disillusioned in his work as an 'ad man' who is despised by those who 'actually produce things on the ground' \textit{(genba de mono tsukutteru ninogen)} \textit{(Kageyama 1995: 15)}. Set in the mid 1980s, these young men are portrayed as keen consumers of expensive goods and services, who feel the emptiness of their élite lifestyle and go in search of the meaning of life.

The protagonists develop an idea of a trip to Australia over 'Aussie-beef' steak and cabernet sauvignon, which eventually turns into their WH holiday experience. In Monkey Point, a fictitious town located approximately 1,500 km from Perth, the urbanites engage in hard physical labour on a farm, and form a close bond with the farming family. They join the farmers' fight against a nasty development company backed by a greedy Japanese corporation, so that they can help protect Western Australia's marine environment. This experience culminates in their developing the courage to make their own life choices (as well as Ohara's love story with a young Australian daughter of the family). This storyline depicts an Australian WH as a manly adventure full of unforeseeable risks and opportunities in an unknown land, to which some resourceful young people, especially men, were drawn at a time when travel abroad was rare outside the packaged tour environment.

If these adventurous male WHMs were a relatively rare breed in Japan, female WHMs were even more so. Akemi went on a WH in Australia in 1984 at the age of 22, after graduating from a two-year university\textsuperscript{41} and working full-time as an administrator at a health food company. She remembered how she felt she was in the minority among the Japanese WHM population:

\textsuperscript{40} The title might have been inspired by Monkey Mia in Western Australia, approximately 800km of Perth.

\textsuperscript{41} Two-year universities in Japan are commonly attended by women, and many of the institutions include 'women's two-year universities' \textit{(joši tanki daigaku)} in their names. They commonly teach literature, general education, home economics, as well as vocational subjects such as nutrition and nursing.
It’s not that there weren’t other women – there were – but there were definitely more [Japanese] men around. I can’t really say what it was, but I felt there was something common among us female WHMs. Basically, we were considered unusual for becoming WHMs. I think it was the same for men to some extent, but more so for women. (Akemi, female, 45)

These WHMs in the 1980s were considered unusual not only because international mobility was still novel, but because their choice of leaving Japan for a prolonged period ran counter to the social expectations of the time. Below, I will explain dominant ideologies and social practices that developed during the era of Japan’s economic growth. My aim is to contextualise the pioneering nature of WHMs in the past, as well as to contrast with the circumstances of the lost generation WHMs, which will be explained in chapter 4.

The ‘salaryman’: the embodiment of the ideal Japanese worker/citizen

In pre-recession Japan, the archetypal worker was the ‘salaryman’ a full-time white-collar male worker with a stable, corporate career. He was, and may still be to some extent, the nation’s model citizen because of his status as a ‘male, heterosexual, able-bodied, fertile, white-collar worker’ (Mackie 2002: 203). Upon graduation from a four-year university, he typically worked for a corporation, or the public service, and his career was based on a seniority-based system of wages and promotions (nenkō joretsu) and lifetime employment (shūshin koyō).

When the salaryman reached his late twenties, he typically married a fellow worker, likely to be a college/university graduate turned non-career track clerical worker,

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42 Dasgupta argues that the idea of the salaryman dates back to the pre-war period, emerging from the combination of the 19th century ideologies of modernity and gender construction and the economic, social and cultural shifts of the 20th century, but that it is only in the post-war period that it becomes hegemonic (Dasgupta 2004: 69–108).

43 The seniority-based system of wages and promotions means that those graduates who enter the company in the same year climb up the corporate ladder more or less uniformly, both in terms of seniority and salary. Lifetime employment means that companies employ workers upon graduation and keep them until retirement. These systems initially began in the pre-World War Two period when some employers introduced a seniority-based system of wages and promotions, in order to cope with skilled labour shortages and the potential unionisation of workers (Brinton 1993: 121). The government established new regulations regarding wages and company welfare based on the experience of the war, so that workers would be better supported throughout their adult life through their employers. In the post-war period, workers themselves preferred these systems, as they sought financial stability in the face of a labour surplus and shuttered national economy (Brinton 1993: 121–122).
and subsequently produced children (Ogasawara 1998). As a family man, he received various allowances from his employer to help maintain his family in the context of limited government welfare (Iwata 2007). 44 His wife became economically dependent on her husband in order to engage in domestic chores, childrearing and later supporting the children’s education, although she might balance home duties with part-time work and hobbies when the children were older (Rosenberg 1996: 14). She was also likely to be a carer for the elderly in the family and the husband after his retirement (Rosenberger 1996: 14). The salaryman model upholds the ideal of a nuclear, heterosexual family bound by marriage where the male breadwinner protects his wife and children as dependents. Therefore, the female counterpart of the salaryman as the model citizen is not the full-time working ‘salarywoman’, but the housewife.

Under this system, new male graduates were employed and provided with in-house training to develop skills specific to the company. While young, they were treated as ‘trainees’ and engaged in menial and supporting tasks for low wages. The pay-off came as they advanced in seniority in the workplace, through guaranteed promotion, pay rises, annual bonuses and a pension on retirement (Lam 1992: 63). These incentives tied to the seniority-based system rewarded those who remained in the same company until retirement. In other words, job change was effectively penalised by this system (Brinton 1993: 71–108).

While the salaryman ideal was widely promoted as the norm, it was, in fact, out of reach for the majority of workers in Japan (Kelly 1993: 203). For example, many scholars have pointed out that the majority of Japanese workers did not work for

44 Examples include housing allowances, compensation for travel costs, access to subsidised recreation facilities, and, if he was to form a family (as he was encouraged to), extra assistance for family events such as a wedding and childbirth (Maruyama 2004: 73–74). His salary typically increased in his thirties, in order to cover expenses for children’s education, home mortgage and insurance. In addition, the salaryman with dependents received certain tax benefits for further support, including tax concessions if his wife engaged in part-time work under a particular threshold. Thus, the entire system of the salaryman-style employment supported him and his ideologically sound family (i.e. wife and children born in wedlock), and rewarded him for being the ideal worker and citizen as he travelled up the corporate hierarchy. In addition, the employer had plenty to gain from this model, in the form of the retention of skilled workers, employee loyalty, and relatively peaceful worker-management relations (based on the worker expectation of long-term employment and thus a disincentive to antagonising bosses and colleagues).
top-class, large-scale corporations with which the seniority-based system and guaranteed lifetime employment was associated (Cheng and Kallenberg 1997: 29; Roberson 1998: 50). Still, compared to the circumstances in the lost decade, the salaryman lifestyle was a possibility for a greater number of (male) workers from the economic boom in the 1950s until the 1980s (Tipton 2008: 178). This is because economic growth caused youth labour shortages and the need for secure employment of blue-collar workers at large companies, in order to cope with technological innovation (Hara and Seiyama 2005: 70). In any case, the important impact of the salaryman ideal did not necessarily stem from the extent to which the majority could actually attain it, but from its far-reaching ideological influence. The practices of large corporations became the model for small- and medium-sized businesses to emulate, and the moral influence of the salaryman extended to non-salaryman workers, including the unemployed, who identified with the image of the ideal citizen (Baba 1991: 62–63).

Even though it was relatively inaccessible, the ideal of the salaryman life contributed to a high level of standardisation in life trajectories during the era of the economic growth. For example, 91.5 percent of Japanese women who married in the year 1960 were aged between 20 and 29 years, compared to 76 percent in Spain, 60 percent in England, and 42 percent in the US (United Nations Demographic Yearbook cited in Brinton 2008: 28). Similarly, in the 1980s, 60 percent of Japanese men married between the age of 23 and 29, while the comparable figure in the US was 40 percent (Brinton 2008: 29). A national campaign of birth control in the 1950s aimed to standardise women’s reproductive life (Coleman 1983 cited in Rosenberger 2001: 16). By the late 1960s, a ‘normal’ life trajectory of marriage and childbirth before turning 30 years old had been established for women (Brinton 2008: 29). By the late 1980s, approximately 50 percent of children were born by mothers who were 25 to 29 years old (Brinton 2008: 29). The 1980s was also characterised by a rigid education system which strongly discouraged those past their twenties from becoming tertiary students (Brinton 2008: 31).

In sum, between the 1960s and the 1980s when the salaryman ideal was at its height, a large number of Japanese men and women moved from finishing
education, gaining employment to marrying and having their first child (and more), marking roughly the same milestones based on age and the order of life events (Brinton 2008: 33). This ‘normal’ life course was supported by the education and recruitment systems. A division of labour based on gender was also central to its operation, as men assumed the role of the breadwinner as a full-time worker, and women took the ‘supporting’ role of taking care of home duties and some part-time work.\footnote{The patterns would have been different in small, family-based businesses.} In short, the salaryman was a middle-class ideal.

The WHMs of the 1980s were young people who did not automatically follow such a prescribed life course. They left Japan at a time when the vast majority of youth directly proceeded from education to employment, and to family making. In chapter 4, I will compare the circumstances of these former WHMs with those of the lost generation WHMs at the time of their departure. In chapter 7, the discussion of return migration will compare the experience of the WHMs in the bubble-economy era, and those in the lost decade.

**Japanese WHMs in Australia since the 1990s**

Some data are available from the early 1990s, approximately a decade after Akemi’s arrival in Australia. According to the immigration statistics, there were 4,368 Japanese WHMs in Australia as of 23 July 1993, and they comprised 60 percent of all the Japanese temporary residents with the right to work (Bell and Carr 1994: 46).\footnote{Apart from the WHMs, the total population of Japanese temporary residents with the right to work at the time of Bell and Carr’s study included those on the following visa classes: Independent Executive; Executive; Specialist; Educational; and Medical Practitioner (Bell and Carr 1994: 29). Independent Executives were mainly business owners, while Executives were managers at a branch of a foreign company based in Australia. Specialists were workers with trade, technical or professional skills (Bell and Carr 1994: 19).} Two thirds of these WHMs were between 20 and 24 years old, and the rest were mostly 25–29 years old.\footnote{At this time, the age limit to applying for a WH visa was still 25 years old. However, some exceptions were allowed for those up to the age of 30 years old (Chikyū no arukikata 1988: 13).} The gender ratio was 2,333 females to 2,036 males, indicating that the current trend for a greater number of female Japanese WHMs was already visible at this time.\footnote{While most Japanese WHMs in 1993 were recorded as ‘clerks’, Bell and Carr noted that this occupation type was not further defined, and that they were sceptical of this} Immigration data from October 1994 indicate
similar trends in terms of the gender balance and age groups of Japanese WHMs, who comprised 21.5 percent of all WHMs in Australia at this time (Murphy 1995: 14–15). Notably, Murphy found that the Japanese WHMs in his study tended to move from white-collar jobs in Japan to service jobs in Australia (in particular at Japanese-speaking workplaces), and remarked that on the whole, they experienced downward career mobility during their WH (Murphy 1995: 44, 48). This was despite the fact that 71 percent of them had tertiary education (Murphy 1995: 35). As the following chapters explore in detail, these trends also pertain to today’s WHMs.

A 2002 report on WHMs in Australia provides a profile of Japanese WHMs in the 2000s. Harding and Webster (2002: 16) report that most WHMs, including those from Japan, stayed in the country for nearly the maximum duration allowed. Based on a very small sample of 32 Japanese WHMs, they also explain that nearly 70 percent of Japanese WHMs had tertiary education (Harding and Webster 2002: 25).49

During 2007–08, seven percent of WHMs in Australia were Japanese, making Japan the fifth most common source country (DIAC 2008c: 51).50 In 2007, 11,217 Japanese people were issued with the Australian WH visa (approximately seven females to three males—see Table 2.1). The age groups at the time of being granted a WH visa were evenly split between those who belonged to the 21–25 year bracket and to the 26–30 bracket (46 percent and 47 percent respectively). Grouped differently, a large majority of 79 percent (9,211 people) were over the age of 23, the age at which a four-year university degree is completed, and 59 percent (6,827) were over the age of 25 (my own calculation based on the figures in Table 1).

description (1994: 46). They argue that such a picture did not fit with the previous research findings that Japanese WHMs’ jobs and sectors in which they worked varied.

49 53.1 percent with a bachelor degree, 6.3 percent with an undergraduate diploma and 9.4 percent with a vocational degree.

50 The top four countries were the UK, Republic of Korea, Germany and Ireland. Compared to past figures, the proportion has decreased (e.g. from 9 percent in 2006–07). This is due, however, to an increase in WHMs from other countries such as South Korea, rather than a decrease of Japanese WHMs.
Table 2.1: Age and gender breakdown of Japanese holders of Australian WH visas in 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>21</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>26</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>28</th>
<th>29</th>
<th>30</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>1138</td>
<td>1246</td>
<td>1325</td>
<td>1198</td>
<td>1026</td>
<td>1001</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>1334</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>11740</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unpublished data (DIAC 2008d)

As mentioned in chapter 1, various scholarly efforts have investigated Japanese female out-migration, partly as a response to the greater proportion of female migrants in certain countries. The Australian WH is no exception to this trend.51 Between the period 1994–5 and 2006–7, the proportion of Japanese female WHMs to male was consistently greater in each year (Graph 2.2).52 I will discuss the relation between gender and WHMs’ migratory motivations in chapter 3.

Graph 2.2: The Australian WH visas issued to Japanese—by sex

Source: Unpublished data (DIAC 2008d)

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51 See Podolsky (2007: 43) for data on Japanese long-term residents in Canada and their gender breakdown.

52 Unfortunately, DIAC does not have gender and age breakdowns of data on Japanese WHMs earlier than this period.
According to information provided by 7,979 Japanese WHMs, who arrived during the 2007–08 period (DIAC 2008c), the most popular intended residence was Queensland (3,320), followed by New South Wales (2,356), Western Australia (1,014), Victoria (646), South Australia (80), Northern Territory (42), Tasmania (22), and the Australian Capital Territory (16). While this information can provide a rough estimate of popular destinations, statements of intended residence most likely refer to the place of entry. Subsequent internal movements across cities and regions depend on a number of factors. For example, some WHMs arrive in Cairns, which has the cheapest flight options from Japan, but they may move to other areas soon after their arrival. Others stay in large metropolitan areas for study or work opportunities, and take short trips elsewhere, after which they resume their study/work routine. Chapter 4 will discuss different patterns of engaging in a WH, based on my ethnographic data.

Since the first Japanese WHMs arrived in Australia, international tourism products have continuously diversified to satisfy the ever-changing tastes of Japanese consumers. In 1990, the number of Japanese who went abroad exceeded a staggering 10 million per year, and in 2007 over 1 million Japanese were living outside Japan as long-term or permanent residents (MOFA 2008: 7). This is more than double the number in 1986 (Adachi 2006: 17). Moreover, in 2009, the number of Japanese long-term residents in Australia surpassed those of the UK, with Australia becoming the third most popular destination for such migrants after the US and China. In particular, the independent travel sector in both Japan and Australia has continued to grow through the 1990s and up to the present. This is remarkable, given that the overall number of Japanese tourists (i.e. short-term

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53 Exactly the same order of popularity and similar figures were observed for the quarter between July and December in the previous year (DIAC 2007).
visitors) to Australia has decreased in recent years.\textsuperscript{56} A notable trend amongst independent travellers (as opposed to group tours) in recent years is the shift from travel as an informal and less structured activity to a more organised and commodified ‘product’ for mass consumption (Prideaux and Shiga 2007: 45–46). Guidebooks, numerous websites and the rapidly expanding migration industry have undoubtedly heightened the popularity of the Australian WH with Japanese youth, by not only facilitating but also actively promoting Japanese outward mobility in various shapes and forms. As the coming chapters will explore, there is a close relation between the migration industry and the contemporary experience of international mobility among Japanese WHMs in Australia.

The flow of Japanese WHMs to Australia is part of a larger stream of Japanese nationals to the Southern continent. In the next section, I will outline the changing characteristics of the Japanese population in Australia up to the present, before introducing changing Australian reactions to the WH scheme.

\textbf{The shifting composition of Japanese communities in Australia}

Between the 1880s and World War Two, a small number of Japanese nationals lived in Australian communities, including pearl divers on Thursday Island, in Darwin and in Broome, cane cutters in Queensland (Oliver 2002: 277), prostitutes (\textit{Karayuki-san}) (Sissons 1977), students and tourists (Lyng 1927: 173).\textsuperscript{57} However, internment during World War Two, post-war repatriation and some cases of deportation caused the existing Japanese community to largely disappear. At the end of World War Two, only 141 Japanese nationals resided in Australia (Nagata 2003: 95).

In the post-war period, the number of Japanese-born people in Australia gradually increased. In 1947, there were 335 Japanese in the country (Nagata 1996: 58).

\textsuperscript{56} For example, 15.3 percent of all visitors in Australia were from Japan during 2006–07, but this fell to 12.9 percent in 2007–08 (DIAC 2009a: 48).

\textsuperscript{57} The so-called White Australia Policy, enacted through the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 and its infamous dictation test, effectively barred Japanese and other non-Europeans from becoming permanent migrants. However, as a closer trade relationship had been developing between the two countries certain exemptions were made in the early 1900s. These included the 1904 agreement, which allowed Japanese merchants, tourists and students to enter and reside in Australia for a year (Oliver 2002: 278).
Following the removal of measures to restrict non-European settlers, the number of Japanese residents in Australia increased to 4,924 by 1971, surpassing the number in 1901 (Nagata 1996: 239). They were a new set of Japanese migrants arriving in Australia. One of the groups was Japanese women who married Australian men, often soldiers, and moved to the home country of the husband. In the 1950s, 650 such ‘war brides’ made their way to Australia (Tamura 2001: xiv-xv).

From this time until the mid 1980s, the largest category of Japanese in Australia consisted of expatriates and their families. The Japanese overseas student population also expanded during the 1980s, especially after the abolition of the quota system in 1986, which aimed to attract more full-fee paying students (Andressen and Kumagai 1996: 8). Various permanent migrants also arrived, from young single males (especially cooks) in the early 1980s to mature-aged male business migrants and their families in the early 1990s (McNamara and Coughlan 1992: 50). The number of Japanese residents in Australia has steadily risen since then, reaching approximately 30,800 in 2007, an increase of 20.8 percent since 2001 (DIAC 2007).

The presence of Japanese WHMs is having an impact on local Japanese communities, as they now form the largest group of Japanese migrants. Recent data show that, of the 26,685 Japanese temporary migrants residing in Australia on 30 June 2008, the largest group was WHMs (31 percent), followed by students (26 percent), visitors (21 percent), temporary skilled migrants on the so-called 457 visa\(^58\) (14 percent) and the other (8 percent).\(^59\) The WHMs are one of the few groups of Japanese migrants whose numbers have recently increased. For example, during the period between 2002–03 and 2007–08, while the number of student visas issued to the Japanese dramatically decreased from 12,886 to 7,669 (DIAC n.d. Student Visa Statistics), the number of WHMs rose from 9,915 to 10,599 (DIAC n.d. Visitor Visa Statistics).

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\(^{58}\) What is commonly known as the 457 visa is a temporary business (long stay) visa (subclass 457), which allows foreign workers to be employed in Australia, based on business sponsorship.

\(^{59}\) Due to increase in the first two groups, the proportion of the last two groups has dropped to 10.2 percent in 2007 (MOFA 2008).
Graph 2.3: Proportions of Japanese temporary resident groups in Australia on 30 June 2008

Source: DIAC (2008c)

Most Japanese residents in Australia have arrived quite recently. According to the 2006 Census, more than half the residents stated that they arrived after the year 1996, with 17.4 percent arriving between 1996 and 2001, and 40.1 percent arriving between 2001 and 2006 (total of 57.5 percent). These post-war new settlers form the bulk of contemporary Japanese communities in Australia. This means that contemporary Japanese migrants in Australia have few direct links to the pre-war communities, which have mostly disappeared or have been integrated into the ‘general Australian’ community. While most temporary migrants from Japan remain transient, no doubt some will become permanent additions to the resident population in Australia, and contribute to supporting and transforming the existing ‘ethnic’ Japanese communities as consumers and workers.

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60 Because migrants become eligible for citizenship only after three years of maintaining permanent residency, the recently arrived nature of Japanese residents in Australia might explain to some extent the low uptake of Australian citizenship (20.6 percent in 2007, compared to 75.6 percent for all migrant populations; DIAC 2008b). Countless anecdotal accounts, both during fieldwork and in my personal experience, strongly suggest that the major inhibitor to citizenship uptake is the Japanese government’s ban on dual citizenship for their nationals.
From cultural ambassadors to working tourists: Australians’ changing attitudes towards WHMs

The WH scheme between Japan and Australia now has nearly 30 years of history. During the course of this history, its popularity has grown, and its visa conditions have been variously modified, in order to address particular domestic needs and concerns. The Australian government has undertaken numerous and largely quantitative inquiries into Australia’s WH and its participants. These have unanimously emphasised WHMs’ potential financial contributions to the domestic tourism sector, as well as the impact on local labour-market conditions, both positive and negative. In contrast, there is no government-funded research on the WH scheme at cultural and social levels, such as impacts on career choices after the WH experience, and factors enabling and inhibiting satisfactory experience of Australian society. This is one indication that the Australian government is mainly concerned with the economic and political impact of the WH scheme.

Although the Australian WH is officially about holidaying and ‘incidental work’ to support it, its function as a simultaneous case of tourism and quasi-labour migration has existed from the earliest days. For example, Withers and Birrell’s 1991 report was concerned with the impact of the WH scheme on local jobs, given the increase in the total number of WHMs in the mid to late 1980s (Withers and Birrell 1991). The National Population Council report (1991) had the same concern, although its findings, based on surveys conducted between 1986 and 1989, assured trade unions that WHMs were not a threat to local jobs. On the other hand, this study found that Japanese WHMs brought twice as much spending money as their British counterparts (National Population Council 1991). Pearce (1990) also found that Japanese backpackers were the biggest spenders of all, while Sloan and Kennedy (1992: 64–65) found that a noteworthy amount of taxation is generated from WHMs and other temporary residents who work in Australia.

An inquiry into skilled temporary migrants by Healy (1993) discussed the controversy regarding the growing Japanese tourism industry and its preference for hiring Japanese workers from Japan, as opposed to Japanese-speaking Australians. In his defence of employment opportunities for the local population, he
pointed out that Japanese WHMs in this industry were hired in an organised and prearranged manner, which would have potentially breached the WH visa conditions (Healy 1993: 16). Bell and Carr’s study (1994: 4. 74–89) on Japanese temporary residents and the Cairns tourism industry addressed a similar concern, concluding that these young transient workers were an important source of temporary, and not so temporary, labour in the tourism sector.

WHMs’ positive financial contribution to Australia is often discussed within a framework of positive backpacker effects on tourism. Despite the existence of some negative stereotypes of backpackers, tourism in Australia is now highly dependent on them, and State and Federal government campaigns have long promoted Australia as a backpacker destination. Backpackers have boosted Australia’s tourism sector in general, and in particular the regional economy as they tend to venture outside the metropolitan areas (Tourism Victoria 2002 and Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources 2003 cited in Peel and Steen 2006: 1058). It is reasonable to assume that a considerable number of these backpackers are on a WH visa.

Worries regarding the negative impact of the WH scheme existed from the start. For example, prior to commencing the scheme, Australian officials had concerns about the incoming Japanese WHMs from the viewpoint of immigration control, worrying especially that they might obtain long-term employment in Australia (e.g. as chefs—see Wilson 2008: 367). Limitations on work conditions stem from this early unease. Since the Australian recession in the early 1990s, a tension between two interests has characterised views on the Australian WH scheme. On the one hand, immigration, tourism and certain business interests favour WHMs for their high rates of visa compliance, for filling in labour shortages in the agricultural and

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61 For example, the Federal Government committed 4 million dollars to further develop the backpacker market between 1994 and 1998 (Murphy 1995: 2).

62 There is a heavy overlap between ‘backpacker’ populations and WHMs who come to Australia. For example, the number of Japanese backpackers was reported to be 32,000 in 2005 (Peel and Steen 2006: 1058). In the same year, 9,421 Japanese people were issued with the Australian WH visa (JAWHM 2007), which means nearly 30 percent of the Japanese backpackers in Australia were WHMs in this year.

63 Japan established the JAWHM in order to ease the difficulties young Australians experience in finding employment upon arrival in Japan. However, given the extreme imbalance between Japanese WHMs in Australia and Australian WHMs in Japan, the majority of its clients are Japanese nationals.
other sectors, and for spending most of their savings and earnings before they leave.\(^{64}\) On the other hand, some view WHMs as threats to the local employment market. These views are often represented by trade unions, which worry about high unemployment rates, especially for youth (Murphy 1995: 10–11). Such a concern led to the Parliamentary Committee Report, published in 1997 (Kinnaird 1999: 39). By discussing extensively the opposing views of interest groups, the Committee made recommendations to maintain, but not expand the WH scheme, and cautioned against using WHMs for the purpose of solving labour market problems in Australia, or using the scheme as a side door to skilled migration (Joint Standing Committee on Migration 1997: xvii).\(^{65}\)

Largely ignoring such recommendations to keep a status quo, the Immigration Department went ahead and expanded the scheme. As one such measure, the Department has removed the cap on the maximum number of WHMs, which had been placed at 38,000 in 1995, and later at 50,000 (Clarke 2002 cited in Allon 2004: 60). Moreover, it increased the age limit from 25 to 30 years old in 2000 (DIMA Media Release 6 June 2000).\(^{66}\) As part of its election campaign, the then Liberal party-led Coalition government announced in October 2001 that it would extend the WH agreement to more countries (DIMA 2001: 10). In 2002, the Immigration Department introduced the electronic processing system to make the WH visa application considerably easier (Wilson 2008: 375).\(^{67}\) The visa conditions were further relaxed in 2006 when the restrictions for study and paid employment were extended to the current duration of four months study and six months work under one employer (instead of three months and four months respectively). These

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\(^{64}\) See Murphy (1995: 69), and Joint Standing Committee on Migration (1997) for examples of voices of pro-WH industries.

\(^{65}\) Commenting on the Committee Report, Kinnaird (1999: 47) raises questions regarding the exaggerated claims of positive impacts of WHMs on the Australian economy, in particular the extent to which they create new jobs. As part of a response to the Committee Report, ‘defensive research’ (Wilson 2008: 374) was commissioned by the anti-union and pro-business government of the time, in order to prove the economic worth of the WH scheme. The published report states that the WH overall created more jobs than it took away from locals (Harding and Webster 2002: 8–10).

\(^{66}\) Before the change, those aged between 26 and 30 could apply for a WH visa, the granting of which was based on the Minister’s satisfaction that the ‘applicant’s entry [would] be of benefit to the applicant and to Australia’ (Murphy 1995: 77).

\(^{67}\) An internal audit undertaken in 2003 corrected some operations of the Tokyo Office of the Australian Immigration Department, stressing that the Department prioritised and encouraged online application processing (Australian National Audit Office 2006). My ethnographic data indicate that the WH visa is now usually issued online to Japanese nationals within a day.
measures directly led to a marked increase in the number of WHMs from 74,450 in 1999–00 to 93,760 in 2003–04 (DIMIA 2005).

By 2003, the benefits of the WH scheme for Australia were clearly stated as social and economic, a move away from the original intention of the scheme, ‘cultural exchange of young people at the grassroots level:’

Australia’s Working Holiday visa program has both social and economic goals. It promotes international understanding by helping young people experience Australian culture. It also supports the Australian economy by providing supplementary labour for industries requiring short-term casual workers (DIMIA Annual Report 2002–03).

The single most influential change made in recent times is the provision of the ‘second WH’ visa. In 2005, the Immigration Department announced that it would allow WHMs to apply for a second WH visa, if they engaged in work in designated rural areas for at least three months (88 days) during their first WH. Qualifying WHMs may apply for their second WH while still in Australia, or after going home. Although the Immigration Department encouraged WHMs to take up a second WH visa by representing such work in its campaign material as a healthy way to enjoy Australia68, this new rule had the clear effect of formalising the quasi-labour migration aspect of the WH scheme. That the Australian government has been using the WH scheme as an important source of temporary labour power contrasts with the use of temporary contract migrant labour in other countries (Inglis 2007: 194).

The expansion of wine, fruit and vegetable exports to Asian regions has recently increased the need for harvest and other agricultural workers in Australia (Hugo 2006: 224). The Australian government established the National Harvest Labour Information Service (NHLIS) in July 2003, in order to help direct jobseekers to harvest work on the Harvest Trail, and assist growers to find workers at harvest

68 The leaflet I picked up during fieldwork contains the following sentences: Imagine...keeping fit being a farmhand in the bush. Topping up that tan picking berries in Byron Bay. Kick-starting this year’s vintage by picking grapes needed for the robust red wines from the Coonawarra. (DIMA n.d. Pick Australia).
times. NHLIS also publishes the National Harvest Guide, which provides information about types and locations of harvest jobs in Australia, and guidance regarding transport and accommodation for workers.

Japanese WHMs soon began applying for the second WH visa in steadily growing numbers. In the first year since the introduction of the rule, only 70 people were issued with a second WH visa. In 2006 this rose to 962, and in 2007 to 1,611. Given that the application for the second WH visa can be submitted both onshore and offshore, and that the eligibility remains active until the applicant reaches the age limit, it is natural to assume many more Japanese WHMs will follow suit.

The provision of the second WH visa solicited mixed responses. A national newspaper article reported that farm employers welcomed it as providing relief with an increase of willing workers, and allowing for longer employment periods (Taylor 2007). Others such as researchers of social policy were quoted in newspapers arguing for a ‘proper’ guest worker scheme that would benefit both the Australian farmers in need of a stable and reliable workforce, and neighbouring countries with high unemployment rates, such as those in the Pacific (McDonald 2006). It is unsurprising, but nonetheless regrettable, that the strong focus of Australian public debates has been on the immediate economic benefits to Australia, with little concern shown for the welfare of WHM workers. As I will detail in chapter 4, my data demonstrate the frequent exploitation of WHM labour in Australia’s rural, as well as urban workplaces.

In part 1, I explored the theoretical concerns and the historical context. The following chapters will introduce ethnographic accounts, starting with part 2 on migratory motivations.

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69 The initiative continues in the form of the Harvest Trail as part of Australia JobSearch, a government-funded and -operated, free matching service for job seekers and prospective employers.
Part 2

Migratory desires and decisions
Chapter 3

The desire for cosmopolitanism and the imagined ‘West’

Introduction

The keyword wākingu horidē (Working Holiday), when typed into a Japanese online search engine, brings up hundreds of thousands of websites promoting this popular mode of international migration. These websites are mostly run by migration agencies, and typically invite viewers to imagine the endless future possibilities that a Working Holiday Maker (WHM) can enjoy. The following is one example of how they entice potential participants:

The Working Holiday is characterised by a high level of freedom. Its basic purpose is a holiday, but casual work is allowed so it’s flexible. Go on a WH as a trial of living or working abroad, to increase language skills while living in the actual place, or to tour around highlights of a country at a leisurely pace. Set your own goals and enjoy a rich Working Holiday life!70

Reflecting the diversity conveyed by such marketing lines, Japanese WHMs in the present study listed a variety of reasons for their travel to Australia. However, as the excerpts below convey, they shared a number of motivations in common,

70 http://www.ryugaku-seikatsu.net/Workingholiday/ (last accessed 13 July 2010).
including a sense of stagnation and a desire to actively pursue fulfilment through new experiences and self-improvement:

I like English, so I’d wanted to immerse myself in an English-speaking environment to improve my speaking skills, and also to meet people of different nationalities. [...] [At the time of leaving] I was having relationship problems, and I wanted to become a stronger person as well, to show him the new me (Mariko, female, 27).

We all want to go outside Japan, don’t we? Especially, I wanted to bring myself to an English-speaking world [as an aspiring dancer], but America is full of Japanese dancers. Australia has a low profile, but it still offers me the prestige of [being associated with] abroad (Emi, female, 27).

I had an interest in foreign cultures and was an international studies major, but job hunting as a graduate wasn’t going well, and that was when I thought of going overseas either as a language student, or a WHM, because I couldn’t afford long-term study abroad (Tetsuya, male, 25).

I was an IT specialist for seven to eight years. I felt I had done everything that was within my reach. I tend to get bored easily. [...] I wanted to change my environment by going somewhere completely different. [...] It was my last chance, given my age [30 at the time of departure] (Mitsuru, male, 31).

While the above quotations contain various interests and feelings, they all communicate a strong sense of ‘I’ as the decision-making unit. The ‘I’ has particular desires, and acts to bring about changes in life. At the same time, this ‘I’ is also a social being, always situated in a particular socio-economic position. For example, the increasingly high standard of living in Australia makes a Working Holiday (WH) a major financial commitment for Japanese youth. It is not surprising, then, that those in my study tended to be older, with savings from their post-education work experience.

This part of the thesis is devoted to the personal reasons behind WHMs’ migratory decisions, and their relation to dominant social ideologies and practices in Japan. In this chapter, I will first explore my interlocutors’ desire for cosmopolitanism, and the major social, cultural and historical factors that shaped their individual pursuit of cultural capital in this field. I will then examine WHMs’ choice of Australia as
their destination, in order to illustrate how the Southern continent is discursively positioned in their worldview. The Japanese image of the ‘West’ is a key concept throughout.

In chapter 4, the focus will shift to the location of WHMs in the Japanese labour market of the lost decade. I will explain that shifting socioeconomic practices of Japan in the post-bubble economy, especially since the early 1990s, both restricted and opened up life possibilities for the lost generation. A particular emphasis will be placed on gendered social expectations, and how individual youth developed and acted on certain desires. Throughout this fourth chapter, my aim is to show how certain larger forces played a part in opening up a particular context in which the WHMs sought to develop their selves, as they made their way towards adulthood.

The pre-arrival image of Australia

Despite the abundance of available information, the overwhelming majority of my interlocutors reported that they had limited knowledge of Australia as their destination before arriving. Pre-arrival images of Australia tended to be vague and stereotypical. Koalas, kangaroos, Ayers Rock (Uluru), white sandy beaches, the red earth and the blue sky were recurrent features, and the Opera House was usually the only sign of human creation. These are all the stereotypical representations of Australia straight out of tourism brochures,71 as well as the standard answers to the annual surveys conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).72

Australian policy efforts have recently strived to renew the overseas image of the country. For example, the Aichi Expo in 2005 was one opportunity for Australia to present fresh images of the country as young, vibrant and full of diversity.73

71 Almost identical images were found in marketing brochures promoting Australia to the Canadian backpacker market in 1998 (Jenkins 2003: 316). Jenkins’ study covers how particular promotional images are reproduced by backpackers themselves, while they are in Australia.
72 Personal communication with a senior DFAT officer (31 January 2006).
73 The success of this particular effort may have been limited, as the most popular attraction of the Australian pavilion was reported to be the Crocodile Burger (Personal communication with a senior DFAT officer. 31 January 2006).
Similarly, Tourism Australia has been at pains to promote the country beyond its image of Crocodile Dundee. According to representatives of Tourism Australia’s Japan team, the organisation’s campaign materials now deliberately include images of human beings, in the hope that the overseas tourism market will come to think of Australia as more than a gorgeous, but essentially empty landscape devoid of civilization (Cathy Hales, personal communication, 2007). Still, WHMs in my study mostly imagined Australia as just that: exotic and isolated landscapes with strange animals and little human activity. This kind of imagining resonates with the 1980s Japanese perception of the Australian WH as an opportunity for wild adventures (see chapter 1).

**The image of the West and Japan’s national identity**

Japanese WHMs in the present study were very keen on experiences of worldliness outside the ‘parochial’ national domain:

> I craved to do something different from other people. ...I enjoyed music and films from western culture, and I wanted to see the outside world (Makoto, male, 24).

> By taking the WH, I wanted to go on diving trips, and to travel in Australia, as well as just live abroad. In Japan, you just can’t do things like sharing a house and have a barbeque on the weekend (Tomoe, female, 30).

As I will illustrate, this ‘outside world’ that Makoto and Tomoe talked about is not any random place, but the imagined West. Such an image of the West is inseparable from the history of Japanese national identity building. The beginning of Japan’s modern history is usually traced back to the arrival of Commodore Mathew C. Perry into Tokyo Bay in July 1853, when he demanded that Japan opens its ports for American ships. From then on, Japan focused its efforts on modernisation (*bunmei kaika*, or ‘civilisation and enlightenment’), in order to match the economic and
military might of the US and European superpowers.\textsuperscript{74} Japan’s efforts to gain new knowledge such as Western customs, science and technology ranged from entering the international diplomatic system,\textsuperscript{75} inviting western officials, hiring teachers and technical advisors\textsuperscript{76} to sending students and state representatives abroad. Such new knowledge and technology also led to a realisation among influential intellectuals that Japan needed to become a stronger military power, if it wanted to counter Western domination over Asia (Ishizuki 1985: 164). From the start of its modern history, then, Japan’s national identity had its roots in the idea of the West, and Japan pursued a national project of modernisation based on what the West signified: progress and advancement.

Since then, the image of the West has continued to be Japan’s reference point, when it comes to national identity and Japan’s place in the world. Being a discursive construction, the West can be imagined as having positive or negative characteristics, depending on the circumstances surrounding Japan’s need for self-definition (Gluck 1985: 137). For example, in Meiji Japan the West was seen as a positive model to emulate. More recently, as a later section will explain, Japan’s project of internationalisation in the 1970s and 1980s, and of surviving the forces of globalisation since the 1990s, has largely been about maintaining nationalism by treating the West-dominated ‘outside world’ as the opponent. Whether or not the

\textsuperscript{74} Even when the exclusion policy and its ban on foreign travel were still in place, diplomatic missions to the US and Europe (e.g. France in 1864 and 1867) took place to investigate institutions and cultures of the West (Ishizuki 1985: 162). The Tokugawa shogunate also established an office ‘for the study of barbarian books’ (ban sho shir abesho) in 1855, to send intellectuals abroad as ‘official students’ (Burks 1985: 149). The Tokugawa ban on study abroad was finally lifted for all in 1866, two years before the Meiji restoration (Burks 1985: 152). The US was a popular destination for most privately funded students, and those on government scholarships in the mid to late nineteenth century. Exact numbers of Meiji era students are contested. One account states that 11, 248 passports were issued between 1868–1902, and 57 percent went to the US, popular for its relatively inexpensive living costs, advanced technology and the availability of practical courses in areas such as agriculture, mechanics and engineering (Burks 1985: 152–153). During a similar period of 1868–1896, 11 percent of such students were said to be on official trips (Burks 1985: 152).

\textsuperscript{75} In 1854, following Perry’s arrival, Japan signed the Treaty of Peace and Amity with the US, and within two years, allowed American diplomats to be stationed in Japan. For a detailed account of the European pressure on Japan to enter ‘international society’, see Suzuki (2003).

\textsuperscript{76} They mostly came from Britain, France, the US and Germany (Schwantzes 1985: 209). Public works engineering such as railway construction was often overseen by the British, while medical training was often dominated by Germans. (Schwantzes 1985: 210–212).
CHAPTER 3 THE DESIRE FOR COSMOPOLITANISM AND THE IMAGINED ‘WEST’

portrayal of this opponent was favourable, the imagined West has always been the standard against which Japan judged itself. In this thinking, cosmopolitanism exists outside Japan, which largely excludes the discursive possibility of cosmopolitan Japan.

In contemporary popular cultural imaginings, the Meiji images of the West as progressive, modern and advanced still persist. For example, a code analysis of over 2,500 Japanese television advertisements featuring ‘foreigners’ found that ‘white people’ were overwhelmingly and consistently portrayed as signifiers of modernity with an ‘international flair’ (Prieler 2008: 6). The conflation of ‘Western’, ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘whiteness’ gives the Westerners a special status, and ‘parochial’ Japanese identity is to be transcended through association with them. Although Japan has by now surpassed most Western economies, ‘the motivation to be recognized as equal or better remains’ (Rosenberger 1996: 13).

The English language as cosmopolitan cultural capital

Attaining a cosmopolitan identity through mastering English, the imagined language of the West, was a powerful drive behind WHMs’ decisions to go to Australia. Comments such as the following were extremely common:

Before leaving Japan, I was thinking things like ‘I wanna speak fluent English, it’d be cool’ (laughs) (Yoshie, female, 32).

An advertisement for an English school from nearly 20 years ago still resonates with the sentiments of WHMs such as Yoshie: ‘If you dream in English, you are a kokusaijin (internationalist)’ (Nakamura 1991, cited in Kubota 1998:303). For all but a few WHMs in my study, Australia’s primary value was undeniably as an English-speaking society. Occasionally, my interlocutors explained that learning English was not their reason for an Australian WH, but it is telling that they felt the need to ‘clarify’ this, without being prompted.

For the majority of Japanese learners of English, including the majority of my interlocutors, the language competence they seek involves speaking the kind of English spoken by Westerners (i.e. native speakers). The act of cultivation,
maintenance and performance of the cosmopolitan identity through English speech occurs in the presence of those who are seen as the ‘naturally’ cosmopolitan (i.e. the Westerners) as interlocutors. In other words, conversing with Westerners in English functions as recognition from the ‘real’ English speakers as a seal of approval. The popular idea that Westerners are these ‘real’ English speakers is well expressed by the dialogue between a professor of English and an editor of a major Japanese newspaper, published in a popular journal. These professionals of prestigious social standing openly commented that the accented English spoken by the Filipinos or Indians sounds ‘so ugly to the ear’ and together with their ‘often wrong’ usage of words, it is ‘tempting to make every possible correction’ (Funabashi and Suzuki 1999: 14). This comment was followed by the backhanded ‘praise’ that even then, such confidence and ownership of the English language is something the Japanese can learn from, because ‘we tend to strive to imitate correct English’ (Funabashi and Suzuki 1999: 14–15).

The roots of Japan’s interest in English go back to the Meiji era of the late nineteenth century. In their quest for internationalisation and modern nation building, intellectuals and policymakers began treating English both as a tool of communication to negotiate with intruders on an equal ground, and a key to gaining new knowledge and technology (Stanlaw 2004: 54–55). The end of World War II saw the rise of English as the most dominant foreign language in people’s minds. No longer seen as the language of the enemy as it had been in wartime, intellectuals as well as ordinary Japanese people became eager to learn English, the language of the Allied occupation force comprised of personnel from the US, the UK, Australia and other countries. A second wave of the English craze swept Japan

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77 Elsewhere, it has been pointed out that this ‘correct’ English is frequently American (and to a lesser extent, British) English (Tsuda 1994: 189).

78 Commonly, the aforementioned arrival of Commodore Mathew C. Perry is cited as the beginning of Japan’s attention to the English language. However, some argue that the arrival of American missionaries 15 years after Perry and their teaching English at private and government schools was the true ‘opening’ of Japan to the world of the English language (Ike 1995: 4). In any case, English had become a popular language to learn by the end of the nineteenth century. For example, Fukuzawa Yukichi, a former samurai intellectual prominent in generating ideas for Japan’s modernisation, wrote that English had become even more popular in school than the Chinese language, traditionally essential for any student to master (Fukuzawa 1899).

79 The public enthusiasm for English is well illustrated by the following events: In September 1945, a month after Japan’s surrender to the Allied Forces, the first post-war English phrasebook was published. Titled Nichibei eikaiwa techo, (‘Anglo-Japanese
During the lead-up to the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. For example, a book called *Eigo ni tsuyokunaru hon* (Strengthening Your English Skills) became an instant bestseller in 1961, selling a million copies within two and a half months of its release. Moreover, the year 1963 saw the establishment of the STEP (Society for Testing English Proficiency), and approximately 38,000 people took its test in the first year.\(^8\) *Expo ’70* in Osaka, the first international fair of its kind in Asia, further encouraged the trend of English learning.

By the mid 1980s, Japan’s national economy expanded to become the second largest in the world after the US, and the presence of Japanese companies overseas increased. Japanese corporations established factories in South-East Asia, and famously dispatched managers from headquarters as a means of conducting business ‘in the Japanese way’. Trade imbalances between Japan and the US met with heavy Japan-bashing in the US and Europe by the late 1980s. Arising from this was the feeling amongst the Japanese that their nation was misunderstood, and in need of more positive images for the outside world (Kawatake 1988 and Ayabe 1992 cited in Iwabuchi 1994: 69). Bilingual handbooks produced by major corporations are one notable example of an effort to promote an understanding of Japan’s ‘unique’ culture to the English-speaking non-Japanese (Yoshino 1995: 173–178).

Following then Prime Minister Nakasone’s pledge to transform Japan into an ‘international country’, the concept of ‘internationalisation’ (*kokusaika*) became popular among policymakers and the intelligentsia alike (Hook and Weiner 1992: 1). The use of English was identified as a key element in this effort to cultivate a wider understanding of Japan and its culture. The underlying assumption was that, if Japanese people could explain themselves in English, foreigners could develop a ‘correct’ understanding of who the Japanese really were, as well as the value of their ‘unique’ culture (Ivy 1995: 2–3). In this sense, the ‘internationalisation’ of the

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Conversation Manual*), it focused on American English, and contained 79 example sentences and 204 words under themes such as shopping and asking for directions. It became the first bestseller in post-war Japan. It sold 3.6 million copies in three months. In the following year, the state-run NHK Radio (Nihon hōsō kyōkai or Japan Broadcasting Corporation) began broadcasting English lessons. This program proved popular, and has continued to this day.

\(^8\) Currently, the number of candidates reaches 2.5 million per year. STEP official website [http://www.eiken.or.jp/step/index.html](http://www.eiken.or.jp/step/index.html) (last accessed 13th October 2008).
1980s is more aptly described as an ambition towards the 'Japanisation' of the world.\footnote{It is no coincidence that Japan's soul searching began at this time, in the form of \textit{nihonjinron}, or 'theories about the Japanese people'. For example, the Nakasone government established the well-funded International Research Centre for Japanese Studies (\textit{Kokusai nihon bunka kenkyū sentā}), with the aim of understanding the origins and development of 'Japanese culture'. Many argue that these efforts to '(re)discover' and affirm Japan's unique culture were, in fact, the forces \textit{constructing} such uniqueness (See Befu 2001 for a review of the \textit{nihonjinron} literature). Internationalisation as a policy, and the emergence of \textit{nihonjinron} came together to maintain a balance between Japan's need to expand its influence outwardly as a 'first class' nation, and remaining patriotic. However, the fundamental contradiction remained. That is, even while exhibiting a desire to be understood through internationalisation, \textit{nihonjinron} emphasised the impossibility for the non-Japanese to fully grasp the 'Japanese way', because of its uniqueness.}

\textit{The lost decade and the 'Japanese with English abilities'}

In contrast to the past ‘internationalisation’, ‘globalisation’ (\textit{gurōbaruka}), a current buzzword in Japan, has quite a different connotation. Broadly speaking, globalisation is about ‘changing economic relationships accompanied by the increasingly rapid and intensified circulation of finance, commodities, people, signs and symbols’ (Mackie 2007). Japanese policymakers began using this term to replace ‘internationalisation’ in the late 1980s, and this timing is telling. It was during this time that Japan’s economic competitiveness started to weaken, and policymakers and top management figures in private companies alike began viewing globalisation as a threat to the national economy (Hamada 2006: 141). This is despite the fact that Japan is very much implicated in the rise of transnational corporations and other economic forces, which are partly responsible for the current globalisation of the world.\footnote{At the national policy level at least, globalisation has largely been equated with Americanisation. For example, former Prime Minister Koizumi Jun’ichiro was arguably the most pro-American of all past prime ministers, and his push for Japan’s globalisation was sometimes criticised as simply trying to follow the footsteps of the US. In 2009, newly elected Hatoyama Yukio, who led the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) into a historic victory over the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), had a markedly different view. In his essay translated and published in the \textit{New York Times}, he stated: 'In the post-Cold War period, Japan has been continually buffeted by the winds of market fundamentalism in a U.S.-led movement that is more usually called globalization. [...] If we look back on the changes in Japanese society since the end of the Cold War, I believe it is no exaggeration to say that the global economy has damaged traditional economic activities and destroyed local communities' (Hatoyama 2009). \url{http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/27/opinion/27iht-edhatoyama.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print} (last accessed 12 December 2010).} On the surface, Japan’s interests in internationalisation and globalisation are similar, because the central drive is a nationalistic concern for remaining an important and respected nation. But they are
also different, because while the discourse of internationalisation in the 1980s was an expression of Japan’s confidence as a rising world power, the discourse of globalisation since the lost decade is an expression of fear that its power and influence might be diminishing. There is no more Japanisation of the world: Japan’s survival rests on its need to ‘globalise’ (i.e. fit itself to the ‘global standard’) as well as becoming self-reliant, in order to remain in the game.  

In the lost decade, English language ability is commonly seen as one of the tools to develop self-reliance in the international arena. Political attention given to the issue of English language education in Japan has reflected changes of attitude occurring right at the top of the policy circles. In January 2000, a report commissioned by the Obuchi Government *The Frontier Within: Individual Empowerment and Better Governance in the New Millennium* outlined Japan’s future vision. It repeatedly highlighted the importance of the English language, with frequent recurrence of the phrase ‘English as the international lingua franca’. For example, chapter 6, on *Japan’s Place in the World* states (PMO 2000 CH6 IV 3 Toward global literacy):

Lest there be any misunderstanding, we stress that Japanese is a wonderful language. [...] But [...] English has become the international lingua franca, a process accelerated by the Internet and globalization. So long as English is effectively the language of international discourse, there is no alternative to familiarizing ourselves with it within Japan. Even if we stop short of making it an official second language, we should give it the status of a second working language and use it routinely alongside Japanese.

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83 Some economists state that, in fact, Japan’s trade became far stronger in the 2000s than the previous decades (Hamada 2006). However, whether or not Japan’s actual trade power increased is not a significant point for the purpose of my argument. It is the perception—that Japan’s overall economic power is declining and that external forces are threatening the country’s future—that is relevant.

84 This was particularly noticeable in the sections titled Global Literacy, The Information-Technology Revolution and Transforming Education.


86 A more extreme statement of this sort was also made by the first Education Minister Mori Arinori back in the Meiji era: ‘Under the circumstances, our meager language, which can never be of any use outside of our small islands, is doomed to yield to the domination of the English tongue, especially when the power of steam and electricity shall have pervaded the land....all reason suggests its disuse.’ (Mori 1873: ivii quoted in Stanlaw 2004: 65). However, such sentiment never led to the official adoption of English in Japan.
In the new global order, Japan needed to realign itself with new global standards, and it was no longer adequate to assert Japan’s presence as ‘unique and different’ from industrialised nations of the ‘Occident’ (Iwabuchi 2008: 547). However, it is no easy task to achieve the balancing act between globalising to survive and preserving the sense of nationalism based on ‘unique’ Japanese-ness, because no strong imagery has so far developed to replace Japan’s past self-image of a high-achieving, modern yet uniquely non-Western nation. The following social debate illustrates this difficulty well. Acquiring a name *eigo daini kōyōgoron* (‘the debate over English as the second official language’), participating intellectuals had heated discussions regarding the desirability of a more aggressive promotion of English in Japan.87 On the one hand, the argument of the pro-English camp echoed the belief of the previous era that Japan as a nation must represent itself ‘correctly’ to the ‘international community’, and to do so is a matter of nationalistic pride (Funabashi and Suzuki 1999: 12–27). On the other hand, the anti-English camp opposed the widespread use of English, on the grounds that it would Americanise the Japanese language, and by association, Japanese culture.88 Framed as a matter of national security in the face of ‘spiritual colonisation’ (Tsuda 1996: 45), the pro-English approach was viewed by the other side as encouraging uncritical adoration of the foreign language at the expense of national language education (Ishii 1996: 41). Furthermore, both sides exhibited an understanding that the dominance of the English language was a force that may threaten Japan. The pro-English camp claimed that there was no future for Japan without English. The other side predicted the loss of Japan’s crucial essence through English language imperialism. Either way, the assumption was that Japan needed to take action to protect itself against the dominance of this foreign language. Compared to the arrogance behind

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87 This debate was intensified by the release of the aforementioned *Frontier Within* report commissioned by the Obuchi government, which hinted at the desirability of using English as Japan’s second official language. Further fuelling the debate was the *National Commission on Educational Reform: 17 Proposals for Changing Education*, also commissioned by the Obuchi government in March 2000. The final report, delivered to his successor Mori Yoshirō in December 2001, stated that ‘IT education and English education should be promoted as early as possible by exposing children to ‘authentic and realia’. Responsibility for reaching and the way of teaching are important issues. Assistant foreign language teachers (AFL) whose native language is English and staff who have expertise and experience should be actively invited from outside.” [http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/education/report/report.html](http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/education/report/report.html) (English language version; last accessed 2 February 2010).

the internationalisation of Japan in the 1980s, the responses to globalisation in the lost decade displayed insecurity and fear.

The vision of Japan as an English-speaking society was turned into policy plans, outlined in reports such as *Developing a Strategic Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'* (2002) and *Regarding the Establishment of an Action Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'* (2003). The government’s message to the public has consistently been that it is individuals’ responsibility to master English and other potential-enhancing skills (Hashimoto 2009: 30). The underlying idea is to transform Japanese citizens through new skills and abilities, which in turn will transform the nation. The discursive emphasis of government policy papers on individuals and their potential is echoed by the words of WHMs, who are eager to, and feel responsible for improving their own abilities:

> The number one reason for going to Australia is because I want to speak English. I think it will expand my career options later (Shizue, female, 23).

> I had an interest in Germany too, but I chose Australia because, whatever the case, English would become a necessity in the future (Testuya, male, 25).

Hashimoto points out that there is a rhetorical continuity between policy directions and popular sentiment (Hashimoto 2009: 24) and that promotion of English as cultural capital is ‘not a top down project but is embraced by the wider public’ (Hashimoto 2009: 38). Whether WHMs in my study really believed in the importance of English in their future, or if it was a convenient way to legitimise their motivation for a WH, I cannot be certain. However, what is evident is that learning English has been a project widely pursued by a great number of Japanese people over the last century, and the social climate of the lost decade, in particular the neoliberal discourse of self-responsibility and economic competitiveness, has shaped this project in a certain way. In sum, WHMs’ desire for the English language is an intersection of their individual project of self-improvement, and political

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89 Studies of young people in other non-English speaking countries have found similar enthusiasm, which associates the English language with progress and modernity, both at the individual and national levels (Matthews and Sidhu 2005: 56; Pegrum 2004: 5).
leaders’ project of transforming a nation into a thriving economy. It was in this context that English learning opportunities were considered an added value to the Australian WH. Be it for the purpose of career building, or seeking the excitement of being at the heart of global modernity, the image of the WH experience offered a sense of hope for acquiring a useful skill and social prestige through which self-transformation might be possible.

**Choice by elimination: Australia’s peripheral position in the West**

Japanese WHMs in my study reflected a broader Japanese imagination of the West, on the basis of which they chose to go to Australia. These young people largely treated the Southern nation as interchangeable with other Western countries. This is evidenced by the pragmatic convenience and compromise frequently expressed in narratives of ‘why I picked Australia’. The ‘elimination method’ used in the selection process shows the lukewarm attitude of the WHMs toward their destination. Noriko’s reasoning is typical:

> I wanted to go to an English-speaking country, but America is expensive and unsafe now. I didn’t have money to study full-time, so the choices I had were Australia, Canada or New Zealand [where WH visas were available at the time]. Canada is too cold, and New Zealand is too small to offer enough jobs, and the time difference from Japan is greater (Noriko, 29, Sydney).

For those interested in learning the English language, this method of selecting Australia first eliminates non-English-speaking countries from their choices. Then, the relative inaccessibility of work permits removes the US and the UK from the list. The US currently has no WH agreement with Japan, and while the UK does, its age limit of 25 years and the annual quota of 200 WH visas act as a common obstacle. The next countries in line tend to be Australia, Canada and New Zealand, because they are English-speaking and their visa requirements are more relaxed.  

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90 Other examples include business leaders who are keen to strengthen the IT industry through promotion of English skills, or educators whose aim is to promote English while cultivating a strong sense of national identity (Hashimoto 2009: 32–33).  
91 A small number of those between 25 and 30 years old may be issued with a WH visa, based on a short essay submitted to explain why their application missed the age limit.  
92 Throughout my fieldwork, nobody I knew mentioned Ireland, another Japanese WH partner, whether as a choice of destination for themselves or their friends. At migration agent offices I visited in Japan and Australia, there was no agent specifically in charge of
Among those who prefer Australia, Canada is usually unpopular because of its perceived cold climate, and New Zealand tends to be imagined unfavourably as a small country with fewer jobs and a smaller Japanese population. On the other hand, Australia is associated with a warmer climate, sizable Japanese communities and sufficient employment opportunities. This line of reasoning seems so prevalent that a Japanese tourism business owner in Sydney voiced his concern about it in his monthly magazine column, suggesting that Japanese people should take a more proactive stance in recognising Australia’s virtues (Matsumura 2006: 32).

**The hierarchy in the West**

Although all were seen as desirable, countries deemed Western were often interchangeable in the imaginations surrounding the West. Interview narratives indicate that Japanese WHMs in my study frequently saw Australia as a substitute for the ‘real’ place of desire:

I once travelled to New Orleans for a month with Japanese musician friends, and I had always wanted to live there, if I was to leave Japan. When a friend of a friend suggested that I join him in Australia, I thought it’d be a good chance to learn English, gain work experience abroad, and prepare myself for a future life in the US (Kōji, male, 30).

The film and TV industry [within which he had established a career as an editor] is bigger in America or the UK, but it is hard to get a job because of competition. So I looked into an option of a WH in an English-speaking country. Since the UK has the age limit of 25, I picked Australia (Shin’ichi, male, 28).

Approximately one quarter of interlocutors previously experienced short-term study in the US, Canada, NZ and Australia, typically in their early 20s. For these WHMs, the relatively long-term nature of the WH was the main attraction. For those who wanted to study in the West but could not due to financial considerations, the self-funded WH was the only realistic option to experience life matters relating to the Irish WH, in contrast to the abundance of those specialising in Australian WHs.
in the West in any meaningful way (chapter 4 will discuss the issue of finance in more detail).

WHMs commonly conceptualised Western countries in a hierarchical order, based on their profile in, and historical relationship with, Japan. Cultural powerhouses such as the US, and to a much lesser extent the UK, have dominated the imagination of the West via heavy flows of mediated images. Juri (female, 26) longingly described her yearning for the American way of life, during her preparation for Australia:

[My image of Australia is] like my image of America. [...] The image of Starbucks, filled with the overwhelming smell of coffee, [...] I’m dying to live like in the movies, at a breakfast table in a big beautiful house, where milk and orange juice are poured not directly out of paper cartons, but properly from nice glass bottles...

Later during the same interview, Juri gave a light-hearted comment about her hope for international marriage, culminating with part white, part Japanese children. Her fantasy echoes the widely promoted image of squeaky clean, heterosexual, white middle-class America since the post-war period. As discussed in the previous chapter, Japanese patterns of consumption went through radical changes during the era of high economic growth as newly produced and acquired electrical goods permeated the nation. In particular, colour television became the must-have item for the middle class by the late 1960s (Kelly 1992: 78–79)\(^3\), and the mass production and consumption of this household item was accompanied with wide dissemination of images from the US.

Marilyn Ivy explains that it was the middle-class American cultural images of this time that ‘taught this newly formed Japanese middle-class what they should aspire to and what they should consume’ (Ivy 1993: 245). In other words, the American gaze had been internalised in the Japanese mind as their ‘referential vantage point’

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\(^3\) The depiction of an upper middle-class lifestyle in the Ozu film *Ohayô* (released in 1959) shows how televisions became an object of desire among this class, as the entire story revolves around children’s protest against their parents who refuse to buy them a television. By the late 1960s, colour televisions, along with cars and air conditioners (the ‘three Cs’) had become the three must-have items for the consumption-driven middle class who had already acquired the three *Ss* of the late 1950s and early 1960s: *Senpuki, Sentakuki, Suihanki* (electric fans, washing machines and rice cookers) (Kelly 1992: 78–79).
(Yoshimi 2007: 20). In contemporary Japan, there is a strong awareness of the US in general, and constant comparisons of the two countries are made in the media by politicians and in everyday conversations. Survey figures reveal that the Japanese consistently have positive images of the US, even in the face of the worldwide decrease in the country’s popularity (Yoshimi 2007: 9–10). It is in this context that certain Japanese WHMs both idealise and identify with middle-class (white) American, and by extension, other Western images and lifestyles.

**Australia as a generic Western country of white people**

When prompted about images of Australian cities before their first arrival, interlocutors’ comments indicated that Australia’s urbanity is situated faraway from the ‘wild’ Australia, both geographically and imaginatively. Frequent characteristics cited included economic advancement and features of modernity, such as skyscrapers, clean streets, bustling shopping districts, well-dressed people and impeccably presented shops. These images seemingly contradict those of Australia as nature that I discussed earlier. However, none of my interlocutors seemed to find contradictory the fact that these two opposing images coexisted in their interview narratives. One factor which may have contributed to their split image is the marketing of tourism businesses, which frequently relies on a collage of photos depicting Australia’s beaches, deserts, rain forests, the Opera House and the modern surroundings in one space. Another possible contributing factor is interlocutors’ assumption that Australia is part of the West. For, strikingly, their images of cities were interchangeable with images of other Western cities, particularly the US.

[Before arrival] I didn’t know much about [Australian cities], but I used to think they must be developed, like America (Daisuke, male, 21).

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94 In 2006, 63 percent of Japanese surveyed had positive feelings about the US, and this figure was the highest among 14 countries surveyed (Yoshimi 2007:10). Similarly, the US was the most popular country among over 1,300 Japanese high school students, surveyed for a comparative study involving the US, China and Korea (Nihon seishōnen kenkyūjo 2006: 42–50).
Before coming here, every foreign country [i.e. Western countries] in my imagination was totally European. So I thought Sydney would look European, too (Mariko, female, 27).

Large and big, like Osaka [where he was from] and other Japanese cities, except that people are white Western people and everything is in English (Daisuke, male, 21).

Before their arrival in Australia, my interlocutors were typically unaware of the fact that one’s national, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds may not be one and the same thing. There has long been a tendency in Japan to equate having Japanese nationality with being ‘ethnic Japanese’ and speaking Japanese as the mother tongue (Lie 2000: 76). In much the same way, WHMs in my study assumed that being ‘Australian’ was the same as having Australian nationality, being ‘white’ and being a native speaker of English.\(^95\)

Australia as a Western nation was unambiguously imagined by my interlocutors as a country of white people. In interview narratives on pre-departure expectations, hardly any mention was made of non-white Australians.\(^96\) This runs counter to the fact that more than 25 percent of the Australian population are overseas born, and even more have at least one overseas-born parent. Such a lack of awareness about the host society’s ethnic relations is consistent with the findings of a study on young Japanese people in New York City and London (Fujita 2004: 34–35). The whiteness of the imagined Australians stems from the fact that the West has always been racialised as ‘white’, due to its association with Euro-American dominance. Historically, this whiteness has assumed a position ‘at the higher end of the white-yellow-black racial hierarchy, which the early Meiji Enlightenment uncritically accepted and reproduced’ (Sakamoto 2006: 144). Sakamoto states that this historical residue contributes to ambivalence and ambiguity within Japanese

\(^95\) No interlocutors offered comments about Australians in detail without prompting. When I asked pre-departure WHMs to describe the image of Australians, a minority of interlocutors such as Hiromi (female, 26) thought white Australians would be casual and friendly: ‘I picture Australians to be in shorts, T-shirts and sandals, and have a friendly character. But actually, I’ve never seen them in real life.’

\(^96\) Tetsuya was an exception as he talked of a (white) Australian guest lecturer and his history lesson on the Australian Indigenous people. Even though some mentioned the increasing Japanese population in Australia (E.g. ‘I heard from my hometown friend in Perth that there are a lot of Japanese people in Australia.’ Mamoru, male, 27), it was not immediately clear if they considered these Japanese as Australians.
society towards white Westerners ‘where desire and attraction are mixed with aversion and indifference’ (Sakamoto 2006: 144–145).

Prior to arriving in Australia, WHMs either had a strong desire to be associated with white Westerners, or looked forward to interactions with (white, Western) Australians as part of an authentic WH experience. Expectations were at times quite high (and, as chapter 4 will explore, often unmet):

By the word ‘home staying’, I pictured being welcomed into a friendly happy family house. The image of a Christmas turkey on a big dinner table and everyone is wearing a party hat. And the people would become my second family. I would keep in touch for years to come (Ryō, male, 30).

My home staying experience was different from how I imagined. They didn’t have a barbeque for me, or do anything homely as a ‘family’ (Keiko, female, 32).

Ryō and Keiko claimed that various websites and publications promoting home staying were the source of their images. Certainly, photographs of Australian host families on websites frequently emphasise their comfortably well-off, family-oriented and friendly nature, for example by portraying a free-standing house, a backyard with a swimming pool and other markers of Australian middle-class lifestyles. Dialogue-style captions accompanying such images on one website read: ‘[The house looks] so foreign! sugoku gaikokuppo! ‘Of course, this is Australia’; ‘Wow, a house with a swimming pool! Unthinkable in Japan!’

Snapshot images provided for such publications by former home stayers overwhelmingly portray the Japanese guest as part of a smiling white, heterosexual nuclear family, much like the now archaic image of the 1950s American TV family. In this imagining, the Japanese as the racial Other is seamlessly integrated into a group of Westerners.

Such an expectation of fitting in with white people of the host society was also displayed by the fact that no WHM in my study expected class or racial conflicts in Australia. Asked what sort of possible troubles they expected before leaving Japan, common answers included misunderstandings and minor disadvantages caused by

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language barriers (‘I may get ripped off at markets because I’m new to the country and my English isn’t good enough’ Hiromi, female, 26), or becoming victims of random crimes such as robbery. There was no expectation of being unwelcome or having trouble fitting in amongst white Australians because of their ethnicity and class position. In a study of Japanese overseas students in the UK and their perception of racism, Nishimuta similarly explains (2008: 142) that her interlocutors seldom expected to experience racism, especially on campus, because, as educated and middle-class members of the ethnic majority in their home society, the Japanese youth did not dream of being discriminated against by their equally educated, middle-class white people in the UK.98

I have so far discussed the widespread image of Australia as the West in Japanese society, which resonated in accounts provided by the WHMs. In the next section, I will shift my attention to some of the driving forces behind the Japanese imagination of cosmopolitanism.

The merchant of cosmopolitanism: the English and migration industries

In contemporary Japan, positive images of the West such as that it is cosmopolitan, white and English-speaking are not only historically formed, but also promoted on a daily basis in Japan. Businesses such as those marketing tourism, temporary migration and English language learning have been booming, encouraging further identification with all things cosmopolitan. For example, through aggressive commodification, the ‘English language industry’ has grown to become a billion dollar business. Even in the midst of the recession, there were an estimated number of over 6,000 private English schools in Japan, and the number of students had reached 80,000.99 While several of the large English school chains have recently

98 ‘Theme parks such as British-themed British Hills in the Fukushima prefecture are an indication of how the West is widely imagined as devoid of class and ethnic tensions in Japan. According to Seargeant (2005: 327), British Hills employs native English speakers (who ‘look British’, that is, white Anglo-Celtic people) to interact with visitors in English. Factors prevalent in the UK, such as racial, linguistic and religious diversity, unemployment and poverty are obviously omitted from its representation of Britishness. As the marketing slogan succinctly communicates, this sanitisation makes British Hills ‘More English than England Itself’ for the Japanese visitors.
gone bankrupt, it was by no means the end of this industry. Advertising campaigns run on TV, the Internet, the print media, and on the trains. Numerous publishers release English textbooks, CDs and CD-ROMs for self-directed learning, the sales of which are fuelled by the promotion of English proficiency tests such as the *Eiken* Test in Practical English Proficiency administered by Japan’s largest testing body STEP (Society for Testing English Proficiency), and the internationally administered TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication).

The English language industry is not alone in its promotion of cosmopolitanism. With the growth of the Japanese tourism market came the prominence of the ‘migration industry’. The migration industry may be defined as ‘a broad spectrum of people who earn their livelihood by organizing migratory movements’ (Castles and Miller 2009: 201). While other factors such as social networks also encourage mobility to Australia, the extent to which the WH is commodified by the growing migration industry is unprecedented. Hundreds of migration agencies operate throughout Japan, especially concentrated in urban areas. These businesses profit by charging for services such as finding schools and host families for home staying in the destination country, helping with the visa application process, and selling various goods such as mobile phones, insurance packages and in some cases, providing after-arrival care.

During the 1980s, the first decade in the history of Japan’s involvement with the WH scheme, such agent businesses hardly existed. According to several former WHMs of this era, all they were aware of was a small and apparently non-functioning office of the JAWHM in Sydney. Otherwise, as mentioned in chapter 1, the general guidebook *Chikyū no arukikata* was the bible for independent travellers. This situation had not changed much in the mid 1990s, except for the now annual publication of the small WH edition of the aforementioned guidebook.100 Murphy’s survey on WHMs in Australia around the same time also revealed that guidebooks were a common method of research into Australia for his Japanese respondents (Murphy 1995: 33).

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100 This relatively small book of less than 200 pages covered all the three countries with which Japan had working holiday agreements at that time: Australia, New Zealand and Canada (*Chikyū no arukikata henshūshitsu* 1988).
The 1980s and the early 1990s were also the time when strong promotion efforts were made to increase the Japanese consumption of cosmopolitan goods and experiences (see chapter 2 for a discussion of the rise of international travel during this period). Japanese women became a prime target of such promotions as the main consumers of leisure products. For example, the ‘Imported Goods Catalogue’ published by the government encouraged women’s consumption of imports at a time when Japan’s large trade surplus was beginning to damage its reputation abroad (Rosenberger 1996: 18–19).101 Women’s magazines of the era and ‘special deals’ by airlines and other businesses aggressively cultivated the young single female market, in order to turn them into keen consumers of cosmopolitanism (Rosenberger 1996: 18–19, 23).102 Women themselves embraced their rising living standard and greater purchase power by, for example, enjoying trips abroad in increasing numbers, as I will explain shortly. Women might have been second-class citizens in the sphere of labour, but as consumers, they occupied the top position.

Current marketing materials for cosmopolitan products indicate that their primary target market is still women. For example, English-language-related advertisements in Japan have long depicted the learner as a female (Tsuda 1994: 185–186, Railey 2006: 105, 107, 114–118). Success stories in promotion materials developed by the English and migration industries are mostly women’s stories told in an autobiographical style. Such gendered marketing discourses have long existed in Japan, accelerating together with women’s spending power during the era of high-speed economic growth (Spielvogel 2003: 31).

The effort to promote the consumption of cosmopolitanism among young women was one factor contributing to the reversal of the gender ratio in international travellers. In the early period of Japan’s modernisation, those who went abroad were dominated by male Japanese intellectuals on official and private study trips, and since 1870, only a small number of women and children in noble families could study abroad ‘as models for the people’ (Burks 1985: 150–153). The male-

101 As this example shows, consumers do not need to travel in order to ‘consume abroad.’ Jackson (2004: 170) points to the practice of acquiring a different identity through consumption of imported goods: ‘Consumer desire is a way of overcoming spatial constraint, acquiring “worldliness” or “imagined cosmopolitanism” through (often indirect) engagement with the world of goods.’

102 See Kelsky (2001: 127-128) for a comparison of women’s and men’s magazines in their promotion of cosmopolitanism.
dominated nature of international travel by the Japanese continued until the 1980s when such mobility became accessible to the masses. By 1990, the number of young Japanese female travellers abroad had already surpassed males, and by the early 1990s, 80 percent of Japanese overseas students were women (Kelsky 2001: 2). By the 1994–95 period, the proportion of female WHMs in Australia was greater than their male counterparts (56 percent female), and the gender imbalance continued to grow to the current ratio of 7:3 (see Chapters 2 and 3 for more detailed information regarding the change in the gender balance).

In the lost decade, the marketing of international travel reached a whole new level. The proliferation of the migration industry is most starkly visible on the Internet, which is saturated with countless migration agent websites and various references to the Australian WH. One of the largest and most visible migration agencies, which in this thesis I refer to pseudonymously as Second Chance, embodies the expansion of the migration industry. Established by people who had previously run private cram schools, the company targeted women in their twenties with a keen interest in international travel (Nikkei Venture 2002: 46). Just under ten years in operation, their customer base had expanded to over 10,000 annually by 2007, of whom 70 percent were women in their 20s (Nikkei Venture 2002: 46). Previously, dealing with clients seeking WH experience was a side job for study abroad specialists, because of the industry view that people who engage in ‘adventure type’ mobility tend to manage on their own (Nikkei Venture 2002: 47). However, the number of WHMs doubled from the early to late 1990s, and many businesspeople saw a gap in the market. The range and types of migration consumer products have multiplied to create greater revenue-making opportunities. The competition is particularly fierce for those businesses physically located in Japan, as their target market is an unknown number of potential WHMs, as opposed to those operating in the destinations, which can only target WHMs already in the country. This simple factor drives the race to secure as many ‘clients’ as possible by promoting WHs widely.

Discussion of the migration industry in existing studies has often focused on the coyotes (people who help undocumented Mexicans to cross the border into the US) and other types of human traffickers/smugglers. There has also been analysis of the remittance industry (Hernández-León 2008: 154). In his study of migration from
urban Mexico to Houston, Hernández-León states that the migration industry ‘greases the engines of international human mobility by providing and articulating the expertise and infrastructural resources’ (2008: 155). By drawing on my ethnographic data, I further argue that the migration industry does more than facilitate transnational migration. Rather, migration is actively promoted through creating certain expectations. As commercial entities, migration agents market commodified experiences abroad as their ‘products’, often directly to potential clients via the mass media. As seen at the opening of this chapter, images of the WH conveyed in promotional materials are overtly positive. However unrealistic they may turn out to be, my interlocutors’ expectations indicate that these images can directly affect WHMs’ hopes, desires and plans.

One migration agent in Sydney said she had come to feel negatively about her own occupation and how she became part of a system that ‘sells’ commodified migratory experience. She openly lamented that the Australian WH ‘has become like ordering a burger set in MacDonald’s. The difference [from what others have] is minor, like whether to have it with Cola or Sprite’ (Chinami, female, 38). Interlocutors were often aware of the paradox of ‘individualism on a mass scale’, a mass marketed trend of consumption in which young people flock to migration agents and leave Japan in large numbers. There was a tension between a wish to experience something ‘different’, and the availability of packaged WH experience. Narratives by Keiko (female, 32) provide an example of contradictory remarks, often co-existing in one interview. Earlier in this chapter, I introduced her motivation for a WH as a longing for a different and novel experience. I later asked how she expected others to perceive her, after returning home. Would her extensive experience of Australia make her special in any way? In response, she shrugged and said ‘They wouldn’t think anything special of me. It’s so common to go overseas these days.’

Encouraged by the overload of promotion and marketing, a great number of Japanese WHMs leave for Australia and other participating countries. In this sense, Giddens’ observation that commodification has standardizing influences (1995: 5) resonates with my findings. Yet, even as the increasing availability of WH mobility made interlocutors almost blasé about their experience, the allure of
cosmopolitanism and the promise of possibilities for the future attracted a constant outflow of Japanese youth as WHMs. In the following chapters, I will further analyse the mechanisms of the migration industry and its relationship with Japanese WHMs.

**Unequal distribution of cosmopolitan imaginings: The case of a regional city in Japan**

Despite the egalitarian promotion of cosmopolitanism-for-purchase, the capacity to imagine one’s life abroad is unequally distributed in Japan. The case of WHMs in a regional city in western Japan, pseudonymously called Takakura, illustrate how structural factors such as socio-economic background, geographical location, class and gender hinder not only access to certain forms of capital, but discourage the imagining of such possibilities.

The city of Takakura is a few hours’ train ride from major cities such as Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto. Despite its relative proximity to these larger centres, this prefectural capital is undeniably provincial and declining, partly due to an aging population. It has one of the smallest working-age populations (15–64 years old) of all of Japan’s prefectures, and one of the largest populations of people over the age of 65. In 2007, there were only two places in the whole prefecture to which inquiries about WHIs could be directed. One government-funded ‘International Centre’ was a small office staffed by a couple of administrative clerks. The only counsellor, Yukio, described his job as ‘dealing with all things foreign gaikoku kankei no koto zenpan o tantōshiteimasu.’ His duties included finding appropriate services for victims of domestic violence (the majority were Thai and Filipino wives of Japanese men), and providing advice to Japanese youth on study abroad. The other place was a recently established migration agency, the first of its kind in the prefecture, where Sachiko worked.

Both Yukio and Sachiko remarked during separate interviews that a limited number of young people contacted them for advice on WHIs, and their descriptions of Takakura revealed the particular demographic characteristics of local youth. In 2008, university enrolment rates were 49.4 percent, which was lower than the national average of 52.8 percent (placing Takakura 20th out of 47 prefectures) and
this led to local youth being uncompetitive in the non-local job market. Outmigration to larger cities in search of jobs was common. Salary levels remained low in Takakura due to its smaller economy, and young people on low salaries suffered difficulty in becoming financially independent from their families.

Sachiko had been conscious of this pattern as a teenager, and this is why she pushed herself to go to a university in Osaka. She explained her determination to access better jobs: ‘Going to study in Osaka was pretty much the only way for me to get away from Takakura for an extended time. I thought it would open doors that would have remained shut otherwise.’ One of the doors that opened for Sachiko was the chance to study abroad. She participated in a summer study abroad program run by her university and spent one month in Sydney. Sachiko commented on the contrast between the high number of her friends in Osaka who experienced international mobility, and the lack of such cases among her friends back home.

As Sachiko’s case demonstrates, one’s background may affect access to social networks of educated people and their outward-orientated experience. The issue of economic capital is highly relevant in this regard. If, for example, her parents had not been able to afford her university tuition fees as well as living expenses in Osaka, Sachiko’s life path might have been different. Gender also plays a role. Referring to her friends’ experience, Sachiko was certain that if she had had a brother, his education would have been prioritised in the family, and she might not have received financial support to leave Takakura. Yukio’s words sum up the general situation for Takakura’s youth:

You can’t begin to imagine what it’s like to live overseas if you don’t know anyone who’s done it. You need to be able to picture it somehow, however vague the details might be. It’s the vicious cycle of not enough people with experience abroad, so not many people, including parents, see enough value in it to make an investment in themselves.

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104 It would have cost Sachiko’s parents approximately 3,000,000 yen a year in total, which is equivalent to over A$350,000 (based on the exchange rate on 19 Feb 2011).
On the one hand, cultural images that circulate globally foster imagination and identification with places beyond one’s immediate surroundings. Businesses are often able to provide services to clients in remote areas, should there be such needs. On the other hand, social networks do matter. In the case of my interlocutors, parents were often the main source of kinship support, and parents’ financial capacities had a significant impact on the life options of the youth. Friends constituted another important group of supporters for WHMs, often in the domain of emotional encouragement and influence. Thus, as Yukio explained during an interview, the kind of anecdotes and personal views to which one is exposed can trigger new interests.

Wilding (2007: 341) reminds us that ‘the capacity to imagine “difference”, “opportunity” and “connection” are clearly important in motivating people’s engagement with movements and activities that transcend national borders.’ The case of Takakura illustrates that the imaginings around ‘what is possible in life’ are unevenly spread in society, and this may have a profound effect on who aspires to accumulate cultural capital in the field of cosmopolitanism. Bauman claims (2000: 88) that watching those who have, the have-nots can do nothing but desperately want to taste the choices the haves possess, ‘[if] only for a fleeting moment, the bliss of choosing.’ However, applied to the current context, there is also the possibility that those have-nots may be indifferent to choices that they do not imagine as their own.

This is not to say that the lack of fostering young people’s cosmopolitan ambitions in places such as Takakura necessarily has negative impacts on them, whether subjectively or materially. Images and imaginings sold by the migration and English industries and further encouraged by broader social discourses may well allow new actions and subjectivities, such as WH mobility and a global outlook on life. However, Appadurai (2000: 6) also reminds us that ‘it is in and through the imagination that modern citizens are disciplined and controlled – by states, markets and other powerful interests.’ As we have seen, those Japanese WHMs who leave for Australia are shaped by such ‘powerful interests’, as much as through their individual agency. In the coming chapters, we will follow how their life
experience through international mobility continues to be shaped by a variety of broader forces and their own way of negotiating with them.
Chapter 4

Japanese Working Holiday Makers as lost generation workers

While the main focus of this thesis is on the Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) who returned to Japan after spending time in Australia, this chapter emphasises the perceived open-ended nature of an Australian WH as an important aspect of its attraction. For example, there was a strong tendency among WHMs to recount the pre-departure optimism of ‘anything can happen’. Some explicitly hoped for a chance to access another visa post-WH to prolong their stay in the country. Besides, the popularity of the second WH visa meant that stretching their WH over two years was now a realistic option. My analysis will pay attention to the fact that, while the majority of Japanese WHMs return home when their Working Holiday (WH) is over, their decision-making in relation to return migration is largely improvised.

The attraction of the imagined West is powerful, but it is only one of the multiple forces motivating Japanese WHMs’ mobility to Australia. A superficial reading of my interlocutors’ accounts suggests that their migration was a private, individual pursuit of happiness. However, their life trajectories, and the timing of their
migration points to a shared social context. In this chapter, I will view Japanese WHMs as workers, whose migratory motivation and behaviour I read as one (among many possible) set of responses to the constraints and opportunities created by the labour market practices of the lost decade. These practices include recent dramatic changes as well as continuities with the past, and have had differentiating impacts on WHMs based on gender and educational background. However, I will illustrate that differences among interlocutors notwithstanding, the late modern idea of self-development and neoliberal morality of the autonomous, entrepreneurial individual was one factor that strongly shaped the young people’s migratory desires and decisions.

Precarious living: Casual employment in the lost decade

When interlocutors described their life circumstances leading up to their decision to become a WHM, commonly expressed feelings included boredom, discontent and craving for a challenge regarding their status as a worker. For instance, Yukari (female, 24) found the idea of becoming a full-time employee in an unsatisfactory job unbearable. After completing a two-year university degree to become a nutrition expert, she gained permanent employment as a bank clerk, which had little to do with what she studied. She barely tolerated her job for two years, before becoming a haken (dispatched worker) administrator. Various jobs she undertook were ‘all easy and boring, but I earned more money than at the bank where my monthly income was 130,000 yen after tax.’ She left for Australia after a year of saving wages from casual work. Mamoru (male, 27) experienced a string of casual jobs during and after high school. As a student, he worked as a waiter, retail assistant and cleaner. After graduating, he gained his first full-time permanent job at a local business making and repairing window sashes. He said he quit after a month, ‘because the job was hard (kitsukatta) and often made me work until 11 at night.’ After a few months of unemployment, Mamoru worked in various casual capacities, such as a pizza delivery driver. He had turned 24 years old by the time he was ready to go on a WH, with just 3,000 dollars in traveller’s cheques.

Other interlocutors had held no full-time, permanent work position before becoming a WHM. Kayoko (female, 27) graduated from a four-year university in a
regional city but worked as a call-centre operator for a year before leaving Japan, because permanent employment options were scarce and unattractive, whereas the call-centre job provided a relatively high hourly wage and time to think about her next move without having to commit to her job. Similarly, Tetsuya (male, 25), who was introduced at the beginning of the last chapter, struggled to secure naiteri (an informal appointment) from prospective employers.\textsuperscript{105} He was a graduate of what he regarded as a ‘second-class university’ in a regional town two hours by train from his home in Kyoto, and the only job offer he received was far from the kind to which he could ‘devote his life.’ Juri (female, 26) was excluded from the graduate job market altogether, as she dropped out of high school at the age of 17. She had since worked as a casual waitress.

These two patterns – engaging in casual work straight after leaving education or after quitting a relatively short stint as a full-time permanent worker – were extremely common among my interlocutors. Slightly less than half of the females, and 12 out of 14 males fit into either of the two categories. While the career trajectories of these interlocutors seem diverse, they all shared a common location in the Japanese labour market as casual workers in the ‘lost decade’. In this post-bubble economy period of the 1990s (and beyond), career mobility had become even lower than before, and therefore second chances to re-start or re-design one’s career were scarce. Below, I will trace the changes that occurred in the post-bubble economy period in the youth labour market, as these changes had an enormous impact on lost generation WHMs, both in terms of their prospects as workers, and their life expectations. As I will explore in this chapter, their reality as lost generation workers was one broad force that encouraged Japan’s youth to consider alternative life courses.

In the lost decade, one of the most severe impacts of economic stagnation was felt in the youth recruitment sector. Smaller firms suffered the most, and reducing the number of regular employee positions was one major way to cut the costs (Tipton 2002: 226). By the mid 1990s, some of the largest firms had also resorted to lay-offs of their core members, in particular middle managers (Tipton 2002: 226). Even

\textsuperscript{105} Naiteri, literally ‘internal decision’ is an informal job offer given to a job seeker without binding power. Graduate job seekers begin the job interview process about a year before the commencement of employment (which is in April, the beginning of the financial year), and naiteri are made during this period.
though 82.3 percent of university graduates gained regular employment (MEXT 2001), graduates of the lower ranked universities were now much less likely to gain a full-time job with sought-after employers, such as large firms and the public sector (Rebick 2005: 145–146). The cases of Kayoko (female, 27) and Tetsuya (male, 25) above come to mind. High school graduates were hit even harder, as only 17.1 percent were able to find regular employment as full-time permanent workers (MEXT 2003). This was a remarkable decrease from 33.1 percent in 1992, when the full force of the economic changes was yet to be felt in the recruitment market. In my data, there were three high school graduates (Makoto, Shoko, Keisuke) and one junior high school graduate (Juri). Overall, more young people became cheap, expendable casual workers to fill the human resource gap, created by the drastic reduction of permanent career-track positions for young workers.

The onset of the employment ice age overlapped with the graduation of the second baby boomers. The second baby boom occurred between 1970 and 1974, with the most dramatic increase in the number of newborn babies seen since the first baby boom of the post-war period. The second baby boomers peaked in 1973 when 2.09 million babies were born. The total number of this group is estimated at 8 million (MHLW 2004). This means that two in five members of the lost generation are second baby boomers. Second baby boomers encountered intense competition at every turning point of life, due to their large population size. They (and their parents) raced for desirable schools and universities, as they had previously

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106 In the lost decade, high school leavers became even more disadvantaged in the recruitment market, because a greater number of youth proceeded to higher education. In 1992, 95.9 percent of junior high school leavers (i.e. those who completed the compulsory part of secondary education) went to high school, whereas 97 percent did so in 2002. Of the high school leavers, 32.7 percent continued on to the university level in 1992, and the figures rose to 44.8 percent in 2002. In addition, a similar increase was seen in the number of high school leavers who continued to the vocational school: 16.4 percent in 1992 to 18 percent in 2002. This means that by the early 2000s, over 60 percent of high school leavers proceeded to higher education, making those who did not a large minority (MEXT 2003). According to a 2005 National Diet Library report, the ratio of full-time job openings to applications for junior high school and high school leavers decreased from a peak of 3.08 in 1992 to 0.53 in 2003 (Suzuki 2005: 11). Reasons for this dramatic decrease and the continued tightness in the recruitment market for school leavers include the increasing casualisation of jobs previously undertaken by them (such as junior level administrative work and the manufacturing sector) and the expansion of university graduates into retail and administrative positions. For more details on job openings for school leavers in large corporations as well as the manufacturing industry, see MHLW (2005: 296). For figures and discussions on the levels of educational attainment and differentiated employment prospects for youth, see Rebick (2005: 146–147).
provided a ticket to a ‘good’ company. Instead, however, second baby boomer graduates faced the employment ice age head on.

The difficulties of gaining employment were clearly expressed in unemployment rates. For the 20–24 year age group, for example, unemployment rates rose from 3.7 percent in 1990 to 8.6 percent in 2000 (MHLW 2000). This is considerably higher than the overall unemployment rate of 4.8 percent, or the unemployment rate of 2.0 percent for married male breadwinners with wives under the age of 55 (PMO 2001). Those with lower educational qualifications (i.e. junior high school and high school leavers) were the most affected.107 In the lost decade, youth under the age of 35 years were the only age group for whom income inequality increased (Nihon keizai shimbun 7 February 2006 cited in Brinton 2008: 42). These trends all point to the fact that the economic events of the lost decade disadvantaged young people.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the expansion of a post-Fordist, post-industrial economy has polarised the workforce between fewer educated and skilled specialists, and a large number of un-skilled or low-skilled workers who directly or indirectly serve the former group, such as junior administrators, office cleaners and waitresses (Sassen 1996: 72–73). Employers nurture and protect the former, but consider the latter to be expendable. The shrinking demand for intermediate level skills has meant a reduced need for internal labour markets. The result is a fewer number of stable, internally protected full-time posts, replaced with irregular workers who serve as adjustment valves (Sassen 1996: 73; Honda 2005: 17). Moreover, in Japan, as elsewhere, sectors that primarily employ women and youth, such as wholesale, retail and catering, have higher proportions of irregular workers (Standing 1999: 176). One in three of my interlocutors had the experience of casual work in these sectors as a student, and/or after leaving education, but the majority of these interlocutors were female (seven out of ten).

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107 Among youth between 20 and 24 years old, the unemployment rate for those with junior high school education was 16.8 percent in 2001, while the figure was 10.2 percent for senior high school leavers (PHPT 2000). In Japan, six years of education at the primary level and three years at the secondary level are compulsory.
As noted in chapter 1, such a shift in economic emphasis from Fordist mass production to the flexible service sector had already been occurring in Japan, and it noticeably accelerated in the lost decade. For example, the rising demand for flexible labour, especially in the service and retail industries, encouraged a growing number of women, especially married women, to enter the workforce as part-timers (Broadbent 2003: 3). This has expanded the part-time workforce, which had been increasing in size since the oil shocks of the 1970s (Imai 2009: 255). The greater reliance of employers on part-timers also functioned to protect the existence of more costly male full-time workers (Gill 2000).

The deregulation of haken work (literally ‘dispatch’) is another important shift that has occurred in the labour market. Haken workers are brokered by haken agencies, who supply labour to registered businesses. They usually work on a short contract basis, commonly up to three months at a time, and their contract may or may not be renewable. Originally banned under the American occupation for its exploitative potential (Rebick 2005: 62), the first deregulation occurred with the Dispatch Workers Law (rōdōsha hakenhō) in 1986. The new law allowed the use of temporary despatched workers in 13 highly specialised occupational categories, in order to fill labour shortages during the early phase of the bubble economy era (Mouer and Kawanishi 2005: 115). The powerful Japan Business Federation aggressively lobbied the government to ensure that deregulations continued. The number of occupation categories in which the use of haken workers was allowed expanded in 1996 and 1999, topped off by the inclusion of manufacturing, the last remaining off-limit category (Imai 2009: 255). The rapid rise of employment agencies as intermediaries in the Japanese labour market is consistent

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{108}}\] The report published in 1995 by Nikkeiren (the Japan Business Federation) Japanese-style Management of the New Era (Shinjidai no nihonteki keiei), advocates a more ‘economical’ way of operating businesses by dividing workers into three groups: 1) those whose skills are developed over the long-term, 2) those with highly specialised skills, and 3) those who engage in ‘flexible employment’ (i.e. who act as a pool of labour to be employed or cut, depending on the economic trend) (Saito 2000: 27). The rationale for such a system is efficient investment in ‘human capital’ to produce a stable number of specialists and a small number of well-trained management professionals who together control a large number of manual workers (Saito 2000: 11–71). The Nikkeiren report later became a bible for employers of all sizes seeking to devise human resource cost-cutting strategies. The skills of those who belong to the first and second groups (the ‘professionals’) will be developed to become members of the ‘global meritocracy’, while people in the third group—the vast majority of the workforce—will attract the least attention regarding their education and career development (Iwaki 2004: 9–10).
with Sassen’s explanation of the effects of flexibilisation of the market (1996: 72–73). Of the WHMs I interviewed, four females (Natsuko, Noriko, Yukie and Yukari) experienced haken work, all switching from their full-time, permanent jobs.

Under these circumstances, avenues for entry into the permanent labour market considerably narrowed for lost generation workers. The proportion of casual employees in the Japanese overall workforce rose from 25.6 percent in 1990 to 32.1 percent in 2001 (PMO 1990). Translating these rates into an absolute number, 4.17 million youth, or one in five young people, worked casually in 2001 alone, up from 1.82 million people in 1990 (PMO 2003). By 2001, the number of female casual workers aged 15–24 years was double the figure in 1990 (20.7 percent to 43.9 percent). The number in the 25–34 age bracket also increased, from approximately a quarter (24.2 percent) to nearly one in three females (32.9 percent). For the young male population, the impact was painful, but in a different way. On the one hand, there were fewer casual workers amongst men than women. In particular, the 25–34 age bracket was still largely unaffected, as less than one in ten of them were in casual work in 2004. On the other hand, the increase in the proportion of male casual workers was much more severe: for both age brackets, it more than doubled in just over a decade, and among the younger cohort of men, the rate of casualisation almost caught up with that of their female counterpart.¹⁰⁹ Such a rate of increase in young male casual workers is rare among other countries, including the US and a number of European countries (Brinton 2008: 37–39).

These characteristics point to an important, but often overlooked feature of casualisation in contemporary Japan: while it impacted on all categories of youth, the basis for labour casualisation had long existed for women, and the new increase was an exacerbation of the past treatment of their labour as supplementary to men’s. In other words, flexibilisation of the labour market based on deregulation further expanded the already large contingent of young female casual workers. For men, however, severe casualisation signalled a major social change, and the possibility (and increasingly the reality) of downward movement in the labour

¹⁰⁹ One survey conducted by a university research centre found that the proportion of men whose first job was casual employment increased threefold, from 5.7 percent (pre-lost generation youth born between 1966 and 1970) to 16.7 percent (lost generation youth born between 1971 and 1980) http://www.jiji.com/jc/c?g=soc_30&k=2010051500059 (last accessed 18 July 2009).
market was thus newly troubling for them. Remarkably, nine out of 14 male interlocutors in my data worked as casual workers before arriving in Australia. Later in this chapter, I will discuss these gendered characteristics of labour casualisation in relation to the WHMs’ reactions to gendered social expectations.

Intensifying the difficulties for lost generation workers was low mobility in the Japanese labour market. For example, ageist practices frequently prevented young people over the age of the typical graduate jobseeker from gaining graduate positions.\textsuperscript{110} Casual workers were not immune from ageist practices either, even though they were effectively barred from upward career mobility. According to \textit{Hello Work Shinjuku}, the largest publicly funded employment centre in Japan, funded by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the jobs-to-applicants ratio was 3.5 for those under 24 years old (3.5 jobs per job seeker) in 2004. The figures decrease sharply to 1.8 for the 25–34 years old bracket (Maruyama 2004: 40). The low mobility in the Japanese labour market is a barrier to flexible career planning, as it makes the decision of leaving a job potentially risky. However, in the lost decade, the retention rates of graduate employees plummeted (Genda and Kurosawa 2001). This is because the employment ice age increased the sense of job mismatch, whereby lost generation graduates grabbed any job within their reach for fear of unemployment. In 2000, 36.5 percent of fresh university graduates left their workplace within three years of commencing graduate employment, a large increase from 23 percent in 1992 (MHLW 2000). In my data, about one in five interlocutors left the full-time, permanent job they gained as university or high school graduates within three years.

The door to full-time employment was shut in the face of many lost generation youth as they had no choice but casual work. Others ‘chose’ to work casually because the alternatives seemed equally unappetising. Whatever the intentions of the young workers themselves, the situation starkly contrasts with that of the bubble-economy generation who benefited from the booming economy, and for whom choices to become permanent employees existed in abundance.

\textsuperscript{110} For example, despite its own general ban on recruitment advertising based on an age restriction (effective since July 2007), the Ministry of the Health, Labor and Welfare recognises the existing practice and officially allows employers to practice age-based discrimination regarding recruitment of graduate students on a career track \url{http://www.mhlw.go.jp/qa/kouyou/kinshi/qa.html} (last accessed 18 July 2010).
Casualisation of the youth workforce also meant that the number of young workers without access to job training and promotions was rapidly increasing. In recognition of the employment practices of the lost decade, I will refer to lost generation casual workers as ‘precarious workers’. Following Vosko, and in recognition of the employment practices of the lost decade, I will refer to those who engaged in employment commonly characterised by low wages, job insecurity, lack of social benefits and entitlements, high levels of direct or indirect health risks as ‘precarious workers’ (Vosko 2006: 3). Precarious workers may be produced by a mix of factors, including the mode of employment (permanent, temporary, casual, dispatch), employment status (wage labour or self-employed), locations in society (e.g. gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status) and in the labour market (e.g. occupation, industry, geography) (Vosko 2006: 3–4).

In addition to haken, arubaito was another form of precarious work that WHMs in my study frequently engaged in, both before and after their WH. Arubaito (‘work/labour’ in German) is akin to ‘permanent part-timer’, and they are also called arubaitā or baito. While arubaito may refer to work of short hours, its casual status does not prevent them from working full-time hours. It was explained above that more than half of my interlocutors worked as precarious workers prior to the WH. When it comes to returnee WHMs, as chapters 7 and 8 will show, all but one of them used precarious work as a way of re-entering the Japanese labour market (and a number of them remained in that status). Furthermore, the precariousness of work in the lost decade extended beyond casual employment, for even among full-time permanent positions there was a decline in job security, social benefits and entitlements, and an increase in health risks. This will be illustrated in chapter 7.

So far, I have explained the changing labour market practices in the lost decade as a context in which WHMs in the casual workforce made their decision to leave for Australia. In the next section, I will examine concerns voiced by those who comprise the social networks of my interlocutors—parents and friends—and how

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111 In contrast, the official definition of ‘standard employment’ is still ‘those employed immediately after graduating school or university and have been working for the same enterprise’, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 2006 (Gottfried 2008: 181).
the youths responded. Ethnographic narratives will illustrate the relation between the interlocutors’ desire for temporary migration, and dominant gendered social expectations.

**Gendered social expectations for lost generation WHMs**

According to interlocutors, most parents gave general support for their children’s individualistic pursuit of happiness, albeit reluctantly at times. For example, when Kōji (male, 30) broke the news about his plan for the WH, his parents ‘didn’t say much. They were worried, but they said “you’d go anyway, even if we told you not to’.” Even so, reactions to WHMs’ decision to leave Japan to take charge of their own life courses reveal that the key figures in their social networks often disapproved of or worried about their decision. In particular, parents and friends frequently considered their loved one’s departure from the Japanese workforce a risky endeavour, and expressed their fear of its negative impact on their future prosperity.

Worried parents often treated children’s WH as their final chance for carefree leisure time (*asobi*) before settling down. For example, Mariko (female, 27) remembered how her father angrily demanded that she ‘grow up and stop messing around (*asobimawaru*),’ and sternly warned her never to call him from Australia for help. While this was one of the most severe cases, such parental pressure to settle down was generally strong for male interlocutors, and all but one of them recounted episodes of dealing with parents’ anxiety about their son’s future.\(^\text{112}\) Examples include Akihiko (male, 30), who was planning to go on a WH with his wife Reiko (female, 30), and Mamoru (male, 27), who had hopped from one job to another until he left Japan. Akihiko’s parents demanded that he and his wife live and work with them in a rural town 150km north east of Tokyo upon returning from Australia, while Mamoru’s mother begged him to get serious and find permanent employment once his WH was over.

Parental concerns partly stem from the fact that their pre- and post-WHM children tended to be (semi-) dependent on the everyday support of the family. Two-thirds

\(^{112}\) The remaining male interlocutor was still at a university, the only such case in my data.
of my interlocutors still physically lived with parent(s), and enjoyed financial support in one way or another prior to their WH. The remaining one-third, who lived away from the natal home, frequently referred to their access to the family home as a temporary residence before and after their WH, as well as for storage while they were away. In other words, most of the interlocutors could count on various forms of support from their family as they came and went between two countries. This tendency was observed among interlocutors whose parents’ occupations and levels of financial comfort varied. Among my interlocutors, half had fathers in the managerial class working for small-, medium- to large-sized corporations. In these cases, mothers usually stayed at home full-time. Several WHMs had parents in blue-collar work, such as a seaman, a factory worker, a labourer and a taxi driver, and one mother worked as a call- centre operator. Three interlocutors came from a single-parent household, and four WHMs lived outside the natal home, after leaving their rural hometown for education and/or jobs in metropolitan cities. The majority of interlocutors in all these groups self-funded their WH trips by choice, but they could also benefit from family assistance in forms such as subsidised or free ‘rent’, utilities and other necessities of life. Those who could not, or did not make use of financial support from the family could also enjoy some assistance, as described above. These examples illustrate that the WHMs’ position as adult-aged ‘children’ in the natal home helped them achieve WH mobility as a life option. On the one hand, parents’ support helped provide the financial and material conditions enabling the WH. On the other hand, the absence of children of their own was a decisive factor, as the WH visa conditions worldwide forbid bringing dependents to the host society.

Another factor that made worried parents nervous was their children’s age. Japan is a society where one’s age is an important identity marker, and becoming 30 years old can be a source of psychological pressure for young individuals, as well as a time of parental and social pressure to begin assuming adult ‘responsibilities’, such as holding a full-time permanent job and making a family. For this reason, age was a major concern for both WHMs and their parents. The interlocutors in their late twenties or on the brink of thirty frequently expressed that this was their ‘last chance’ to do something as dramatic as a WH in Australia. People who become a WHM right on the age limit of visa eligibility are called girihori (a shorthand for
girigiri wākingu horidē, or ‘the very last minute WH’), and the wider girihori trend is clearly indicated by statistics: out of the 11,740 Japanese WHMs in Australia in 2007, the largest age group, numbering 1,334 (1,003 females and 331 males), was 30 years old (See Table 2.1 for a detailed age breakdown). In my data, six people fit this description, while two were 29 years old and the other two were 28 years old at the time of arrival in Australia. The age limit of thirty for application to the Australian WH works as a nudge for those who have hesitated to take the plunge. These girihori WHMs are sensitive to the older generation’s expectation surrounding their age, but still defy such social pressure by taking advantage of the Australian WH scheme.

For all their apparent wish to see their children ‘settle down’ into a conventional life trajectory, parents seem to have expressed little concern about their children’s marriage prospects. The only context in which WHM interview discussions about the pre-departure period brought up the topic of marriage was in which a father did not want his daughter to marry and leave home. Yukari (24 years old) and Yukie (30 years old), both of whom were the only unmarried daughter of the family, both stated that their fathers constantly expressed their wish for their daughters to get a stable job, continue to live with them and stay in Japan forever. In both cases, their mothers were reportedly much more relaxed about the daughters’ decision to go to Australia. Yukari shrugged: ‘Mum didn’t say much, it was like “do as you please”’. As chapter 7 will detail, such apparent lack of concern regarding WHMs’ marriage during the pre-departure period contrasts with some parents’ anxiety after the youth had returned home from the WH - the ‘last’ youthful adventure.

Social expectations to conform and remain in the Japanese labour market were also expressed through peer pressure. In WHMs’ accounts, the most common stress-inducing comment usually came from friends who questioned the usefulness of the WH for their future in Japan. Uttered in a discouraging or even scornful tone, the question ‘What are you going to do when you come back?’ elicited strong emotions in WHMs. Some interlocutors became even more determined as a result:
I stopped telling some of my friends about my plan to go to Australia, because they would only say negative things, like ‘It’s dangerous for a girl to go alone’ and ‘It won’t change your life.’ I’ve really wanted to become a WHM for a long time, so I’m doing it no matter what they say (Juri, female, 26).

As in the case of parental worries, peer pressure was most strongly felt by male WHMs. Mitsuru (31 years old) announced one day his decision to go on a WH to his university friends, who were ‘all working full-time in one way or another.’ According to Mitsuru, the typical response was ‘I envy you, but I couldn’t do it myself. It’s too risky.’ As he reflected on his past at a Sydney café, Mitsuru was somewhat sympathetic to this kind of attitude:

I came here thinking ‘Something will work out, I’m sure I can find a job.’ But I suppose the reality in Japan is that if you take your job seriously, it’d be difficult to leave. Still, I want to say to my friends ‘You can do it if you want to’. …Well, though, I’m not sure if the decision will turn out to be good or bad later on, even for myself (laughs).

Takashi (male, 26) was more frustrated with his friends’ similarly lukewarm responses:

Friends around me were envious of my decision, but at the same time, they expressed some kind of amazement and said things like ‘Leading a carefree life, aren’t you?’, or started complaining about their own job. I thought ‘if you are unhappy too, then why don’t you go overseas yourself?’

Even though the number of men on the Australian WH has also been on the increase, male narratives in my data tended to emphasise the lack of alternatives in life and the pressure to conform. To male interlocutors, the way young Japanese women experiment with their life frequently seemed courageous and proactive. Perhaps not deeply aware of the structural factors behind gendered social expectations, Makoto (male, 24) essentialised the gender imbalance of the Japanese WH population in Australia: ‘I think men are more serious. Women seem to “just do it”, but men need a lot more courage to take action.’ As chapters 7 and 8 will show, WHMs’ post-return statements frequently discussed the gendered nature of social expectations for their life courses. Male interlocutors tended to contrast women’s ‘choice’ not to work full-time with the lack of such an ‘alternative’ for themselves.
Indeed, some male interlocutors expressed, without the slightest hint of sarcasm, envy at women’s access to an ‘option’ to escape the drudgery of full-time work.

New socio-economic trends notwithstanding, labour practices in the lost decade still exhibited continuing patterns that are highly gendered. The male breadwinner ideal is still the standard expectation for men, and the threat of emasculation for those who become ‘anomalies’ is real. This is well illustrated by social debates on the furitā, which have tended to demonise those in casual employment, especially when they are men. The term furitā is a combination of free and arbeiter (‘work/labour’ in German), coined in the late 1980s to refer to a casual worker who is ‘free’ from the binding of a permanent contract.113 For the older generation, the image of the furitā was of a carefree, dream-chasing and unconventional young person. The public at that time reacted in a mixed manner, and portrayed such youth sometimes as irresponsible, but at other times as a symbol of a new historical phase and future possibilities.114 This image no longer reflects the reality of youth employment in the lost decade, when nearly three out of four casual workers hope to gain permanent positions (PMO 2003). Despite this fact, however, popular social debates tend to blame the lost generation furitā for their ‘selfish’ or self-defeating lifestyles, frequently relying on the neoliberalistic logic of self-responsibility.115

Social panic around the ‘furitā problem’ is mainly based on the assumption that such workers are young males.116 This is because precarious, non-career worker status has long been normalised for women, and therefore females who deviate from the salaryman model do not threaten existing social practice. In the lost decade, women continue to engage in irregular employment in higher proportions than men. Where women work as full-time permanent employees in white-collar jobs, the majority of them hold a non-career track position, providing

113 The term was first invented in 1987 by an employment magazine (Hashiguchi 2006: 167; Obinger 2009).
114 This image is well expressed in a movie called Furitā (Yokoyama Hiroto: 1987), which is about young people who attempt to be financially independent while enjoying their freedom by working casually (Maruyama 2004: 23).
115 Certain academic literature also treated their apparent ‘choice’ to remain casual workers as irrational and even foolish (e.g. Nagasu 2001).
116 Concerns about other ‘problem’ youth in the lost decade, such as the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training), who are young, out of school and unemployed, and hikikomori, who isolate themselves socially by spending most of their time in their room under the care of their parent(s), are also essentially anxieties about unemployed young men.
administrative support to (male) specialists and managers (Morley 1999: 78).¹¹⁷ The non-career track positions do not attract the same level of training, promotion and employee benefits, and so these women are frequently excluded from the career opportunities that male permanent workers tend to enjoy.¹¹⁸ While more women in their twenties and early thirties remain in the workforce in the mid 2000s compared to the 1970s or the early 1990s, they still tend to leave employment upon marriage and childbirth, and to return to the workforce as part-timers when the children enter school (Tipton 2002: 195–196, 226–227).¹¹⁹ A tax exemption discourages dependent spouses (usually wives) from earning above the low-income threshold, acting as a disincentive for married women to take up full-time employment (Liddle and Nakajima 2000: 11).¹²⁰ The social anxiety around the furitā finds its root precisely in the fact that precarious employment, believed to be only suitable for the female population, is now fast encroaching into the young male population.

Not bound by the idea of a lifelong career or servitude to one employer, flexible employment planning becomes more possible for female workers in Japan than males. This may allow the women to make bold choices, such as going on a WH regardless of their age or occupational status. Slightly over half of the females in my data left a full-time permanent position in order to become a WHM. Of these, half had qualifications in traditionally feminised employment areas such as nursing and childcare, while the other half worked either as an office administrator or retail personnel. For example, both Tomoe and Yukie had held a same job for eight years, and were 30 years old at the time of leaving Japan:

¹¹⁷ For example, in a survey conducted between April 2004 and March 2005 with corporations in which a separation between career and non-career tracks existed, the proportion of female workers amongst the career track population was 5.1 percent (MHLW 2004 Koyō kanri).

¹¹⁸ Unlike the salaryman counterpart, only a small number of elite women in private business and the public sector are expected to become part of management, as ‘exceptions’. In 1996, ten years after the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted, only 1.2 percent of female workers assumed a position at the level of the departmental head, and in 1999, only 16.1 percent of central government employees on a ‘career-track’ were women (Tipton 2002: 227).

¹¹⁹ In 1975, just over 40 percent of women in the 25–29 age bracket worked, while the proportion increased to over 60 percent in 1990 and over 75 percent in 2005. The figures for women in the 30–34 age bracket are just over 40 percent in 1975, over 50 percent in 1990 and over 60 percent in 2005 (see figures in Tipton 2002: 196).

¹²⁰ The Hatoyama government announced in September 2009 that it would scrap this system after 2011. However, since his resignation in June 2010, the future of this plan is uncertain.
After high school, I went to a two-year university, to be qualified as a
kindergarten teacher. Three years into my first job, I thought about
going to Australia on a WH. But then the age limit [of the Australian
WH] was extended so I decided to stick around [in my job] for longer.
I was getting tired of the work environment, but I still liked my job
itself. [...] I stayed five more years, then quit and got a casual job to
boost my savings before going to Australia. [...] I’m really not
interested in going back to my old job after my WH, because it will
just be more of the same. (Tomoe, female, 30)

It had been eight years since I graduated from university and started
my job [as an office administrator for a major construction company
on a permanent contract]. I found my work interesting, but I was on
a non-career track (jipanshoku). I experienced several internal
transfers, but my circumstances never really changed much. I was
starting to feel it was always going to be the same, and I really
wanted to do something more exciting. (Yukie, female, 30)

In a sense, low social expectations regarding their career paths gives them a little
more freedom to seek opportunities for self-exploration, although within a highly
limiting context. Ryang (2002: 907) talks about a similar paradox, in the context of
Korean women in Japan: ’Unlike the male household head, women have the
“freedom” to leave Korea, since women have no entitlement in the lineage – both
paternal and matrimonial. The traditionally marginalised position of Korean
women ironically enables them to enjoy mobility.’

Existing statistics show interesting trends, which may be indicative of the gendered
impact of Japanese labour practices. Firstly, I showed in chapter 2 that the number
of female Japanese WHMs has been consistently greater than that of males, at least
since 1994–95 (Graph 2.2). Secondly, Table 4.1 below clearly shows that females
outnumbered males in all age categories in 2007.

Table 4.1: Percentages of Japanese WHMs based on gender and age in 2007
(percentages)

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Source: My own calculation based on unpublished data from Department of Immigration
and Citizenship (2008) (Table 2.1 presents the same data in the actual number of visas
issued)
Thirdly, the general trend is that the older the WHMs are, the more females dominate, and a greater concentration of male WHMs can be seen in the younger age categories. For example, in 2007, the gender ratio was almost equal for the 18 years old, and hovered above 4 males to 6 females for those in the early 20s. However, from the mid 20s onwards, the proportion of males decreased consistently (except for one small increase for the 29 years olds), with the lowest proportion of men (25 percent) found amongst the 30 year-olds, the oldest category.

These numbers seem to support the proposition that gendered labour practices in Japan impact on the way Japanese men and women become WHMs. That is, on the one hand, women become WHMs in greater numbers in all age categories because Japanese society does not expect them to pursue their career by staying in Japan. On the other hand, men tend to avoid the risk of leaving the labour market due to low mobility. The men who do leave tend to be young and may be divided into two groups. One group is comprised of students who reduce the risk of unemployment or underemployment by undertaking the WH while still a student. Among my interlocutors, Daisuke (male, 21) fits this description, as he strategically chose to leave for Australia after completing the second university year, so that it would not impact on his job-hunting during the third and fourth years. The other group contains a growing number of men who fail or choose not to start their career based on full-time permanency. Katsuhiko, Makoto (both 19 years old at the time of departure), and Tetsuo (21 at the time of departure) fit this category, as all left Japan soon after failing to pass university entrance exams and receiving (partial) financial assistance from their parents. These men may not see positive alternatives to staying, or want to avoid stigma for themselves and perhaps their family.

Among young Japanese women who take the leap and become WHMs, a peripheral social position is combined with an important role as the nation’s prime consumers. As explored in chapter 2, policymakers and businesses intentionally encouraged young Japanese women to be active consumers of cosmopolitanism in the 1980s onwards, and since then, women have been the driving force behind the popularity of international travel. Initially a more masculinised form of mobility, the Australian WH has also become dominated by women.
I draw a parallel between Japanese women’s active participation in international travel since the 1980s, and the increased number of Japanese WHMs since the lost decade. A marginal position in the Japanese workforce and the limitation that comes with it paradoxically gives rise to opportunities, as well as pressures, for young people, especially women, to seek possibilities abroad. The parallel becomes even more pronounced when the position of lost generation workers in consumption is taken into account. Just as women had been since the 1980s, young people in the lost decade are keen supporters of certain high-growth areas of the economy, including the migration and English language industries. Regardless of their place of birth, my interlocutors all had experience of a city life as students and/or workers.¹²¹ The majority had prior experience of international travel, and taking short trips abroad were not exceptional. As chapter 3 traced, the WH has become a commodity to be promoted and purchased. Free from family obligations, young single people such as the WHMs are a prime target of the migration industry.

With their individual courage and keenness to invest considerable energy, efforts, time and money, the WHMs in the present study proactively exercised their agency to improve their life circumstances. However, to view this as an act of free will and defiance despite social constraints is to ignore the other half of the story. Social constraints that were prominent in the lost decade were active contributors to (but not determinants of) the WHMs’ desire to leave Japan in the ways they did. Instead of the triumphal image of a ‘universal middle stratum society’ (sōchūryū shakai) (see chapter 1), Japanese social discourse of the lost decade highlighted the dawn of kakusa shakai (‘society with a gap [between the rich and the poor]’). The reduced accessibility – or indeed, desirability - of the salaryman lifestyle opened up possibilities of alternative life courses for young people, but the old ideal was yet to be replaced with a clear idea about a successful formula or model to follow. In a sense, as Mary Brinton points out (2008: 8), the lost generation youth were doubly ‘lost’: lost in the transition of the Japanese society from the era of economic growth to an economically and psychologically uncertain time, and lost in individual transitions to adulthood. Under these circumstances, young workers who ambitiously sought greater satisfaction and challenges were faced with the

¹²¹ Approximately one third spent their childhood in regional and rural environments.
dilemma of whether to ‘take a gamble,’ or to play it safe for the sake of stability. Among those who chose to ‘take a gamble,’ the WH was a common choice, although by no means the only one possible.\textsuperscript{122}

**The Australian WH as a chance for self-transformation**

Regardless of employment status, interlocutors considered an Australian WH as an avenue to contemplate a life path that would feel more meaningful to them. Self-improvement was a constant theme in such narratives. For example, one of the two males who were qualified specialists in full-time permanent employment, Shin’ichi, described his motivation for the WH as follows:

> After three and a half years, I was beginning to be involved in higher levels of work. The more responsibility I was given, the more I realised that leaving the job was going to be complicated. [...] For a small company to lose me in a few years time, it was going to have a lot of impact. But I wanted to know new ways of thinking in a foreign environment, and try new ways of working. I thought I didn’t have much time left to make big changes in life [26 years old at that time].

Reiko was another interlocutor who craved change from her everyday life as a qualified permanent worker. She explained the reason why she now hoped to seek a career in therapeutic aromatherapy while in Australia, where tea tree oil, famous for its medicinal properties, is produced:

> I started to work as a nurse after going to a vocational school. Having worked for eight years at the same hospital, I became disillusioned with my profession. I don’t dislike the work itself, but I got sick of how my workplace operates. [Kumiko: Could you elaborate on that?] The way the managers operated, I felt I wouldn’t be able to make positive changes or have some kind of impact for years to come. [...] (Reiko, female, 30).

In this last section, I will discuss the desired outcomes the Japanese WHMs sought from their Australian experience. I treat lost generation WHMs’ move out of Japan

\textsuperscript{122} Other routes that people took include hopping from one Japanese resort town to another as seasonal workers, leaving metropolitan cities to resettle in places such as Okinawa or Hokkaido, and studying to gain new qualifications. Relatively speaking, only a minority chose a WH; the total number of Japanese who become WHMs is limited. For example, nine participating countries issued a total of 20,941 WH visas to the Japanese in 2007.
as something more than a youthful, temporary escape from their ordinary lives, before returning to daily routine to settle down. This may makes WHMs different from many other temporary migrants. For example, a recent study quotes one gap-year participant who positioned her overseas experience as a break from the ordinary, and portrayed this ordinary life as something she expected to resume when she returned refreshed and wiser:

I think you learn so much more about yourself when you go overseas and you get thrown out there in different cultures. You learnt from all that and you can come back and go yep cool, you know (laugh), you appreciate all the mundane things in life now. (quoted in Roberts 2007: 5)

In contrast, the WHMs in my study were open to, or even expected, the possibility that their experiences abroad might take them in a completely new direction. Even when some WHMs, such as Megumi and Keiko, more or less expected to return to Japan when their WH visa expired, they never ruled out the chance that something might change their life course forever, including the possibility of remaining outside Japan. The Australian WH was considered an exploratory journey into the unknown, in the course of which doors might open for them in a way that would transform their life, and themselves.

Some talked about learning new skills and adopting new lifestyles. The above examples of Shin’ichi and Reiko are particularly illustrative of the tendency in late modernity to value professions that are associated with ‘aesthetic experience’ (see chapter 1 on Bauman’s argument), as opposed to work routines that offer few chances for challenges. Both of them took the initiative to self-impose new tasks to reinvent themselves as professionals. At the same time, their accounts show how their career ambitions are inseparable from their sense of self and personal desires. Shin’ichi (male, 28), who ‘wanted to know new ways of thinking in a foreign environment’, also explained his yearning for the West and the ‘cool’ English language, while Reiko (female, 30) sought chances to find a career that aligns her ‘personal interest in aromatherapy and a job to heal patients.’ As discussed earlier, boundaries between labour, leisure and consumption are blurred in such entrepreneurial endeavours.
Others were explicit about their desire for self-transformation. These interlocutors anticipated an opportunity to become a different, better person in a new place, without the weight of personal history and social constraints. Tetsuya (male, 25) said: ‘my plan was to change myself.’ Ryō (male, 30) similarly explained that the attraction of the Australian WH was its offer of ‘a chance to press the “reset” button and start again.’ Yoshie (female, 32) explained her hope for personal, internal change:

I wanted to become like my image of a foreigner, expressing emotions clearly, being good at telling jokes and wearing a big smile. I thought I might be able to change too [through immersion in a foreign country].

WHMs sought opportunities to gain experience of the foreign world, new skills and social networks beyond their ‘parochial’ boundaries. As chapter 3 explained, forms of cultural capital in the field of cosmopolitanism are some of the major attractions of the Australian WH experience, and interview narratives of seeking change and new challenges frequently portray Australia as a suitably cosmopolitan place to open a new chapter of their lives. Although the intertwined nature of the accumulation of cultural capital and self-transformation has been an under-investigated area in migration studies, my data above act as ample examples illustrating this relationship.

The project of self-improvement, and eventual self-transformation is part of the serious game of self-making that WHMs play in late modern Japanese society, in which neoliberal discourse distinctly colours the ways in which the youth conceive their existence, and the way forward. The WHMs in my study exhibited their understanding that any successes and failures would be brought about by their own doing. Their sense of responsibility for risk management and their entrepreneurial eagerness to create and grab chances underlay the youths’ proactive decision to take an Australian WH. Mariko’s (female, 27) comment below is typical in this regard:

I think everyone has unlimited potential hidden inside. Seeing and experiencing different things, meeting and talking to different people broadens one’s horizons. ...by taking challenges of living in Australia and improving myself, I want to extend my future possibilities.
The exact details of what these ‘future possibilities’ look like were often vague in interview accounts. Even so, WHMs felt the urge to get moving, because the sense of moving forward was much more preferable to that of stagnation or endless circular motions without an exit. In his analysis of migration as an act of hope, Ghassan Hage (2005: 470–474) juxtaposes the physical movement of going to another country with a sense of what he called ‘existential movement’. He argues that the context in which migrants leave their country is inseparable from their subsequent experience of the new country:

I believe that the movement we call migration cannot be understood without taking into account this relationship between existential and physical movement. What’s more, such a relationship allows us to construct a whole social physics of socio-existential mobility, explaining different kinds of mobility rather than homogenizing them with one term that equates the travel of the totally-at-home-having-fun tourist and the travel of the fragile, dislocated and hesitant refugee (Hage 2005: 470-471).

When Japanese WHMs boarded a plane to Australia, it was at once a physical act of mobility to a different place, and existential mobility to a new, cosmopolitan stage. It also had the possibility for social mobility, because ‘...travel and distance in space also represent distance and travel up or down the social hierarchy’ (Liu 1996, cited in Pieke and Mallee 1999: 16). Wanting to expand a range of life options, as well as developing their self along the way, the young people’s act of leaving Japan was a rejection of uninspiring circumstances and unappealing future prospects in Japan in the lost decade.

**Conclusion**

In part 2 of this thesis, I have discussed Japanese WHMs’ motivations for a WH in Australia, and explored the wider social contexts in which their individualistic desires were embedded. Social, cultural and historical forces have shaped, reinforced, and encouraged lost generation Japanese youth to imagine what life options could be within their reach, and how they should act on their imaginings. Images of the West have been central to Japan’s national identity since the Meiji era of modernisation, and together with the long-lasting social fascination with the
English language, such images shaped the WHMs’ selection of Australia as their destination. Gaining experience of the ‘real West’, not as a tourist but as a resident-worker was high on their agenda, because it would help them accumulate cultural capital in the field of cosmopolitanism, such as improved language proficiency, and social networks with Westerners and other residents of the ‘global village’.

Acting on their Westward desires, young people pour into countries such as Australia, making the WH a paradoxical phenomenon of ‘individualism on a mass scale’. The marketing of the migration industry invites everyone to access transnational mobility as a commodity. Access to such opportunities, however, is unequally distributed in Japan. The case of the regional city Takakura illustrated structural factors affecting access to self-development through international mobility, not only in terms of material circumstances, but also in terms of the ability to imagine a certain life. Hence, even while the individualistic society celebrates cosmopolitanism, we are not ‘all cosmopolitans’ (Rabinow 1986: 258) in the same way, to the same degree. This rings even more truly when considering the fact that many WHMs chose Australia out of compromise, as a substitute for their primary place of desire, such as the US and the UK.

WHMs’ decision to take an Australian WH also emerged from the circumstances of Japan’s labour market in the lost decade. New constraints and continuing tendencies combined to open up a particular context in which the WHMs sought to make their transition to adulthood. It is no coincidence that two groups heavily affected by the lost decade, women and those with a non-prestigious educational background, dominated the WHMs in my study. These young people were able to utilise their resources in an attempt to influence their own life courses, and taking an Australian WH was one such step. The young people’s decision to become WHMs was at once their resistance against the difficult and disheartening situation in the lost decade, and their defense of ‘the right to have projects’ (Ortner 2001: 81), of the kind that contribute to their self-making.

How did they establish a new life in Australia, a country of hopes and unknown possibilities, but also of pragmatic compromise? How did their experiences abroad
shift their expectations over time? These questions form the central discussion of the next chapter.
Part 3

Experience in Australia
Chapter 5

Working their way around Australia

Introduction

At the time of their arrival in Australia, Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) saw what they had expected most from Australia: a vast natural space full of vivid colours. ‘The sky was so blue and so big, and there were lots of trees with green leaves. I felt I’ve really come to Australia’ (Megumi, female, 28). If it was their first visit, everything was new at the start of their WH, and simple everyday things became exciting discoveries. For instance, Juri (female, 26) was thrilled that ‘Everything on the shelf is so big!’ at her local supermarket, while Mitsuru (male, 31) was surprised that ‘you need to put your hand up to stop a bus at the bus stop.’ During the first several weeks, seeing things through the tourist gaze gave them much to talk about, while familiarising themselves with the local practices and new routines often boosted their budding confidence in surviving on their own in this new culture.

Chapter 3 showed that the Australian Working Holiday (WH) is marketed in Japan as an opportunity to have a variety of experiences in a new country. By implication, it represents an open-ended possibility, in the spirit of ‘anything is possible’. But
investigation of the everyday lives of Japanese WHMs revealed that the limited
timeframe of the working holiday put constraints on any aspects of their Australian
experience. Moreover, their status as newly arrived migrants from a non-English
speaking, non-Euro-American background strongly affected the social positions
they occupied in the host nation.

This chapter examines WHMs’ project of ‘living like the locals do,’ through their
engagement in the three main basics of WH life—shelter, English language learning
and employment. The issue of employment is particularly important, because work
is a dominant aspect of the Australian WH, especially given its status as a quasi-
labour migration scheme. WHMs’ position as Japanese migrant workers ‘fresh off
the boat’ impacted on their ability to access desired forms of cultural capital, and to
enact their individual project of self-improvement. My argument will be that their
serious game of self-making was inherently limited, due to their lower status and
lack of power, relative to other economic, political and social actors in the host
society.

In chapter 6, I will explore how Japanese WHMs perceived and negotiated their
marginal social position in Australia as gendered and ethnicised migrants. The
development of a cosmopolitan identity was one of the most popularly cited desires
among my interlocutors. Their ability to pursue this particular project was
influenced by the shifting power relations of the host society in which they became
embedded. Portraying their WH as an emotional journey, I will highlight their
ambivalence, resistance and complicity with regards to the social discourses and
practices that were dominant in their home society.

Arguably, the most salient characteristic of the WH experience is its temporary
quality. As noted, the WH visa is for a period of up to 12 months, with the
possibility of extension for a further 12 months. Unlike most other visas, the WH
visa internationally is obtainable only once in one’s life per destination country.
This rule adds to the sense that the WH experience is a once-in-a-lifetime
opportunity, available for a limited time only. Before embarking on their trips,
Japanese WHMs seemed to think that one year was a long time. Asked to describe
the plan for the coming year in Australia, Shizue (female, 23) replied ‘I want to go to
English school, but I don’t know for how long...one year is too long to have precise plans, so I think I will have to see how I feel.’ While in Australia, Asaka (female, 26) reflected on her similar past attitude: ‘Before I left, I was thinking, I have the whole year in Australia. I can do so many things. But once I arrived, the time passed so fast.’

Setting up the basics of life such as accommodation, work, school, and social networks turned out to be more time- and energy-consuming than expected. Dissimilar to expatriates or overseas students, WHMs usually arrive in the host country without an institutional affiliation, and this, together with language barriers and different cultural practices and assumptions, makes settling in a challenge. From finding accommodation and learning English to gaining jobs, there was a series of hurdles for them to overcome. Below, I will illustrate some of these challenges.

**Substandard housing and insecure living arrangements in Sydney**

For WHMs in my study, finding stable accommodation took up to a month. At the onset of my fieldwork, it became immediately apparent that an established pattern for WHMs was to live in a group house in Sydney’s central area, especially where the migrants were still unfamiliar the city. This practice was unusual in the mid-1990s, a decade prior to my fieldwork. But in 2006–07, sharing a house, or even a bedroom, with strangers seemed taken for granted by incoming WHMs.

Advertisements targeting Japanese and other migrants, especially those who just arrived, for room-sharing deals were highly visible in Sydney’s migrant-orientated spaces. The advertisements were displayed on websites popular with WHMs, pinned on notice boards at migration agent offices, and pasted on telegraph poles in Sydney city and in suburbs popular with WHMs and other migrants. The classified advertisement sections of Japanese language community papers were also common places for advertisements.\(^{123}\) Below is an advertisement that I found on a Sydney CBD street near Chinatown in June 2006 (text reproduced as in the original, except that the street address and phone numbers have been altered):

\(^{123}\) See chapter 1 footnote 27 for details of these publications.
Master Room for Rent

Large master room for 3 friends, $150 per person per week
No one in living room!!!

Private bathroom, large built-in, Internet, telephone, bed, chair, table, washing
machine, microwave, oven, fridge, electricity, water, gas
3 months minimum stay/ clean and neat, prefer non-smokers

Location: XXX Sussex Street (2 minutes to Town Hall, 3 minutes to Coles and Market
City!)
Call XXXX XXX XXX or XXXX XXXX

All of my interlocutors who lived in this type of accommodation considered their
residence to be temporary, and valued a certain convenience until they moved on to
the next stage of settlement in Australia. Juri (female, 26), for example, described
the reason why she was not looking for better living conditions outside central
Sydney:

I know I can live in a more spacious place out in the suburbs, but for
now, I like living near my friends. I'm never lonely, and I can walk to
work [a Japanese restaurant five minutes walk away].

Noriko (female, 29) also considered advantageous the central location and
proximity to places where other Japanese migrants frequent:

I'm new to Sydney. I don't know other places so much, but there are
a lot of Japanese around here, so it's convenient for finding a job and
school. Once I've settled in, I can start looking for a place, ideally to
live with an Australian owner of the apartment, with my own room.

While their location might be convenient, these ‘room-share’ properties are over-
crowded, over-priced, and poorly maintained. WHMs become ‘roommates’ in a
literal sense, sharing a bedroom with other tenants, or in some cases, sharing a bed
with a stranger. Yukari and Tomoe experienced bed-sharing with females from
Korea and Brazil, respectively. At times, one or two tenants used the communal
living space as their ‘bedroom’. The most crowded apartment I witnessed had nine
people in a two-bedroom unit with a sunroom, within a brand new building in central Sydney. This unit was typical in that the bedrooms and the sunroom each contained bunk beds to house as many people as the floor space allowed.\textsuperscript{124} Illegal arrangements were rampant at properties I visited, including renting out storage space as a bedroom, and creating cubicle-like ‘rooms’ with veneer partitions in what was originally a large living room.\textsuperscript{125} Local Sydney residents would have considered such conditions outrageous, especially for a hefty rent of $150 per week for a small bedroom shared with strangers. Local authorities such as the Sydney City Council were not ignorant of the issue. In 2006, a major Sydney daily newspaper reported illegal overcrowding of ‘student and backpacker accommodation’ in central Sydney and Bondi, popular places for Japanese WHMs:

\begin{quote}
The City of Sydney is planning to crack down on the million-dollar ‘black market hotel’ trade by strictly policing a limit of two adults per bedroom and a minimum lease of three months for all new residential blocks (Norrie 2006).
\end{quote}

However, my subsequent fieldwork data indicate that such enforcement, where it occurred at all, was ineffective and over-crowded accommodation was extremely common.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{124} To make the communal life as orderly as possible, owners of these properties commonly establish house rules, which they enforce themselves if they live in the properties, or have a head tenant act as a leader. For example, one of the places Noriko (female, 29) lived in had a note on the living room wall, detailing numerous house rules. I recorded my surprise at the level of detail in my field notes as follows: [The rules] ranged from cleaning the bed, bathrooms and the kitchen every week, and wiping the bathroom cupboard after every shower to prevent mould, to keeping things tidy at all times, and ensuring that there was some cooked rice in the rice cooker for all to enjoy (the last person who finished the rice was to cook four cups of it for the next person) etc. I thought it was much stricter than a boarding school or a university college [Field note 28 June 2006]. While these rules may give the impression of a boarding house, tenants in this type of accommodation are not treated as ‘guests’, and need to cook and clean for themselves.

\textsuperscript{125} Another illegal activity involved imposing on tenants to share their keys. In a security building such as this one, key cards are issued only for the number of residents for which the unit is officially designed. This means that all the residents must somehow share the cards to access the front door and the lift, usually by arranging to leave them in a mailbox for each other. In addition, it typically takes a long time for the lift(s) to arrive, due to an unexpectedly large number of residents using the facility.

\textsuperscript{126} One owner-occupier told me during an inspection that all the tenants must help him every now and then to move a few beds into his friend’s unit located upstairs, to deal with ‘government inspections’. He warned me, as a prospective tenant, that ‘for one day or so, maybe you have to sleep at your friend’s place, until we can move your bed back into the bedroom again.’ He further informed me that his friend upstairs might have to do the same, bringing beds downstairs to his unit [17 January 2006].
All the shared properties in central Sydney that I inspected targeted newcomers from Japan and Korea, most commonly WHMs. This is not simply a reflection of their large numbers in Sydney, but also a result of certain landlords preferring residents who are still new to the city, and therefore lack local social networks – a profile that fits WHMs. One property owner told me during a house inspection, ‘If they have lived in Sydney for a while, they have more friends to bring and cause trouble.’ For these reasons, Japanese WHMs were more likely to share a place of residence with other Japanese or with Koreans than any other nationalities. Noriko (female, 29) considered herself lucky to have a Brazilian roommate, a relative rarity signifying the authenticity of her experience: ‘I had only lived with Koreans and Japanese before, like everybody else.’

‘Living like locals do’ was something a large number of WHMs had looked forward to while still in Japan. Upon arriving, however, it was very common for those in Sydney to live in ‘high-rise ghettos’ with other disadvantaged newcomers, as approximately half of my interlocutors did for varying durations. While at least half of my interlocutors moved to a more conventional shared house in a suburb not long after arriving in Sydney, room sharing and other similar arrangements occurred frequently among WHMs who had been in Australia for some time. WHMs’ temporary existence and newcomer status in Australia encouraged them to tolerate, and even consider normal, such living arrangements for a limited time. The turnover rates at these premises seemed extremely high, and from the interview accounts, it appeared that this was because residents tended to hop from one such living arrangement to another until they found somewhere acceptable to stay longer.

As none of my interlocutors had had such experience prior to arriving in Australia, the WHMs’ substandard accommodation signified their new status as second-class citizens. As if to confirm the peripheral social position of these young people, the main worries expressed by the wider public do not indicate concern for the migrants, but the ‘cost’ of them to the mainstream population. For example, the

127 Some properties were exclusively for the Japanese, such as a few houses in wealthy North Shore, one of the favourite areas for Japanese migrants to live. Many Japanese owners of such properties explained their preference for all-Japanese households, because, in two owners’ words, ‘the Japanese never cause problems’ [Fieldnote 14 March 2006].
aforementioned newspaper article focused on complaints of other residents (who ‘had paid $900,000’ for his apartment) and the Tourism and Transport Forum of Australia (‘...illegal short-term tenancies cost hotels and hostels millions each year’). In chapter 6, I will refer to the daily conflicts the WHMs experienced with other migrants, in order to illustrate how they negotiated their newly imposed categorisation as ethnically marked migrants of Australia, differentiated from the Anglo-Celtic majority whose ethnicity was rendered invisible and unmarked.

**English learning as a long and slow process**

Almost all interlocutors remembered their sense of relative optimism regarding their English ability at the time of leaving Japan, typically stating that they either thought something would ‘work out’ (Yoshie, female, 32), or that they would ‘learn fast’ (Natsumi, female, 30). 128 By their own accounts, the majority of my interlocutors arrived in Australia with a level of English proficiency that was either inadequate or only just sufficient for conducting day-to-day activities, such as opening a bank account and buying a mobile phone. This tendency was apparent from the fact that my interlocutors who went to English school were typically placed in lower intermediate to intermediate level classes. My observation of WHMs’ interactions with others such as waitpersons and flatmates also helped ascertain their language proficiency levels.

English language competence, one of their most sought-after forms of cultural capital, was much more difficult for Japanese WHMs to accumulate during the first year than they had previously imagined. Asaka (female, 26) reflected back on her 11 months in Australia and said:

> I thought my English would improve a lot in one year, if I lived in Australia. But no, it’s not much better than before. Especially, my listening is really bad. I still don’t understand what people are saying.

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128 Some interlocutors such as Ryō voiced his criticism of this attitude of Japanese WHMs: The Japanese who live here speak poor English. I’m often better than them, even though I’ve just arrived here. What I’ve learnt is that [...] just being [in Australia] doesn’t teach you to speak better [English]. [...] As for the kind of people I meet at agent offices who boast ‘I don’t care about English, I just wanna have fun doing raundo (round trip around Australia)’, my view is that, in fact, they’d wanted to improve their English, but they’ve given up.’ (Ryō, male, 29)
Miyoko (female, 30), Asaka’s friend sitting next to her, agreed:

I thought the same, but I still struggle everyday, constantly entering words into my electronic dictionary like this [mocking furious typing] (laughs). I actually think my English was better when I was at university [where she took some courses taught in English as an English major].

In chapter 3, I discussed the popular emphasis on conversational English skills in Japan, and the association of Westerners with authentic English. As part of the West, Australia was assumed to be a place offering abundant contacts with ‘real’ English speakers. It is in this context that WHMs such as Asaka and Miyoko assumed speedy mastery of the language just by virtue of ‘being surrounded by English every day’ (Asaka, female, 26). Interlocutors such as Mamoru and Mitsuru reflected on the first year of their WH, and regretted not having studied English harder while in Japan, so that they could have made the most of their WH from the start.

Taking a short-term English course at a private college was a common path chosen by WHMs, and the migration industry also actively promoted it as part of their ‘package deals’. Finance-conscious WHMs like Miyoko hoped that a short stint in a formal educational setting would ‘kick-start’ their learning, and pave the way for more informal learning through everyday practice. However, the school fees were a significant burden for the mostly self-funded Japanese youth. For instance, Noriko reported in 2007 that a Sydney-based migration agency offered a four-week deal that cost $2,600 ($300 per week for a home-stay, $350 per week for the English course), plus $75 for an agent fee. Naturally, interlocutors such as Asaka and Masanori, who had arrived without adequate savings, were excluded from

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129 While the Australian WH visa condition restricts institutional study to a maximum of four months, the rule did not seem to be strictly enforced. During fieldwork, I heard numerous accounts of WHMs continuing their studies at private colleges for as long as they liked. They usually simply ignored the rules. Other ways to bend the rules included treating existing students as new by re-enrolling them or changing schools to become a ‘new’ student.
accessing formal forms of English education altogether. \(^{130}\) Lack of economic capital and insufficient time to balance various activities were two major factors that limited WHMs’ development of English competency as a form of cultural capital. Chapter 6 will further discuss private efforts made by the youth to acquire language skills, as part of their project of developing a cosmopolitan sense of self.

Inadequate English proficiency, especially verbal communication skills, was a major obstacle for those who sought professional employment in an English-speaking environment. Shin’ichi (male, 28) arrived in Australia with the aim of continuing his career as a film and TV editor in a Western context. While his technical skills easily attracted several potential employers, his prospects of successfully getting through the interview were ‘hopeless’, due to his level of English:

> During the first year in Australia, I could hardly say anything beyond ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ in response. It was clear what the interviewer was thinking: ‘This man really can’t speak English.’ It was quite depressing every time this happened. \(^{131}\)

Noriko (female, 29) reported the story of her friend in Melbourne, a former WHM who gained permanent residency as a skilled migrant: ‘My friend is still looking for an IT job after two years. In the meantime, he makes a living by filling bar fridges in hotel rooms. But he says he never gets through [job interviews] because of his English.’ Lower levels of language proficiency created a vicious circle for aspiring WHMs. They valued an ‘authentic environment’ of being surrounded by English language users, but their baseline proficiency was inadequate to fully engage in spontaneous interactions with them without significant struggle. This, in turn, was a barrier to further learning, as well as forming friendships. Asaka (female, 26) recounted an illustrative story:

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\(^{130}\) Some WHMs voluntarily excluded themselves from an opportunity to attend English school, since they had negative memories of schooling from years back in Japan. For example, Juri (female, 27), a former high school dropout, said: ‘I stopped [going to class] after a couple of weeks. I just hate studying at school. Being in a classroom, my mind simply stops working. He [a Japanese school counsellor] said I wouldn’t get my money back, but I only paid for two months […] so it’s not so bad.’

\(^{131}\) Shin’ichi continued his stay in Australia on a student visa, and eventually secured an employer willing to sponsor his skilled migration visa. He still struggled with communication issues after two years of being in Sydney. ‘For example, when my colleague talked at length during a meeting and said something like “…and what do you think, Shin?”’, I could only catch my name at the end of his long talk.’
Sometimes the manager invites us [workers] to go to a pub together. He asked me one evening what I wanted to do with my life. I had so many things I wanted to say, and I tried, but my English was not good enough. In the end, he said 'I don't know what you are trying to say', and this was the end of this conversation. This happens a lot, and it's really frustrating.

I have so far discussed the kind of accommodation in which WHMs tended to live, and their efforts to learn the English language. Living in crammed conditions in substandard housing, and having one's patience and determination tested by the process of acquiring foreign language proficiency are something my interlocutors did not imagine in depth before leaving Japan. My analysis of these two aspects of initial settlement in the host society has shown some of the major challenges of living in a linguistically unfamiliar place without an established network of support or an institutional help. In the next section, I will turn to WHMs' experience of employment and associated patterns of difficulties and exploitation.

The 'Work' in 'Working Holiday': Young Japanese as migrant workers

While the WH visa guidelines state that holidaying should be the main purpose of WH in Australia (‘an extended holiday supplemented by short employment’\(^{132}\)), the experiences of my interlocutors suggest that working for money was frequently a major part of a Japanese WHM’s life. All of my interlocutors worked to finance their stay in Australia, and this fact resonates with Hardin and Webster's finding (2002: 26) that 84.4 percent of Japanese WHMs in their study (32 respondents) engaged in paid employment in 2000, and typically held one or two jobs during their stay.

Migration agents typically advise prospective WHMs to bring sufficient savings to ease the financial pressure. Kengo, a migration agent speaking at a preparation workshop in Tokyo stated ‘You need at least 1,500,000 yen to live in Australia for a year without financial panic.’ Some of my interlocutors ignored such advice (as well as the official purpose of the visa), and arrived with the full intention of working as much and as long as they needed. For example, Mamoru (male, 27) managed to

save only $3,000 before his departure. His whole year in Australia was mostly spent working for money, and moving about in search of rural work, changing his residence as often as it became necessary. Looking back on his WH in Tokyo, he gave a piece of advice for would-be WHMs.

I was relaxed about not having so much money when I left Japan. But I now think it’s hard if you don’t have enough money to jump-start the WH. It definitely helps if you have a lot of money to begin with.

Even when WHMs brought savings deemed adequate by the Japanese migration agents, paying for essentials such as rent, food and transport for the whole year left them with only a few thousand dollars to barely cover other necessities, such as school fees, travel, internet and phone communication, social activities, souvenirs and medical expenses. Keiko, for instance, was comfortably funded with her savings of $17,000 when she arrived in Brisbane. However, she still worked seven out of the 11 months she stayed in Australia, and returned to Japan without any savings.

In the sections that follow, I will show how my interlocutors came to occupy a peripheral position, in both the Japanese niche economy as well as the mainstream economy in Australia. My focus will be on the details of their WH experience as workers, and the socio-economic contexts in which their mobility was embedded. Below, I will first analyse Japanese WHMs’ employment at Japanese businesses in Australia. Given the insufficient social, economic and cultural capital at hand, transient WHMs’ Japanese ethnicity was one resource they could employ to gain economic capital in the form of wages. However, the relationship between WHMs and their Japanese employers was not one of ethnic solidarity or even a simple case of matching demand and supply. My discussion will centre on the financial reliance of the youth on their Japanese employers, and its implications for their ability to develop their project of ‘living like the locals do’.

**At the bottom of the pyramid: WHMs’ reliance on nikkei businesses**

To date, Japanese communities as an ethnic minority group in Australia have typically been discussed as a place for permanent resident members and sojourners who are related by kin, (marriage, parent-child relationships) or
institutions (colleagues, business-based networks) (e.g. Mizukami 1993, 2007, Shiobara 2004, 2005). Existing scholarly discussions usually revolve around the communities’ functions or attempts to reproduce, recreate or maintain their links to the homeland in some way. While such aspects are an integral part of migrant communities, scholars have tended not to focus on internal conflicts and unequal power relations within the communities. The few exceptions include studies by Minamikawa (2005: 115–116) and Habu (2000: 54) who mention the tendency of young Japanese to work for existing Japanese communities (young sojourners in Los Angeles and female students in London, respectively). While both of these studies make a point about the informal and nature of such work and the relatively cheap labour the youth provide, these issues are marginal to their studies. In contrast, I make the issue of labour a central concern in the rest of this chapter, and argue that WHMs are important, if unappreciated, drivers of the Japanese niche economy, both as workers and as consumers.

Jobs available for Japanese WHMs are highly concentrated in particular occupations and industries within the nikkei \(^{133}\) (literally ‘Japanese-related’, here meaning overseas Japanese, or ethnic Japanese) business world in Australia. Employment opportunities accessed by my interlocutors were most commonly offered by Japanese-owned or -operated businesses, such as catering establishments (e.g. restaurants, takeaway sushi outlets), retail outlets (e.g. souvenir shops, grocery stores) and the tourism sector (e.g. tour operators, travel agents). In the 1991 census data, a similar set of occupations and concentration of Japanese workers in Japanese-owned firms were also found in the Cairns region (Bell and Carr 1994: 80, 83).

The immediately noticeable features of WHMs’ employment in Japanese communities were the low-skilled nature of their work and the temporary arrangements. Japanese youth in these industries usually work as waitpersons, kitchen-hands, shop assistants, entry-level clerks and basic customer service providers. Multiple factors combine to push Japanese WHMs into low-skilled, short-

\(^{133}\) For a discussion of the term nikkei and the identity politics of members of the Japanese diaspora, see Hamano (2009: 4–5).
term jobs offered by *nikkei* businesses.\(^{134}\) Firstly, due to the temporary nature of the WH visa, employers are only willing to offer low-skilled jobs that do not involve training and career development. The visa condition is specific in this regard, as WHMs’ employment is currently limited to a maximum of six months under one employer. Secondly, Japanese service industries tend to favour precarious workers, like WHMs, because they are cheaper. Thirdly, in the absence of business-level English skills, Japanese language proficiency is one of the few drawcards that WHMs have in terms of attracting employers in Australia. Fourthly, many WHMs are unable to transfer existing skills and experience outside the *nikkei* workplaces due to the non-specialised nature of their previous training, and lack of work experience in an English-speaking environment. The design of the WH scheme and the lack of cultural capital among WHMs limit the types of employment that are accessible to Japanese temporary migrants.

Financial urgency rendered WHMs needy enough to accept any given work conditions for as long as they could tolerate it. They frequently lacked knowledge of local employment practices and workers’ rights, and relied on far fewer resources and support than in their previous circumstances in Japan. My interlocutors’ discussions about *nikkei* jobs frequently involved complaints and accounts of unfair and often illegal treatment by employers:

Please tell others not to work for Z (a famous upscale Japanese restaurant). They are well known for not paying the last pay after receiving a notice of resignation from workers. [...] The manager was a sleazebag too (Noriko, female, 29).

\(^{134}\) A study of foreign-born workers in metropolitan Canada showed a similar reality. As high as 19.9 percent of Chinese-born workers, and 17.6 percent of Portuguese-born workers worked in an ethically homogenous setting, compared to 4.5 percent of the Canadian-born minority (i.e. non-British, non-French) workers (Hou 2009: 83). These workers were associated with host-language proficiency, lower pay levels and sales, personal services and primary industries compared to the Canadian-born population (Hou 2009: 87–91). Regarding the precarious nature of jobs Japanese WHMs tend to access in Australia, the abovementioned study into Japanese WHMs in the Cairns region in the early 1990s already described them as engaging in a practice which ‘[bordered] on contract labour’, as opposed to professional migrants (Bell and Carr 1994: 88).
My friend was working as a tour guide. I wanted to try it myself, but lost interest when she told me that the initial month was a 'training period' for no pay¹³⁵ (Tomoe, female, 30).

I was paid $7 [an hour as a souvenir shop attendant], cash in hand. They [Japanese employers] definitely take advantage of us (ashimoto miteru). It’s like ‘You don’t want to work here? Fine, we can find someone else’ (Emi, female, 27).

I was initially told to work two days a week. But when it’s not busy, they often tell me to leave early. They also change my shift at the last minute. I can’t plan my week or income (Juri, female, 26).

Exploitative employment practices have also been reported in the media. The Age, for example, reported in 2007 the case of a Japanese restaurant in Perth, which was fined for paying two Japanese workers at the illegal hourly rate of $8, half of the minimum wage (The Age 2007). In 2011, the Sun-Herald uncovered a dozen cases of Japanese WHMs and students who were severely underpaid by their employers, the Sushi Train and Sushi Samurai franchise (Norrie 2011). Maltreatment and illegal employment practices are likely to occur beyond the confinement of the Japanese WHM population, as a Sydney Morning Herald article reports the case of a Korean construction worker on a WH visa who consulted his union for the non-payment of wages (O’Malley 2006). My fieldwork data and widely available anecdotal evidence lead me to speculate that reported cases, let alone cases of exploitative employers being punished, are only the tip of the iceberg. Young Japanese on a WH are part of a large number of migrant workers at risk of exploitation at Australian workplaces.¹³⁶

Abuse of ‘internship’ deals was also observed at some nikkei workplaces. Those ‘intern’ positions seemed nothing more than a thinly veiled use of free labour, in the name of work experience and fringe benefits. For example, a recruitment flyer at a Japanese ‘comics café’ in Sydney (where clients pay by the hour to access shelves

¹³⁵ This took place in NSW where, legally, ‘work experience’ for no pay must be through a registered educational training organisation such as TAFE. www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au (last accessed 25 August 2009).
¹³⁶ The experience of Katsuhiko (male, 23) at a Korean restaurant in Sydney suggests that the exploitation of newcomers also occur in Korean communities. According to him, his first week as a waiter was considered a ‘training period’, for which he was paid $8 an hour. During the second week, the wage increased to $9 an hour. During the subsequent two years, incremental pay rises brought his wage level to $11, which was still around the minimum wage in 2006 (taking into account applicable tax rates).
full of *manga* comics) said that one or two interns were required to staff the cashier for several hours a week each. When I inquired about the position, the worker told me that there was no pay, but it was a quiet space and there was plenty of time to read comics, or surf the net. Yoshie was one of my interlocutors who had engaged in unpaid work as an ‘intern attendant’ by accompanying scuba diving tours off the coast of Queensland. She described the job as an exchange of her labour for free access to diving and opportunities to practice her English with non-Japanese customers.

Despite the wide participation of Japanese WHMs in the workforce and the systematic exploitation of their labour, the young people did not understand themselves as migrant workers. Instead, they talked about their precarious *nikkei* employment in Australia as ‘not real work’, as it was considered a temporary measure to earn enough money to live, or to save money for activities such as travel. This is similar to the way in which part-time workers in Japan can be exploited because their wages are just seen as ‘supplementing’ the family income. The attitude of WHMs post-arrival is exactly the same as that of the pre-departure period in which they considered their precarious employment solely as a measure to raise funds for the WH. Their lack of consciousness as workers made it unlikely they would reach out to advocacy groups or watchdog organisations. This would especially be the case if they did not have people in their social networks with good knowledge of employment regulations, or where to seek help.

The existence of an endless supply of precarious workers from Japan is essential to the survival of many existing Japanese businesses in Australia. From my fieldwork, a hierarchical picture of Japanese communities in Australia emerges. Business activities of a small number of migrants with economic, social and cultural capital are supported by the precarious labour of a large number of newcomer migrants, such as WHMs. These capital owners may be recent investors from Japan, while others have lived in Australia for a long time, and have played a key role in establishing ethnic Japanese communities. Many such ‘old-timer’ migrants have been involved in business activities, taking advantage of the highly valued yen and rising Australian interest in Japan, especially during Japan’s high economic growth period. As the ebb and flow of temporary migrants from Japan has dramatically
increased since the 1980s and well into the new millennium, the nikkei market has expanded to continuously meet and create the needs of both Japanese and non-Japanese consumers.¹³⁷

Some researchers have highlighted the function of migrant businesses as providing a path to upward social mobility in the host society (Zhou 2007: 224; Boyd 1990). In Sydney, Japanese migrants who arrived before the lost decade were able to establish a niche market as nikkei business owners and employers, and revenues raised from their enterprises allowed them to enjoy upper middle-class lifestyles. By contrast, contemporary WHMs play a significant part in the thriving businesses, but not as beneficiaries but as consumers of goods and services they sell, as well as providing cheap and exploitable labour at the bottom of the nikkei hierarchy.¹³⁸

Japanese WHMs’ co-national employers rarely come from social networks the young people developed in Japan. Personal introductions do occur, but are not a requisite to WHMs’ accessing jobs offered at nikkei workplaces. This is in stark contrast to various forms of chain migration, which usually rely on personal and communal networks to continue, expand and shift migratory flows (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991: 12–15, Brettell 2000: 101, 107–108).

Japanese WHMs’ reliance on nikkei employers is a double-edged sword. On the positive side, their being Japanese grants them prompt opportunities for employment.¹³⁹ In addition, nikkei workplaces can potentially be a helpful environment in which newcomers can learn from more experienced co-national migrants about the host society. In the context of the scarcity of accessible non-nikkei jobs, the existence of Japanese communities may thus function as a financial,

¹³⁷ When demands for Japanese products continuously rise, other ethnic groups may enter into the existing nikkei market for their share of the profits. Casual sushi restaurants in Sydney owned and operated by Korean and Chinese migrants are a prime example, although not all customers may realise, or care about, the different nationality associated with such businesses.

¹³⁸ They may also serve to heighten a sense of superiority over those ‘below’ them on the scale of economic and social prestige. Shiobara quotes (2008: 151–152) a prominent figure in a Japanese community, who claims nikkei business owners as possessing a mentality of ‘honorary whites’ (meiyō hakujin). There is also a discussion (Shiobara 2008: 153–156) regarding a common sentiment among long-term Japanese permanent residents that they as middle-class migrants are (should be) distinguished from other Asian migrants, including second and later generations of ethnic Japanese migrants from North and South Americas.

¹³⁹ See Light (1972) for the-lower-than-average level of unemployment in Japanese communities in the US during the Great Depression.
psychological and practical support system.\(^{140}\) On the other hand, we have seen widespread exploitation of Japanese WHMs and their labour because of their close association with the nikkei world. WHMs’ nationality and Japanese language ability may be useful within the confinement of the nikkei sphere in Australia. However, the existence of this particular sphere as a niche is based on its inherently marginal status in relation to the mainstream society. Therefore, such employment opportunities come with ingrained limitation and disadvantage, especially for those without various forms of capital to advance their position within this niche market.

A past study (Carson 1995: 46–48) similarly highlights the ineffective nature of community ties among disadvantaged migrants in Australia in gaining quality employment opportunities offered by the mainstream labour market.\(^{141}\) My findings support Floya Anthias’ argument (2007: 788–794, 801–802) that co-ethnic social networks cannot be automatically equated with a form of capital, and point to the need to situate such migrant connections within the broader power relations in the host society. In the case of Japanese WHMs in Australia, limitations associated with their status as a WHM, as well as the disadvantageous characteristics of nikkei employment restricted their access to economic capital, as well as the cultural capital of cosmopolitanism, both of which were major ingredients for their project of ‘living like locals do’.

**Dream jobs or another trap?: Employment in Australian businesses**

As discussed, work was partly a financial necessity, but what WHMs call rōkaru no shigoto, literally, ‘local work’ (i.e. employment in a non-Japanese, English-speaking environment) had a special place within the imaginary of authentic life experience in Australia. In this section, my analysis moves on to employment provided by non-nikkei, or ‘Australian’ businesses, and how my interlocutors fared at workplaces where their nikkei association could not be used to the same advantage.

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\(^{140}\) Chapter 6 will introduce accounts of WHMs who valued the assistance and friendship accorded by co-nationals.

\(^{141}\) The case of Filipino migrant workers in Roma discussed in Parreñas (2001: 223-226) provides an interesting contrast to the employment relation between a Japanese business owner and a WHM. While there are those who sublet their space bed spaces to fellow Filipino domestic workers, most of them only do so to make supplementary income, not to make a full profit (Parreñas 2001: 224).
After ten days of arrival in the country, Yukari (female, 24) talked of her plans in a way that I had heard from many others before:

For the moment, I have no choice but stick to japaresu (Japanese restaurant) because my English still needs to improve. But I’d love to work for a local restaurant or café. That’s my dream. Until then, I’ll just save money.

Several interlocutors managed to find jobs without promoting the Japanese language as their strength. Hospitality was one of the most common industries that welcomed their labour. For example, Megumi was very happy to shift from a japaresu to a ‘local café’ in a North Shore suburb, and said ‘although the owner is a Chinese woman, it’s a local job because it’s eigo kankyō (English-speaking environment).’ The phrase eigo kankyō was popularly employed by Japanese WHMs, and its connotation was undoubtedly positive for those interested in accumulating cosmopolitan capital. But apart from the eigo kankyō, what the youth in my study could gain from their ‘local’ jobs was limited, due to the low-paid and low-skilled type of jobs they worked, much like the jobs offered by Japanese employers.

Hardin and Webster claim that in 2000, 40 percent of a group of Japanese WHMs in their study worked as ‘labourers and related workers’ (including harvesting, kitchen hand, factory hand and cleaning), while 57.8 percent engaged in elementary to intermediate clerical, sales and service work (2002: 24). This starkly contrasts with young New Zealander temporary migrants in Inkson and Myers’ study (2003: 177), half of whom continued their previous professional careers such as accounting, teaching and administration in their host societies. Most of the New Zealanders who initially engaged in low-skilled casual jobs later progressed to ‘jobs which were commensurate with their qualifications and experience’ (Inkson and Myers 2003: 177). This enviable situation was unachievable for the majority of Japanese WHMs in Australia, because they tended not to possess the necessary English language skills.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Tomoe (female, 30) expressed her awareness of the differentiated access to employment opportunities between English-speaking WHMs and their non-English speaking counterparts in Sydney. She sometimes dropped by at a migration agent office catering for ‘native English speakers’, in order to seek jobs. She explained that ‘occupation types advertised at this kind of place are different. There are a lot of normal jobs.’ By ‘normal’, she meant jobs that count as careers, as opposed to the low-skilled precarious work in which Japanese WHMs typically engage.
Despite poor work conditions, WHMs in my study highly valued their ‘local work experience’, and continued to seek it eagerly. For example, Aoi (female, 25) worked for six weeks as an unpaid, administrative intern at a local company, as part of her business English course at a private college. She explained why she was willing to do this:

What I do is not really a ‘job’ (shigoto), but I get to work (hatarakeru) alongside Australians, and the college will give me a certificate at the end of it, so it’s all right. ...But my real goal is to work for a local business and get paid for it.

Ryō (male, 30) was also seeking work experience in an ‘Australian environment’, when he applied for a farm-stay position, in which he would engage in light farm work in exchange for accommodation, food, and hopefully a pleasant time with the family. His stint at this widely publicised form of working holiday experience turned into a disaster:

It was completely different from the happy and friendly image I had. I was told by the agent that the family would provide meals, but there was an apple and a bit of raw Chinese cabbage left on the kitchen bench when I arrived at night. [...] I was thrown into an empty shed with no toilet or shower, far away from the main house. [...] The moment I laid on the bed, it gave me red spots all over my body. [...] The next morning I said I wanted to leave, but the farmer got really mad at me and forced me to work that day. [...] He dropped me off in the middle of the farmlands, to mailbox drop 800 flyers for his pesticide business, all day, alone on foot.

But even this terrible event had a positive side for Ryō. He recounted that an old woman approached him in the field, and asked for a delivery of pesticide. Ryō said, with a hint of pride, that the farmer was impressed that he found a customer on his first day. Other interlocutors similarly expressed an increase in confidence through hardships and small everyday achievements. In contrast, when Ryō spoke about his job for a nikkei tourism company, no such sense of gratification was conveyed.

WHMs in the present study rarely criticised the exploitative practices they suffered at the hands of Australian employers. None of the interlocutors said they would advise would-be WHMs against working in Australia. A great majority were
genuinely enthusiastic: ‘I would definitely recommend people to take a WH in Australia. The new experiences will teach them a lot, and give them an opportunity to grow’ (Yukari, female, 24). As will be discussed in chapter 6, it was not unusual for the young people to treat linguistic, cultural and other difficulties of settling in a new country as ‘great personal challenges’ to tackle, and eventually overcome. This is because such hardships were considered an unavoidable, necessary, or even a welcome process of self-improvement.

**Pikingu: Harvest work in rural areas**

The characteristics of Japanese WHMs as easily exploitable migrant workers become even more apparent in the context of rural work. In what follows, my aim is two-fold: the first is to record the basic patterns of rural work engaged by Japanese WHMs, which is increasingly common but has so far remained mostly invisible, both to the Australian public and to scholars of migration studies. The second is to further analyse the extent to which the WHMs could enact their project of the Australian WH experience, and the implications for their self-making.

WHMs in general have a profile well suited to the needs of the harvest and other rural sectors (Hugo 2001). They are mobile, ready to engage in short-term contracts, and willing to take up rural work by linking it to their travel plans, often to remote places. Since they are only supplementing their ‘holiday’, as opposed to building a career or supporting a family, they are more likely to accept lower wages and poorer work conditions. For rural Australia’s business interests, WHMs are a godsend. As the Australian Chamber of Commerce stated in its submission to the parliamentary report in 1997, WHMs are:

> less averse to working in difficult physical conditions ... [and] not discouraged from seeking work for short engagements... As a result the WHMs have long played an important and positive role in Australian industries, especially those in the agricultural and hospitality sector, by undertaking work that Australian workers have long been unwilling to do (Joint Standing Committee on Migration 1997: 40).

For young people who seek to apply for a second WH visa, there is currently no other way but to engage in unskilled manual labour in Australia’s designated rural
areas for three out of their first 12 months (see chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the second WH visa rule and its politics). This new rule created a steady flow of willing WHMs seeking rural work.\(^{143}\) In 2000, when the maximum length of the WH visa was still one year, already 26.7 percent of Japanese WHMs surveyed worked as pickers, according to Harding and Webster (2002: 28). The ‘carrot’ of the second WH visa has most likely increased the number of WHMs undertaking harvest and other rural sector work in recent years. Approximately half of my interlocutors experienced seasonal work during their first year in Australia, often for visa extension purposes, but sometimes simply for the ‘exotic’ experience.

Japanese WHMs call this kind of work *pikkingu* (‘picking’), since most rural work available for them involves harvesting crops. Following the ‘harvest trail’, WHMs tend to hop from one fruit picking job to another. For example, grape harvesting in New South Wales occurs approximately between February and April every year. If someone needs to continue working for financial and/or visa reasons after this period, they must either find a chance to stay and engage in vine pruning (which is physically much harder than picking), or move to another farm to pick other crops, such as apples, citrus fruits or cotton. The National Harvest Labour Information Service provides seasonal and geographical information for WHMs, to help them consider a variety of issues such as the time and cost of relocation, crop types (e.g. smaller fruits for smaller built pickers), the length of stay in each location, and compatibility with their holiday plans. Despite the image of smooth sailing conveyed by the official harvest guide, half of my interlocutors who worked in rural Australia experienced recurrent disruptions of their plans, because of the unavailability of jobs or unexpected delays in harvesting due to weather conditions.

Miyoko and Asaka were working at a berry farm in southern New South Wales when I made a visit. At a nearby caravan park where they lived, the two women described their daily routine:

\(^{143}\) WHMs have the choice of completing the three months requirement in one hit, or spreading the required number of days throughout the year. Although the rule of the second WH visa extension does not exclude such unpaid work as ‘farm-staying’ (as Ryō experienced), all my interlocutors who engaged in rural work for the purpose of visa extension sought paid employment. This is expected, since three months is a long time to work for no payment.
Wake up at 6am to check the start time, written on the blackboard at the caravan park office. The time depends on the weather in the morning, since berries cannot be picked right after the rain. Go back to the caravan to eat breakfast and get ready for work. With other workers, catch a van by paying a dollar each to get to the farm. Pick until 1.00 or 2.00pm. If you are not a ‘packer’, then return to the caravan park, while others will walk to the packing shed, eat lunch, and work until the last berry is packed. Depending on the harvest, it continues to 7 or 8pm. Catch the van back and pay another dollar. Return to the caravan or tent to cook dinner and socialise with other workers until around 10pm, then bedtime.

Judging from the experience of my interlocutors, the culture and employment practices associated with Australian rural industry did not make the already tough physical labour any easier. First of all, due to the availability of cheap and willing labourers such as WHMs, rural workers are paid poorly. Mariko worked in Queensland and her main memory of it was of back pain and how long it took to earn $2 for a bucket full of zucchinis. Miyoko and Asako discussed their pay at the berry farm during our interview:

Pickers are paid by the weight of berries picked. No matter how hard I try, $70 a day is my best, because I’m slow. But the Sudanese are amazing, they make over $200 a day! (Miyoko, female, 30).

But they [the Sudanese] are refugees and have families to feed, so they aren’t so rich in the end (laughs). I earn about the same as Miyoko for picking. I also pack [berries], and that’s $15 an hour (Asaka, female, 26).

As in the case of WHMs elsewhere, harvest workers typically lacked knowledge of workplace safety and rights of the workers, and the employers of my interlocutors reportedly made minimal efforts to communicate these matters. For instance, Juri, who worked as a mango picker in Queensland, said that despite rashes she suffered from touching the fruit with bare hands, gloves were not provided. Asaka and Miyoko also witnessed two Japanese WHMs leaving the locality altogether, in order to receive medical attention for their skin conditions. Other examples of exploitation in my data include non- or under-payment of wages, unlawful

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dismissal and verbal abuse, similar to incidents reported by interlocutors who worked for Japanese employers.

Employers in the harvest sector may engage in what is called ‘sham independent contractor arrangements’, as opposed to employment, in order to avoid certain responsibilities. For example, an employer is legally required to provide all tools, payslips, record of employment and superannuation, and to pay overtime and weekend rates. Conversely, if the worker is considered an independent contractor, s/he must be able to have control over the amount of work, fees, charges and other conditions for their labour, as well as bringing their own tools.\textsuperscript{145} However, several interlocutors were told to work as contractors without such control over their own work conditions, which is a breach of Australian regulations. Mamoru was even told by one of his employers to purchase his own tools (secateurs), even though such a request could only have been made if every other aspect of the work arrangement ensured his independent contractor status. With other unskilled seasonal workers, WHMs share a marginal location within the rural sector. If they want to obtain a second WH visa, however, conditions involving minimal economic gain and being treated as expendable labour are barely avoidable.

The difficult conditions of rural work are combined with substandard housing, because employers and accommodation providers in the countryside frequently operate hand-in-hand. WHMs engaging in harvesting typically stay in commercially operated accommodation near their workplaces, such as backpackers’ hostels and caravan parks. More often than not, accommodation operators play a key mediation role between job seekers and employers, especially in areas where alternative accommodation is scarce or non-existent. Tomoe’s journey from Sydney to a regional town illustrates well the link between rural work and housing. Tomoe called the National Harvest Line, a government-sponsored, telephone-based information centre, to seek harvest work opportunities. She was told to try a town two hours train ride from Sydney, and was given the telephone number of a caravan park to confirm job availability before heading off. When she called the number provided, the caravan park staff told her that she was likely to find a job,

\textsuperscript{145} These requirements are set out by Fair Work Australia, a government agency dealing with workers’ rights and other labour-related matters \url{http://www.fwo.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx} (last accessed 21 October 2009).
but must secure a bed first, because theirs was the only place for workers to stay in town, and no employers would take ‘homeless’ workers. While there was no direct fee involved in this ‘mediation service’, the accommodation provider gained from visitors like Tomoe in the form of accommodation charges.

Despite the promise, work is generally not guaranteed in reality. Upon Tomoe’s arrival, she was presented with a list of labour contractors and farms in the area to contact, and she, along with other job seekers, was to commute to various work sites from this one caravan park. She looked for a job for a week, before giving up and moving to another location. She remembered her frustration:

Hostels and caravan parks often say to people on the phone ‘Yes yes, there are jobs, just book a bed and come’, even when there aren’t many jobs around. They make money this way. But we don’t know the situation unless we get there. So it’s a risk you have to take if you want to do pikkingu (Tomoe, female, 30).

Harvest workers are rarely in a position to carefully select where they reside, and know very little about the locality until they actually arrive at the site. On arrival, they discover that housing for temporary workers in rural areas is generally overpriced and ‘basic’ at best. Users of such accommodation become easy targets for the rural accommodation sector and their profit making. For example, Masanori and his friend each had to pay a weekly fee of $44 to share one tent, which they thought was sneaky (zurui) because the charge should have been per tent. Coin-operated washing machines cost $3 for each wash. Internet access was $2 for 15 minutes. In addition to accommodation-related fees, the caravan park charged each passenger $1 each way for a seat in a 21-person mini bus to commute to a farm which was only five minutes drive away. In some cases, staying at such accommodation can even be dangerous. The backpacker hostel’s fire in Childers, a Queensland town, in June 2000 that killed 15 travellers including one Japanese is an extreme example of what can happen to Japanese WHMs in Australia. One report described the hostel, used by local agricultural employers as a recruitment centre and dormitories for their workers, as ‘a typical firetrap, with 90 people packed into two- and three-tier bunks in the 98-year-old wooden structure’ (Blake 2007).
The Japanese migration industry, already actively operating in Australia, got on the harvesting bandwagon to extend their business opportunities. Juri (female, 26), who fully intended to apply for a second WH visa, began looking for seasonal work soon after her arrival in Sydney. Not knowing anyone in the country, she knocked on the door of a Japanese migration agency after seeing its advertisement on a website popular with Japanese WHMs. An agent at this office urged her to sign up immediately for an expensive scheme:

He told me that seasonal work could be hard to secure without a good knowledge of where and how to access jobs. He said if I paid $600, he would guarantee jobs for six months.

Other services included booking a seat on a bus to Queensland and contacting a local backpackers’ hostel to secure a bed before arriving in town, all for a service fee. Mariko used this service to book a bed in a backpackers’ hostel in Queensland, as well as to book a bus from Sydney. Tomoe, who had already embarked on her second WH year, looked back on the time she was in Perth and said ‘I registered myself with a migration agent. The system was that I would pay $10 if I got a job through them.’

As described above, the Australian government’s promotional materials portray harvest work as a lifestyle choice (‘keeping fit...topping up that tan...’). However, Japanese WHMs as harvest workers are more akin to the archetypal ‘labour migrants’, and their social position has more in common with Filipino peasant workers who worked at sugar plantations in the US in the early part of the 20th century (CIIR 1987: 16), than cashed-up lifestyle migrants in the Mediterranean or Bali. Despite their moderate to high education levels, Japanese WHMs become, upon arriving in Australia, embedded into what is called ‘the gloves-off’ economy. This type of economy flourishes due to ‘[A] set of employer strategies and practices that either evade or outright violate the core laws and standards that govern job quality...’ (Bernhardt et. al 2008: 2). WHMs are at greater risk, if they were desperate to meet the deadline to qualify for a second WH visa, as they are then more likely to hang onto their job, no matter how poor the working conditions might be. Together with other disadvantaged workers, Japanese WHMs in agricultural and other rural sectors all over the country become second-class
workers providing cheap labour without much social recognition or respect for their rights.\textsuperscript{146} Their status as new, temporary migrants with limited resources severely compromises their ability to open up new and exciting occasions that may contribute to exploring future career options.

Interlocutors’ accounts illustrate the way in which the Australian government as a developed economy deliberately uses the labour of vulnerable migrant workers, in order to fill certain labour shortages. The second WH visa is worth offering for the Australian government, which has long been resistant to an official guest worker scheme. Associated industries have also developed, including housing and mediation businesses, to get a piece of the increasingly large pie. Australia’s political and economic actors have a greater ability to advance their own interests, and their serious game of profit making and political popularity has the power to set the terms and conditions under which WHMs pursue their project of gaining cosmopolitan work experience.

‘Success stories’: Differentiated access to career opportunities in Australia

In this last section, I will analyse ‘success stories’ among my interlocutors, in order to shed light on the opportunities for upward social mobility that are open to Japanese WHMs. Previous work experience and existing skills may be used to one’s advantage, if one is prepared to pursue certain forms of employment in the nikkei world. For example, with years of experience as a permanently employed administrator at a large corporation, Yukie exclusively sought administrative positions at Sydney branches of well-known Japanese organisations. She sought a job at a socially recognised institution, because she valued the associated prestige, which she perceived as helpful in gaining quality employment later. Within a couple of weeks, she gained a contract job with a Japanese prefecture government office.

\textsuperscript{146} During my visit to the berry farm where Miyoko and Asako worked, workers’ low social position in Australia was visible, in a literal sense. The caravan park where the workers stayed was clearly divided into four areas: 1) the caravan/tent area for holidaymakers with the best view 2) the caravan area for pickers 3) the tent area for pickers 4) the tent area in the back corner for Sudanese-Australian pickers from a refugee background and their large families. Apart from those already mentioned, berry farm workers at this accommodation included, at the time of my visit, WHMs from Korea and France, and overseas students from a nearby university town (Bhutanese, Indonesian, Indian).
located in Sydney. In Yukie’s opinion, her association with ‘proper Japanese employers’ in both countries led to another job at a major Japanese airline company where she happily worked for a full six months, alongside Japanese and Australian colleagues.

Similarly, Keisuke cultivated personal contacts with Japanese public sector expatriates in Sydney. He promoted his computer skills to gain jobs with local Japanese institutions, particularly those with strong links to the Japanese Embassy and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Australia. At the end of his WH, he was planning to use this ‘worthwhile’ experience to gain similar jobs in Japan. After some struggle, this plan eventuated in the form of a two-year contract job as a youth aid worker, representing JICA (Japan International Corporation Agency), a government agency with links to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see chapter 8). These examples suggest that migrants have differentiated abilities to turn ethnic resources into cultural capital, due to their varying access to resources of different types. White-collar jobs for high profile Japanese institutions come with not only greater economic capital, but also social and symbolic capital in the form of, for example, useful contacts and an association with a powerful ‘brand’.

Albeit less prestigious, there is another way to make use of associations with Japan, in order to gain white-collar jobs in Australia: to work for the migration industry. As former newcomers with accumulated knowledge of the host society, migration agents engage in diverse roles—from intermediary activities to direct sales of goods and services—to promote the destination to co-national migrants. Informally or even illegally operating brokers are a classic case in point. If they are successful with accumulating sufficient economic capital, they may in turn invest in legitimate businesses to achieve a higher status in the host society, a form of symbolic capital. This is why even those who resent agents’ exploitative practices come to emulate
them as the role model of success (Tanno 2003: 214, Hernández-León 2008: 181-182).\textsuperscript{147}

There are certainly structural factors which encourage the reproduction of the migration industry for the Japanese in Australia. The steadily increasing number, and high turnover rates of temporary migrants from Japan have created ample career opportunities for more established co-national migrants, who then become the driving force behind the flows of Japanese into Australia. These agents gain not only a job, but also a kind of community status as experienced migrants. During participant observation, for example, I witnessed a certain sense of superiority and even snobbery exhibited by individual migration agents towards co-national newcomers. One of the migration agents once said to me: ‘They [WHMs] don’t even know the difference between room share and unit share, so we need to explain from there.’\textsuperscript{148} It only took her four years in Australia to claim her superior status as an ‘old-timer’.

A minority of WHMs I encountered managed to gain full-time skilled positions at non-Japanese businesses. Miyoko, with ten years of industry experience as a hairdresser, speedily gained employment at a hairdressing salon run by a Korean immigrant on the Gold Coast, and at the time of the interview, was considering applying for a skilled work visa when her WH visa expired. She was aware that, at the time, hairdressing was nominated as a skills shortage area by DIAC and could be the basis of a skilled worker visa.\textsuperscript{149} Similarly, Yoshie used a decade of experience as an English-speaking childcare worker at international kindergartens and schools in Japan, and secured a job at a childcare centre in Sydney. She was later sponsored by her employer to become a skilled migrant. These are cases of using more transferable, hands-on skills as an entry point into the non-\textit{nikkei

\textsuperscript{147} For example, it is reported that some former Thai victims of human trafficking became traffickers to earn a better living, which they reportedly perceived as a successful career transformation (‘Jinshin torihiki, gisei no rensa: Taijin no onaji kyögû no josei assen’. Asahi Shinbun 11 March 2007). In another example, illegal brokers channelled the profits earned from co-national Japanese-Brazilian migrant workers into legitimate businesses, such as restaurants and shops catering for the same population, earning even more profits and also a legal status in the host society (Tanno 2003: 214).

\textsuperscript{148} Field notes (5\textsuperscript{th} August 2006).

\textsuperscript{149} Subsequently, this occupation was removed from the Immigration’s list of skills shortage areas.
labour market, in order to break the perpetual cycle of unstable, unskilled jobs with few career prospects.¹⁵⁰

I have described some possible avenues for skilled and more socially recognised career opportunities that some Japanese WHMs were able to reach. There are reasons, however, why some consider these inaccessible, or indeed undesirable, options. The limited access to such jobs due to the disadvantaged social position of a newly arrived migrant from a non-English speaking background has already been explained at length. Some, especially younger WHMs, arrive with few promotable skills, because they had mainly been engaged in precarious work while in Japan. Certain interlocutors, such as Shizue (female, 23), deliberately chose casual work between graduation and the Australian WH, in order to earn cash quickly and 'flexibly' because they had already decided to leave Japan once enough savings were made. Perhaps most crucially, however, some WHMs reject the active use of their previous experience and skills because, for them, the value of the Australian WH lies in its association with the idea of a new beginning. Ryō's (male, 30) dilemma illustrated how this craving for new possibilities can obstruct WHMs' entrance into the skilled workforce in Australia. The day before his return to Japan, Ryō recounted how he was advised to gain qualifications in nursing or aged care if he was interested in applying for a skilled migrant visa in Australia. Indeed, he had once worked as a qualified carer in his hometown, although he left the job within a year. When I asked him whether he was still interested in this line of work, he replied:

That's exactly the problem I have. I'm not particularly interested in it, and I'd suffer from the bad memory of the previous experience. Even if I decide to go down this path, it would take two years of studying to qualify as a junior nurse. I didn't come here to repeat my past.

¹⁵⁰ Noticeable was the lack among interlocutors of examples of an even more advantageous way to utilise one's nikkei capital within the host society: to work as a 'Japan specialist' for a mainstream institution. A long-term resident of Sydney and a former WHM in the late 1980s, Tomoko (female, 38) had a senior position at a large Australian company as a business analyst, specialising in statistical analysis. Her cultural knowledge of Japan and her language skills were highly valued, and she became a project manager in charge of a Japanese branch of the company. Ethnographic material in a study by Thang et. al. (2002: 548) also includes a Japanese woman in Singapore who worked as a valued Japan specialist of a local firm. However, penetrating into the mainstream workplace at a high level of expertise is not an easy task for WHMs for the reasons discussed throughout this chapter.
The Australian WH may contain the open-ended possibilities that the young Japanese desire, but only within the limiting context of temporariness and the challenges of adaptation to a new, unfamiliar society. While WH visa holders in this study were not always unskilled or uneducated, their experience of work in the destination was characterised by their vulnerability as temporary migrant workers, and this less powerful status forced them to gravitate towards exploitative employment at the hands of ethnic Japanese businesses, as well as other local businesses. How did WHMs negotiate their marginal social position in Australia, where they previously expected to enjoy open-ended possibilities? In the next chapter, I will examine the extent to which my interlocutors could develop a cosmopolitan identity and how the shifting power relations in the host society impacted on the ways in which they saw themselves, and the world around them.
Chapter 6

Shifting subjectivities

Japanese Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) arrived in Australia with the expectation of an association with cosmopolitanism. High on the agenda was extending their social networks across national and cultural borders. In this chapter, I will explore what kinds of friendships the young migrants developed during their stay in Australia. In particular, I will examine their real and discursive relations with local Australians, other Japanese immigrants, and immigrants from other countries. Becoming marginalised members of a society on the basis of being Japanese was an unexpected outcome of their migration to Australia, and they dealt with this gendered and ethnicised social position in particular ways. The aim of this chapter is to illustrate this positioning, and to consider its implications for their pursuit of a cosmopolitan subjectivity, as well as the maintenance of their identity as members of an ethnic majority within their own country.

The desire for Australians

According to Chinami, a Japanese migration agent in Sydney, her clients frequently expressed their desire to meet non-Japanese nationals, commonly saying 'I came all the way [from Japan] so I want to be somewhere where there are few other
Japanese’ (sekkaku kitandakara nihonjin ga inaitokoroga ii). In their longing for cosmopolitan encounters, not all ‘cosmopolitans’ were equal, but the association with ‘Australians’, typically called òjì (‘Aussie’) or rōkaru (‘local’) by my interlocutors, was most sought after. Sometimes this preference for Australian nationals, as opposed to any Westerner, was explicitly spelt out. A comment made during a three-way conversation with Asaka (female, 26) and Miyoko (female, 30) is one example. Asaka had made a comment earlier about expecting to master English and perhaps make a relationship with what she called a foreign boyfriend (gaijin no kareshi) during her Working Holiday (WH). I asked her what she meant by gaijin (foreigner):

Asaka: I generally prefer those from an English-speaking background (eigoken no hito), but if possible, I’d like to meet an òjì.

Miyoko: (In a surprised tone) Oh, you prefer an Aussie, do you?

Asaka: Yeah (laughs).

The singling out of Australians among generic Westerners, or sometimes interchangeably ‘people from an English-speaking background’, also occurred in other contexts, such as mentioning Australians as preferred landlord or friend. Tomoe (female, 30) reflected on her experience of sharing a small housing complex with 25 women, mostly from Asian countries, and said ‘It was fun, but my ideal is to find a house (ikkenya) to share with a rōkaru owner, because that’s more like the real Australian experience that I’m looking for.’ The implication was that these ‘Australians’ represent their country in an authentic way, much as koalas and kangaroos do in the popular tourist imagination.

In the pre-departure period, my interlocutors positively imagined the West as populated by Caucasians, and assumed Australia to be a white people’s country (see chapter 3). This association gave a special status to the rōkaru residents, and this privileging continued especially during the early period of their WH. The whiteness of Australians in their mind was implicit but unmistakable, evidenced by its unmarked-ness. Whenever my interlocutors referred to Australians who did not fit their image of white Westerners, their ‘difference’ was remarked, in ways such as ‘He is Chinese but neitibu (native speaker of English), because he grew up here’
(Yukie, female, 30) or ‘She is an ‘aborijini (Aborigine).’ The unmarked usage of ōji was reserved for the Anglo-Celtic majority from an English-speaking background, and it resonated with the dominant Australian national imagination of the ‘Aussie bloke/sheila’ (Australian slang terms for ‘man/woman’).

Moreover, as previously discussed, after their arrival the WHMs continued to assume that being white, Australian and a native English speaker were one and the same thing. For instance, Natsuko somewhat innocently remembered the first impression of Australia as ‘Not only white people live here’ (Natsuko, female, 30). Yukie (female, 30), who paid her migration agent to arrange home-staying for a month, complained:

My host family is Chinese, and it’s not a good environment to learn English properly, because they speak English to me, but Chinese to each other. I thought a local family meant Australian. I’m looking to move out as soon as the contract period is over.

Before arrival, WHMs tended to presume an abundance of encounters with white English-speaking Australians by virtue of being in the same country. In particular, the image of harmonious and youthful multicultural encounters in the marketing materials of private colleges and other educational institutions seemed to have a strong impact on their expectation that attending a school – any school – meant making Australian friends (as well as other ‘international’ people). Asaka and Juri were not the only ones who became aware over time that attending an English school did not usually help them to find local friends. Asked to reflect on their failure to realise this sooner, they both explained that they did not distinguish between universities, vocational colleges and English schools when browsing marketing materials. These higher expectations made it all the more disappointing when close friendships with Australians were hard to come by. Tetsuya (male, 25) succinctly put it: ‘Chances to make rōkaru friends are rare.’\(^{151}\) As discussed above, Japanese WHMs commonly lived with other migrants, and when they lived with Australians, it was as a tenant, rather than as a friend. Few opportunities existed to work with Australians at Japanese-dominated nikkei workplaces. If a workplace

\(^{151}\) Relatively privileged migrants such as United Nations employees in Nowicka and Kaweh (2009: 61–63) and middle-class European professional migrants in Kennedy (2009: 26–29) also find it difficult to penetrate local social networks, and gravitated towards non-locals for social and emotional support.
included Australian workers, regular contacts could sometimes develop into a friendship, but such a case was reported only by a handful of interlocutors.\footnote{For instance, Tetsuya was happy to report to me that, while his morning job as a hotel room cleaner was not a good place to make friends (‘I have to go to another job in a hurry, and anyway we all work separate from each other’), he often played badminton with his Australian workmates after his afternoon job at a takeaway shop.}

The interlocutors frequently discussed the inaccessibility of friendships with Australians in terms of their own lack of English proficiency, and this perception led to both productive energy and troubling emotions. On the one hand, their ‘deficiency’ provided a goal to strive for, and a daily motivation to continue self-improvement. Mariko (female, 27) noted how a chance encounter with an Australian woman on the street reinvigorated her motivation. She described the second meeting with her ‘new friend’:

I met this woman again ... Her previous neighbour was from Japan, and she seemed to be fond of the Japanese. I was invited to her house where she helped me prepare for TOEIC (an English proficiency test). I very much appreciated her kindness [...] Since I’m here [in Australia], it’s important to make many Australian friends, and practise [my English] through conversations.

On the other hand, WHMs frequently perceived their lack of Australian friends and English proficiency as a poor reflection on their level of immersion in Australian life. When I met Mariko again after a few months, I casually enquired whether or not she had made any new friends. She replied, sheepishly, ‘Yes, some from pikkingu, but I still have only one Australian friend. I need to try harder,’ before looking away. Mariko’s guilt and shame were widely shared among WHMs in my study, from which an important observation can be made. In addition to being a matter of authentic experience of Australia, close association with Australians also functioned as an indicator of the extent to which their self had been transformed. This was especially the case in the latter stages of their WH.

In seeking a breakthrough out of this seemingly inescapable situation, some WHMs were driven to take desperate measures. One male interlocutor, who had previously discussed his possible bi/homosexuality, wanted attention from Australians so much that he contacted a man on a dating website targeting the gay
male population. On the way to the man’s house in his car, he tried to strike up a conversation, without much success. On arrival, he resisted the man’s advance. While the man settled with having him watch him masturbate, he still asked the man if it was OK to be talking to him in the meantime. While this may be an extreme example, there were other reports, both by men and women, of accepting strangers’ invitation to follow them after only a short conversation. In a culturally, socially and linguistically unfamiliar context, the young people’s drive for authentic experience and self-improvement was sometimes misguided but nonetheless serious and genuine. As a result, some WHMs initiated activities they would not usually engage in back home, and responded to situations in a way that could be described as bold, spontaneous, and sometimes naïve and risky.

**Intimate but segregated: Friendships with other Japanese**

The most intimate friendships seemed to develop amongst the Japanese co-nationals, due to shared language, cultural backgrounds and experience of settling in Australia. In particular, fellow WHMs were a good source of support and information. The exchange of information was vital if they wanted to establish themselves quickly in a new place of residence. Keiko (female, 32) would definitely recommend newcomers not to rule out making Japanese friends:

I could already speak good enough English, but decided to go to school to meet people and collect information. I really enjoyed the initial months of living on the Gold Coast, because of my friends. I became very close to three Japanese women whom I met at my agent’s office, because we were all *girihori-gumi* (last minute WHMs). They told me where they found their jobs, and taught me how to apply to share accommodation.

WHMs frequently described a tight-knit community created by social networks with other Japanese. Their concentration at particular sites, such as English
classrooms, nikkei workplaces\textsuperscript{154} and harvesting jobs in isolated environments provided ample opportunities for friendships to develop. Closeness could develop almost instantly, and the friendships could be long lasting. Keeping in touch with friends while on the move involved the daily use of the Internet and mobile phones. Personal blogs and social networking sites (SNSs)\textsuperscript{155} were popular ways of keeping each other informed of their movements. Meeting up again in a different location was common, as Juri (female, 26) experienced: ‘I posted on my Mixi page where I was going to do my pikkingu next, and some of my friends followed my plan, so we could work together.’ Such friendships often lasted beyond their WH, as evidenced by some returnees’ accounts of visiting each other’s hometowns back in Japan (for example, Yukari, female, 24; Kaori, female, 32; Keisuke, male, 28)

The speed with which WHMs developed intimacy with fellow Japanese in Australia highlighted their isolation from mainstream society. As newcomers, Japanese WHMs were all in the same boat when it came to surviving in the new environment. My interlocutors typically lacked access to critical information, such as their rights as workers, tenants and consumers. In the absence of information and language proficiency, something slightly out of the ordinary could create much confusion and angst, such as whether a consultation with a dentist incurred a fee, and where to seek help for food poisoning if the nearest chemist was closed.\textsuperscript{156} While word-of-mouth and website postings were used to warn each other about dangers of fraud or malpractice by certain employers, these channels rarely went beyond the level of

\textsuperscript{154} Sometimes, a nikkei workplace alone was not sufficient to develop a social network of Japanese friends. Asaka (female, 26) attributed her initial lack of friends to not attending a school. Although she worked at a Japanese restaurant, her co-workers attended the same school where they hung out with each other before work, so they just went home after work.

\textsuperscript{155} Virtual communities for Japanese WHMs within a very popular SNS called Mixi include ‘Society for preparation for the Australian WH’ and ‘WH Australia’ (3, 894 and 8, 926 members respectively, on 28 August 2009).

\textsuperscript{156} These are examples of SOS calls I received from my interlocutors who rang my mobile phone from interstate.
rumour.\textsuperscript{157} Even though Japanese migration agents and other co-national service providers could become close allies of WHMs, as in the case of Juri and her former school counsellor, my observation indicates that the quality of information provided by agents could be highly inconsistent, as they were usually relatively new to their profession. This was especially the case when the matters involved immigration and other laws.\textsuperscript{158}

For the interlocutors who strongly desired cosmopolitanism, such segregation from mainstream society was not satisfactory.\textsuperscript{159} They were not entirely on their own, however, as a large number of WHMs came to find unexpected friendships with another migrant population: Korean WHMs. In the following section, I will examine the nature of these encounters, and their impact on the subjectivity of the Japanese WHMs.

**Encounters with South Koreans and the project of cosmopolitanism**

While accounts of friendships and encounters with other migrants were occasionally recounted, the frequency of contacts with the South Koreans (or kankokujin or korian), especially those on a WH visa, was unrivalled among interlocutors. Fieldwork observation made it clear that Japanese WHMs frequently lived, worked, studied and holidayed with young Korean migrants. At first, the young people in my study were surprised at the visibility of South Korean nationals around them.

\textsuperscript{157} For instance, Shōko (female, 23) had partial information about tax returns: ‘My friend’s migration agent apparently told her that there is a way to get the income tax back when we go back to Japan.’ When I inquired about the process, she had little idea of how it would happen. The Japanese language print media in Australia contain various columns such as Nichigo Press nandemo sōdan [‘advice on everything’] to introduce case studies of legal matters (e.g. ‘how to write a will’ and ‘registering to work as a nurse on a WH visa’ Nichigo Press January 2009: 34–35). However, columns of this nature could not attend to diverse individual circumstances.

\textsuperscript{158} For example, I witnessed that the introduction of the second WH visa scheme created much confusion among Japanese migration agents.

\textsuperscript{159} Some came close to despising the fact that Japanese co-nationals stayed together for company and support. For example, Noriko (female, 29) was unforgiving of fellow Japanese WHMs who seemed to be content with each other’s company: ‘No wonder Australian people complain about Asians sticking to each other.’ She was adamant that there was no point in coming to Australia if WHMs did not make the effort to befriend those from countries other than their own.
[Asked about the first impression of Sydney] I was surprised how many Koreans were here (Natsuko, female, 30).

[Discussing Cairns, her first destination] There were so many Korean people! There might have been as many as the Japanese (Tomoe, female, 30).

Certainly, there are quite a number of Korean WHMs in Australia, and the number has shown a dramatic increase in recent years. In 2003–04, there were 1,593 South Korean WHMs who visited Australia (DIAC n.d. Visitor Visa Statistics). In 2007–08, this number climbed to 32,635 people, to form approximately 22 percent of the total WHM population in the country (DIAC 2008a). In the same period, South Korea had become the second largest source country of WHMs in Australia after the UK. 160 Japanese WHMs tend to share some characteristics with their Korean counterparts, including English proficiency levels, an ethnicised position as ‘Asians’ in the host society, and their newcomer status. Also, the two groups frequently find themselves in each other’s company while learning English at the same schools, sharing accommodation catering for newly arrived WHMs, harvesting crops to extend their visas, and travelling to holiday destinations such as Uluru (Ayers Rock) and the Great Barrier Reef.

Close encounters with Korean people of their own age stimulated curiosity and genuine interest in Korean culture, and led to new friendships. For example, Yukari traveled with her Korean roommate to spend her last remaining month in Australia, and they planned to visit each other after they had returned to their home countries. Also, Ryo’s (male, 29) previous interest in his neighbouring country was reignited by his experience of living with South Korean WHMs:

I realise many Koreans speak good Japanese, and while hanging out with them doesn’t teach me good English, it would be a good environment to learn Korean. I’ve become interested in learning their language.

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160 Australia has WH agreements with Hong Kong (commenced in 2002) and Taiwan (2004). However, the combined number of WHMs from these countries amounted to 7,667 people in 2007–08, which is a significantly smaller number compared to the Japanese and Korean WHMs in the same period (43,234 people in total) (DIAC n.d. Visitor Visa Statistics). This might explain the absence of narratives involving friendships with WHMs from these countries, even though they were all considered ‘Asian’ in Australia.
Despite the fact that it was not at all planned prior to arrival in Australia, perceived as a Western country of white people, friendships with Koreans often provided Japanese WHMs in my study with a chance to develop a new interest in 'other cultures' beyond the West. Maki (female, 25) enjoyed social activities with Japanese and Korean friends after English school, and said that one of her objectives of the WH, 'being in a different environment and getting to know different cultures', was being fulfilled, even though in an unexpected way. In addition, new and positive encounters with non-Western ‘foreigners’ sometimes made the Japanese reconsider their previously West-centric conception of cosmopolitanism. Shōko (female, 23) and Kōji (male, 30) each explained their changes in attitude:

Before I left Japan, 'overseas' (kaigai) meant America for me. But I came here and talked a lot with Korean and other friends, now I am more critical of America [...] (Shōko, female, 23).

In Japan, there is so much talk about speaking English, but just being able to speak it itself doesn’t mean much. From my experience, being able to discuss history and politics is important. My Korean friends know much more history, and I’m ashamed that I don’t know the history of my own country (Kōji, male, 30).

Close contacts with young Korean migrants were not only a source of friendships, however. Accounts of friction were as common, and they seemed to stem from a mutual lack of cultural knowledge, as well as prejudice. In shared accommodation, different habits and customs caused tensions. On a number of occasions, Juri complained to me in person, and on her blog, about the volume of her flatmates’ 'loud' voices and the smell of their kimchi, a Korean staple food of pickled cabbage. Both Noriko (female, 29) and Tomoe (female, 30) each had a problematic relationship with their Korean landlords, and they explained it away as a lack of 'commonsense'. The two women’s negative experiences were sufficient for them to declare the impossibility of getting on with Koreans in the future.

Before arrival, the majority of interlocutors expected Australia to be a country of Western people, but many of them also reported that they looked forward to encounters with people from various countries (ironna kokuseki no hito) in a cultural ‘melting pot’ style, as WH marketing materials portrayed. After arrival, however, living with ‘difference’ turned out to be much more complex than
imagined, especially where certain cultural differences were less valued than others. There was a stark contrast between their eagerness to adapt to what they perceived as Australia’s Western culture, and their frequent unwillingness to change their own habits in relation to Korean people around them. Blaming Koreans for their cultural difference was a common occurrence,\textsuperscript{161} even though Japanese WHMs in other contexts upheld the utopian image of cosmopolitanism and openness to others, such as that can be found in the famous Benetton fashion advertising (especially its earlier versions in the mid 1980s and the early 1990s—see Giroux 1994: 6–8).

**Racism and negotiations of second-class status in Australia**

Accounts of Japanese WHMs in my study included their racism against other migrants, as well as being on the receiving end of racist acts at the hands of the ethnic majority of Australia. I will first discuss WHMs’ own racist tendencies towards South Koreans. Some interlocutors openly exhibited their racist attitudes towards Korean migrants. At a hip-hop dance event organised by one of my interlocutors, Daisuke made his opinion clear about Korean women. It was my first visit to this large pub in central Sydney, and Daisuke, a regular visitor, was showing me around. While asking about the makeup of the usual clientele, I commented on the strong presence of Korean women. Daisuke then made a face expression that looked like cringing, waved his hand in front of his face (a Japanese sign of ‘no’) and gestured to suggest his disapproval of their appearance. Shōko (female, 23) was another interlocutor who made an openly racist comment: ‘I’m sick of them [the Koreans]. Seriously, I can’t bear the way they are – lacking respect and commonsense, always congregating with each other and not even trying to learn about Australia. It must be in their nature.’

\textsuperscript{161} For example, just like the attitude of Noriko (female, 29) and Tomoe (female, 30) explained above, Juri (female, 27) tended to think what she considered ‘normal’ should be shared by her Korean flatmates. She said angrily: ‘They often drink my milk without asking me. They say I can take their food too, but it’s abnormal to use what’s not yours without asking each time.’
Racism against the Koreans (and to a lesser extent, certain other migrant groups\textsuperscript{162}) in my data is in line with the discursive construction of Japan’s national identity. As discussed above, Japan at various points in time has tended to view the West as the desirable Other, worthy of emulation (see chapter 3). At the same time, Japan’s inferiority towards the West was compensated for by its superiority towards Asia, based on the hierarchical worldview in which the West comes on top, followed by Japan, and the ‘rest’ lagged behind. This ‘trichotomy of ‘Japan’, ‘the West’ and ‘the rest’’ (Iwabuchi 1994: 55) was still based on the binary between the West and the non-West. By placing the ‘advanced West’ as Japan’s future and ‘backward Asia’ in its past, these mirror images served to place Japan according to a linear concept of progress.\textsuperscript{163}

Despite their sense of racial superiority over other Asians, the Meiji intellectuals who went to the West were grouped together in the host society as other ‘Orientals’. This is apparent from the fact that, despite their privileged backgrounds, Japanese overseas students at this time often engaged in menial tasks such as ‘house-boys’ (Burkes 1985: 359). Even in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, Japanese migrants were placed in a lower stratum within the racial hierarchy of the West, regardless of their class affiliation back home. In a parallel manner, Japanese WHMs’ expectation for cosmopolitanism through their lived experience of the West had an unexpected outcome of their being placed as

\textsuperscript{162} Similar attitudes and prejudices were sometimes exhibited towards non-Korean migrants. Yukie (female, 30), for example, perceived Peruvians as poor labour migrants of a lower social status. Yukie made the point that in Sydney, even though they were Peruvians, they had better jobs and pay than the Japanese. She said she had no idea why the Japanese ‘had to be treated worse than the Peruvians.’ Noriko (female, 29) also commented on her Peruvian friend in a way that revealed the stereotypical images she held of Peru and its people: ‘He has no sophisticated table manners. It’s because Peru is a poor country.’ The particular image of Peruvians might have something to do with negative media representations against Japanese-Peruvian migrant workers in recent years.

\textsuperscript{163} For example, Japanese colonial discourse attributed backwardness to the Asian Other (as well as to the Ainu and Okinawans), in order to give the Japanese a higher status than those with resemblance in terms of appearance and cultural traditions (Ching 1998: 66). The slogan of Meiji modernisation Datsu-nyū (Leave Asia, enter the West) clearly displayed ‘the uncritical acceptance of the hierarchy of civilizations constructed by Orientalism’ (Iwabuchi 1994: 54). Moreover, Meiji Japan’s inferiority complex against the West was expressed in various theories of the ‘Japanese race’ as superior. For example, anthropologist Taguchi Uikichi controversially claimed that the Japanese were in fact originally a Caucasian race, not like Chinese and other ‘yellow races’ (Oguma 2002: 144-147). Intellectual Kimura Takatarō attacked other theorists who suggested Manchurian, Mongolian and Korean peoples as the origin of Japanese people (Oguma 2002: 148).
marginal migrants, together with Koreans and other Asians. In order to assert their project of maintaining racial superiority over Asian migrants and pursuing ‘cosmopolitanism as Westernisation’, some WHMs deployed racism and prejudice to dissociate themselves from ‘undesirable’ groups. Noticeably, the way they did so relied on the colonial binary between the perceptions of the more modern and advanced Self and the perceptions of the backward and inferior Asian Other.

Japanese WHMs’ second-class status in Australia was further confirmed by their experience of being at the receiving end of racism at the hands of the ethnic majority. Always describing the perpetrators as white Australians, my interlocutors reported several such incidents:

Someone on the street shouted at me in Melbourne ‘Hey Japanese, give us money!’ (Maki, female, 25).

[On difficulties of living in Australia] In the Gold Coast, we got eggs and water bombs thrown at us by young Aussie men. [Asked if the specific target was Japanese] I think it’s Asians. But there are many Japanese there, so maybe Japanese [are the intended target] (Miyoko, female, 30).

Where Australian society and its people were given some attention prior to departing Japan, Japanese WHMs expected to fit in with the ethnic majority quite smoothly, as discussed above in chapter 3. The interlocutors rarely foresaw experiences of racism and other maltreatment based on their ethnicity as part of their WH. When I asked them about their pre-arrival expectations for potential problems, only passing mention was made of dangers and annoyance in an unfamiliar place, such as ‘getting ripped off as rich tourists’ (Hiromi, female, 26), and ‘getting attacked when unwittingly choosing a dangerous street’ (Reiko, female, 30). Not everyone was bothered to the same extent. Natsuko (female, 30), for instance, who had many friends around her and was very much enjoying her new life in Sydney, shrugged off her experience of having her foot bruised when a man on a street threw an egg at her: ‘I don’t think he targeted me, probably it could have been any other person.’ She did not consider that it reflected her lower social status, but was rather an isolated incident.
However, for other WHMs who were uncomfortable with, or even despised their new social status as ‘Asian migrants’, such experiences tended to intensify their sense of isolation from the mainstream. It was not uncommon for such events to fuel a growing contempt towards Australia and its people. In chapter 3, I discussed the marketing of the Australian WH by the Japanese migration industry, which depicts the Southern continent as inhabited by white middle-class people who will always welcome Japanese WHMs with open arms. Interview narratives regarding pre-arrival expectations also mirrored such happy images constructed for commercial purposes. Not only was there a distinct lack of knowledge that immigration is a significant foundation of Australian society, Japanese WHMs failed to imagine themselves as a racialised Other in what they perceived as a ‘white people’s country’. Such a gap between expectation and reality was also a salient feature of narratives of racism in the UK as experienced by Japanese university students. Nishimuta’s study describes how the pre-arrival image of the UK as a pleasant country of the ‘English gentleman’ was shattered when the students became the target of racism, a totally new experience since they belonged to the ethnic majority in their own country (Nishimuta 2008: 141–143).

Whether or not interlocutors experienced clear racism, there was an undeniable awareness that as non-Western migrants from a non-English speaking background, their social position was peripheral. One very common attempt to turn the tables was to point out Australia’s ‘shortcomings’, in order to highlight their own nation’s (and therefore their) superiority

I thought ‘Australia is supposed to be a developed country, but are they really so strong on the world stage?’ I’m sure everyone would say this, but I feel the smallness of the city [Sydney] (Shin’ichi, male, 28).

Australia has little competition [in the world of dancers] because it’s such a rural country. When I saw the [dance] studio, I thought ‘Yep, I can make it here, easy’ (Emi, female, 27).

For vocal critics of Australia, Japan’s greater economic power was a constant source of pride. The following claims were all extremely typical: ‘Even Osaka has a bigger economy’ (Keisuke, male, 28), ‘The Internet is so slow. […] Sydney generally lacks convenience of living’ (Ryo, male, 29), ‘There are not many choices [of consumer
products], and everything is so expensive. Shopping is so much better in Japan’ (Megumi, female, 28). With these criticisms, Japanese WHMs claimed that their power to define others lay with the ‘modern and advanced’ Japanese, not with the ‘backward’ Australians, in much the same way the Japanese nationalist discourse has attempted to define inferior ‘Asians’, from colonial times to the present.

Such a claim of Japanese superiority over Australia becomes possible because of what Sugimoto Yoshio calls ‘diametrically opposed patterns of status inconsistency’ (Sugimoto 1991: 173). Despite the fact that Australia enjoys an association with high-status factors such as ‘being part of Western civilisation, Anglo-Saxon culture, and the English-speaking community’, its small economy causes an inferiority complex towards Japan (Sugimoto 1991: 170–171). Japan, in contrast, prides itself as one of the largest economies in the world, however, it simultaneously ‘remains nouveau riche, incapable of claiming corresponding international hegemony culturally’ due, in essence, to its non-Western status (Sugimoto 1991: 171). Even though Sugimoto’s concept derives from the time when recessionary Australia was looking up to Japan’s economic success, it remains applicable today. As shown in chapter 3 above, Japanese young people valued Australia’s association with the imagined West as something powerful. However, Australia’s GDP, one of the most commonly used indicators of a nation’s economic advancement, was little more than one sixth of Japan’s in 2008. Awareness of this status inconsistency was highly visible in WHMs’ simultaneous expressions of pride and frustration with Japan and contrasting but similarly mixed views of Australia.

Underlying the concept of status inconsistency is the dominant imagining of international relations developed as a result of Euro-American colonialism. In this racialised discourse of the world, Australia’s Western-ness stems from its history as an offshore ‘branch’ of the British Empire. This Westernised Australia has a

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164 A similar attitude was also expressed by Japanese expatriates and their families in a study undertaken in early 1980s Queensland. The expatriates detailed Australia as countrified, rustic and lacking in quality products and services, and therefore inferior to Japan as the economic powerhouse (Mizukami 1993: 41–44).

165 The figures are from the World Bank
(last accessed 20 July 2009). It should be noted that the PPP (purchasing power parity) of the two countries ($35,220 in Japan and $34,040 in Australia) suggests a level of consumer wealth much more similar than suggested by GDP figures.
complex relation with ‘Asia’, because its cultural heritage and geographical proximity to Asia contains an inherent contradiction. This mutually exclusive nature of the West and Asia as discursive entities has remained active in popular discourse, as well as in academic discussions (See Huntington's discussion of the ‘clash of civilisations’ [1993: 45] and critiques in Ang and Stratton [1996: 18–19]), of Australia’s uneasy position. Japan, similarly, does not allow an easy categorisation, as it is neither the modern and central West, nor the pre-modern and peripheral Asia (Mackie 1995: 96). This too underlies the problematic project of national identity construction in Japan. The country’s modern history includes its long-standing struggle to come to terms with its contradictory wish to emulate the modern West, while resisting its imperial expansion.

Japan’s ambivalent relation to Australia brings our attention to another, related aspect of ‘status inconsistency’ between Japan and Australia. When WHMs criticise Australia by asserting Japan’s status as a more modernised nation, they are drawing on their experience of large cities in Japan. The overwhelming majority of my interlocutors were born and bred in large cities, or lived in a metropolitan area as a young adult student or worker. This is not atypical of the lost generation. As discussed in chapter 1, there has been an assumption in much of migration studies literature that migratory flows are about moving from the economic periphery to the centre. WHMs in my study, however, moved from global cities such as Tokyo and Osaka to smaller, less densely populated economic hubs, such as Sydney and Melbourne. Yet the allure of Australia as part of the imagined Western landscape attracted many of them.

When the Japanese migrants’ immediate experience on the ground negatively coloured their perceptions of Australia, they offered various forms of praise for the Japanese nation with a new enthusiasm. This contrasts with the lack of such nationalistic sentiment in narratives of the pre-arrival period. To determine whether or not such an emotional reaction leads to a more nationalistic attitude towards their homeland is beyond the scope of my study. However, WHMs’ interpretations of their experience point to an important, yet often overlooked, fact of cross-cultural encounters. That is, direct contact with a foreign culture can create not only an appreciation of ‘different cultures’, but also reappraisal of one’s own,
which may lead to defensive nationalism. As Tsolidis states in the context of Asian international students at Western universities, immersion in the host society may well create a love-hate relationship:

The desire for Western education does not necessarily imply that people are entirely under the sway of global hegemonic practices, for it is possible that Western knowledge may be desired at the same time as it is despised (Tsolidis, 2001, cited in Matthews and Sidhu 2005: 60).

**Negotiating gendered and ethnicised social positioning**

In this section, I will further delve into the WHMs’ negotiation of their positioning in Australia, with a focus on the nexus between ethnicity, gender and power. My point will be that their experience of gendered power relations took place in relation to Australia’s majority ethnic group, but also amongst themselves. As noted in chapter 1, my discussion here will focus on heteronormative perceptions, because there was very little data which challenged dominant expectations of heterosexuality, regardless of ethnicity and nationalities.

**Reversal of gender relations?: Japanese women’s perceived popularity**

Interview narratives repeatedly brought up the perception that Japanese women were more popular than Japanese men with Australian people, especially with the males. Keiko (female, 32) claimed the general likeability of her own gender group:

My host family really treated me like their daughter. I don’t think they would have done the same to a Japanese man, because he’d be less open-minded and generally incommunicative.

The self-portraits of female interlocutors tended to highlight their superior communication skills, better adaptability and flexibility in comparison with rigid, uncommunicative and maladapted Japanese men who lack English language proficiency. Such claims are also reported by Japanese women in other contexts, including wives of Australian men in Sydney (Hamano 2009: 18) and skilled workers in Singapore (regarding expatriates at Japanese workplaces—Thang et. al. 2002: 547–548).
The perceived popularity of Japanese women was most often discussed in relation to their romantic/sexual attractiveness to Western men. Several interlocutors had a past or present relationship with men from countries such as Australia, South Africa, Canada or the UK.\textsuperscript{166} The commonality of such a configuration, as opposed to the reverse case of the Japanese male/Western female combination, has been noted in existing literature (Hamano 2009: 12–13; Denman 2009: 66–69). Highlighting their closer association with the dominant social group in Australia, the female interlocutors accentuated the changing grounds for their gender relations with their countrymen. The ‘praise’ for Western men came as a package with claims of the inferiority of Japanese men. For example, Natsuko (female, 30) bluntly branded co-national males as ‘low quality’:

> For the present, they are considered the lowest rank [in Australian society], I think. First of all, they are small-bodied, and there is an issue of poor language and escorting skills. They tend to be silent, and not at all able to whisper sweet nothings to women.

Etsuko (female, 23, student) complemented Asian men, but only for their ability to emulate Western men’s escorting skills, which she did not think the Japanese men possessed:

> I personally like Asian men. Japanese men are an exception, but Asian men are proud of their ‘Ladies First’ attitude. Like Western men, these Asian men have this male pride for their ability to treat women well.

Emphasising the drop in status of the Japanese men had the effect of highlighting a sense of elevation for the Japanese women. Yukie (female, 30) openly stated ‘I’m often glad to be Japanese, because we Japanese women are spoiled with positive attention (\textit{chihayofusa sareru}).’ Kato’ study (2009: 223–233) presents a parallel phenomenon. In discussing Japanese women in Vancouver, Canada, Kato argues that Japanese women who desire Western men and feel valued by their attention are internalising the ‘colonial gaze’ (\textit{shokuminchishugiteki manazashi}), which has feminised the image of Japan itself since the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Through their (symbolic) attachment to the dominant males of Australian society, the female WHMs were

\textsuperscript{166} A few others had dated a Korean, Filipino or Chinese man.
discursively mitigating the gendered power balance with their male counterparts, who collectively dominate many spheres of contemporary Japanese society. In one sense, this can be interpreted as the women’s attempt to achieve upward social mobility through challenging the secondary social position they occupy in Japanese society in relation to their countrymen.

In another sense, however, these women’s desire for Western men can be seen as shaped by, and complicit with existing racialised power relations, which essentialise and universalise Japanese men’s inferiority to Westerners. Pyke’s discussion of the racialised sexual desires of second-generation Korean and Vietnamese American women raises a similar point, as the women in her study idealised Western men while rejecting their countrymen as domineering, oppressive and generally sexist (Pyke 2010: 86–91). When unfolding in this fashion, I agree with Pyke that non-white women’s rejection of non-white men based on their ethnicity ‘reproduces white male heterosexual privilege’ (Pyke 2010: 91).

Male interlocutors were acutely aware of being cast as an inferior male group in the host society, especially as an object of sexual attention. Mitsuru (male, 31) voiced a widely shared view among my male interlocutors regarding the different treatment they and their female counterpart receive in Australia:

*It’s easy for them [Japanese women] to become friends with Aussies, because [Australian] men will just come to them. Nobody will come to us!*

Japanese men frequently discussed their unfavourable situation in terms of loss of control. They portrayed Western men as corrupting Japanese women through their dominant social position, while pro-Western Japanese women were depicted as undesirable and no longer within the domain of their actual or imagined control. The recurrent phrase used in these discussions was *namerareteru* (‘being made a fool of’):

*I’m proud to be Japanese, so when I feel I am *namerareteru*, I hate it. I often feel this way in Sydney (Yasushi, 23, student).*
I think I’m *namerareteru* because I’m a Japanese man. Japanese women can attract more attention, but Japanese men are in a different situation. [Kumiko: How do you feel about this situation?] It pisses me off (*sugê mukatsuku*) to see how weirdos (*hen na yatsu*) feel free to pick up Japanese women (Shin’ichi, male, 28).

When I see stupid Aussies acting like playboys with Asian women, thinking they are cool (*iketeru*), I feel like punching them. I always stare at them real aggressive [...] But I’d like to say to these pathetic guys: The ones they get are in fact quite ugly, and we’ve got the cute ones on our side (Tetsuo, male, 23).

When similar comments were made by several other male interviewees, it was immediately noticeable that they placed themselves as angry, but passive observers of the phenomenon. For example, Tetsuo above ‘feels like punching’ Australian playboys but only ‘stare at them’ in response, although his own gaze was described as aggressive.

I have discussed the positive self re-evaluation of Japanese women, and the sense of devaluation from which their male counterpart suffered. These feelings have so far been explained as revolving around the existence of the dominant social group in Australia: Western men. In the following section, I will shift attention to the discursive portrayal of Western women in Australia.

*Negotiating marginality: Attitudes towards Australian women*

The pairing of the Japanese woman and the Western man is unlikely to raise anxiety in Australian society, because the gendered power relations are congruent with the racialised power relations in this part of the world. However, the reverse combination is perhaps more confronting to both Australians, especially women and Japanese, especially men, because of its disturbance of the existing alignment of gendered and racialised power relations (Mackie 2007: 114). Such a coupling was totally absent from my data. The only case of relationships my male interlocutors had with non-Japanese women involved Korean women. In fact, white Australian women were utterly unpopular with the Japanese men in my study:

They have a different thinking pattern. They are too assertive. I’m indecisive so I couldn’t compete with strong Australian women.
That's why I don't feel like having [one of] them as a girlfriend (Takeshi, male, 26).

Ōjī [women] drink like men, and when they get drunk, they are so loud (Shin'ichi, male, 28).

The unfavourable evaluation of Australian women was constantly contrasted with a positive representation of Japanese femininity. In these accounts, a slippage between the terms 'Japanese' and 'Asian' was frequently observable. The male interlocutors might have been uncomfortable with their association with 'Asians' in other contexts, but the majority of them actively defended 'Asian values' when it came to the idea of femininity. One of the most opinionated interlocutors, Tetsuo (male, 23), denounced Australian women, casting them as misguided Westerners who unwittingly disrupted respectable traditional gender roles, while upholding Asian women as silently wise:

I prefer Japanese women. I might sound like a misogynist, but Aussie women have no grace. And they want everything. They are like 'Lady first, open the door for me', but at the same time 'I'm a woman, protect me'. [...] Asian women expect to be protected from the start, so that’s much smarter. Things have been this way since ancient times, so it’s wrong to try to change it over a few decades.

Male WHMs' various defensive rejections of, or passive distancing from, Australian women shared one noticeable tendency. Regardless of the level of discursive aggression, the accounts the young Japanese men offered represented them as passive observers who were invisible and almost asexual. Asian men’s disempowered position in the West has been pointed out by others. For example, Eng states that the popular US cultural imaginary assigns to Asian American men the role of the 'emasculated sissy' (Eng 2001: 29). Fung, in a similar vein, points out that in the realm of US-dominated Western cultural representation, the Asian man has long been shown as either the 'wimp' or the kung fu master/ninja/samurai—'almost always characterized by a desexualized Zen asceticism' (Fung 1991: 148). A similar process of de-sexualisation of the Asian man is at play in Anglo-dominated Australian society. Unlike Japanese women who eroticise the West (Kelsky 2001: 80), Australia as the West is largely a de-eroticised place for the Japanese male WHMs. Seen in this context of existing power relations, Japanese men’s rejection of Australian women, as well as that of Japanese women who favoured Western men,
is their assertion that they indeed possess the power to reject these women, and not the other way around.

Despite their more favourable position in the imagined West, Japanese women also rejected Australian (Western) women, and in their accounts, used this rejection to accentuate their own desirability as romantic partners of Western men. Yoshie (female, 32) made this comparison:

Japanese women are becoming stronger but still quite feminine, so Australian men find us sweet. Australian women are getting increasingly tougher, so [...] they won’t satisfy their men’s wish to be devoted to and looked after.

In asserting their superiority, female interlocutors often relied on ethnicised gender stereotypes. Emi (female, 27) was, in her own words, a ‘proud traditionalist’ who planned to quit her work as a dancer at the age of 30, ‘because I’m a woman.’ She shared her views of what men and women’s roles should be:

Before I came here, I was thinking like ‘yay, handsome blond boyfriends for me!’, but [...] after a couple of short relationships with them [Australian men], I’ve reconfirmed my preference for Japanese men. This must be a cultural difference, but I like men who are dignified in a manly way. [...] As for [Australian] women, they totally lack femininity, by ordering men around and trying to be equal. I couldn’t do that, I don’t even mind walking three steps behind a man (*sanpo sagatte tsuiteiku* [a common phrase to express submissive female loyalty to their male partners]).

Promoting the subordinate nature of Japanese women’s position in relationships with men might help them claim their superiority over Western women. However, it directly clashes with their newly gained superiority over Japanese men. Emi’s contradictory comments express this ambivalence. In the above comment, she advocated women’s submissive role, but in the same interview, she passionately supported ‘girl power’. Emi explained how she disagreed with the manager when he said his Japanese dance studio did not need female students:

I told him girls are much more active than boys, and there is no way not to use their energy. Initially he was reluctant, but I said ‘You don’t understand, girls are impressive. Let me create a new team, please!’
Such contradictions were frequently observed in both male and female interlocutors’ narratives. When Tetsuo (male, 23) relayed his Australian male friends’ ambition to acquire ‘good cars, good suits, good watches, and Japanese girlfriends’, his expression seemed a mix of pride at the women’s desirable status, and condemnation of Western men’s open claim for his countrywomen. While enjoying the attention from interested Western men, Keiko (female, 32) was also aware of an Australian stereotype that treats Asian women as sex workers. She confided that although she was aware of this image, it was still shocking to hear her friend’s Australian male flatmate say that he thought of Asian women whenever he heard the word ‘prostitutes’.

The ambivalent nature of WHMs’ narratives about their shifting identities evidences the multiplicitous nature of subjectivity, and how people adopt various subject positions in an emotional and subconscious way (Moore 1994: 66). The young people’s resistance against their newly imposed marginality as Australia’s minority migrants and their defensive claims to superiority also illustrate a crucial link between identities and power. Even though there are competing discourses and practices to allow for a diversity of subject positions, occupying the dominant subject position may come with a ‘reward’ in the form of ‘such things as social power, social approval and even material benefits’ (Moore 1994: 65). People come to have an interest or emotional commitment to a particular subject position (i.e. they invest in a certain identity), because they expect satisfaction, reward or payoff (Holloway 1984: 238, cited in Moore 1994: 64–65). From this viewpoint, the young people’s attempt to explain, make sense of, and adjust to their location in the gendered and ethnicised landscape of Australia, their imagined West, can also be interpreted as their investment in more satisfactory identities afforded by a mix of dominant discourses of ethnicity, gender and economic-centricism.

The attempt of the WHMs to take up more powerful subject positions was largely experimental because they had not been in their host society for very long. As seen above, some interlocutors could boost their sense of self as a result of ‘counter-arguments’ based on claims of superiority as Japanese (women). However, in any case, a comfortable sense of belonging in Australia was not something that came
easily, and becoming ethnically marginal shook the youth’s sense of self in a way that they would not experience while living in Japan. In the young migrants’ negotiations with shifting power relations, binaristic accounts of Japan and Australia were prevalent. This tendency to view one’s home society as the polar opposite to one’s host society has been found in existing studies of Brazilians in Sydney (Duarte 2005: 327–328) and Hong Kong Chinese returnees from Australia (Mar 2005: 372), to name a few. When the Japanese young people used binary images to reposition themselves to maintain an acceptable sense of self, they depicted Japan, and being Japanese, as simultaneously modern and traditional. If cosmopolitanism is a form of imagination (Nowicka and Rovisco 2009: 9), so is nationalism (Anderson 1983: 6), and these imaginings go through changes as the migrants move between places, physically and existentially.

**Self-improvement and ‘moving forward’**

More often than not, WHMs in my study were hard-working and disciplined as they invested their time, energy, and money in self-improvement. Despite constant rejections, Yoshie kept applying for childcare worker positions for ten months, in order to meet her goal of gaining a skilled migrant visa. Tomoe maintained her focus on building work experience in the hospitality and tourism sectors, as she sought a career change from childcare work. Being fired from a waitressing job at a Cairns hotel after five days did not deter her, and she subsequently completed short-term positions as a hotel cleaner, and an unpaid intern assistant for a Japanese diving tour company. Thirty years old at the time of arrival, Hiroshige (male, 34) was determined to improve his English during his one year in Cairns. He recounted his progress after completing a three-month course at an English school:

> I continued my study by keeping a private tutor. I was careful not to hang out with other Japanese too much. Considering my age, there was no point in wasting my time. [...] Living with an Australian landlord... [and] working for an ice cream van [...] helped improve my English. I studied alone even while travelling through the outback. I wanted to get good scores on *Eiken* [an English proficiency test popular in Japan] when I returned [to Japan].

These young people were making investments for future gains, be it a new visa, a new career or better English test scores. In the meantime, the everyday
achievements of the present boosted confidence and confirmed a sense of progress, however small. At these moments, they could live in hope, a ‘condition in which perceived causal effects of things or events that enhance or threaten the hoped-for state are magnified and dramatised’ (Mar 1998: 366). Katsuhiko (male, 23) expressed this tendency:

When I first came to Australia, I lived in X (a southern Sydney suburb with a small number of newly arrived migrants). It was far from the city, and there were no other Japanese people so I only used English. I had to do everything by myself from organising a PO box, getting to know the bus system to purchasing a mobile phone. By managing one step at a time, I became more confident about my ability to cope.167

Narratives of endeavours were oftentimes followed by the opinion that overcoming hardships was beneficial for self-improvement, and so they accepted and even welcomed the challenge. Continuing from the above comment, Katsuhiko gave a message to fellow WHMs not to ‘take the easy path’ of relying on migration agents for practical help. Mariko (female, 27), whose strong desire to make Australian friends was discussed earlier, was not deterred by the absence of such friends. Instead, she was determined to strive towards her goal by practicing English conversation with her Japanese friend:

It’s not easy to keep motivated, especially when there are other difficult things to deal with. I’m still clumsy at my new job [at a Japanese restaurant], and I get scolded by the manager all the time. But all these difficulties are good for me, because they will make me strong and capable (iroiro dekiru yō ni naru).

The discourse of self-improvement through overcoming challenges is not entirely new in Japan. For example, the discourse surrounding traditional artisanship centres around the idea of maturity and personal growth through hardship. In this tradition, one of the most exemplary forms of hardship is the removal of oneself from the natal home (Kondo 1990: 235–236). Separation from a familiar site of attachment and the suffering associated with it serves to cultivate resilience, and

167 Citing various scholars and writing from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, Tannenbaum (2007: 140) has framed this as follows: ‘By immersing ourselves in another culture, by exploring the foreign, we expand our identifications just like children explore a new environment. When discovering an unknown setting we reinvent ourselves, and often feel empowered as a result.’
overcome youthful selfishness. The goal of artisans is not simply to gain hands-on
skills for their chosen areas of work. More importantly, the apprenticeship-based
system of pedagogy teaches them to become rounded persons with perfected skills
(Kondo 1990: 234–241). Traditional artisanship is regarded as a symbol of national
identity in contemporary Japan, and the idea of personal cultivation is deeply
influenced by the scenario of personal growth based on the idea of achieving
maturity over time and through hardship. In lost-decade Japan, the discourse of
artisanal tradition co-exists with the modern discourse of self as a reflexive project,
and the neoliberal discourse of self-responsibility. These ideas are particularly
relevant to youth, because the crafting of their adult self is a work-in-progress.

When my interlocutors experienced everyday success in self-improvement during
their Australian WH, a great sense of exhilaration was reported. Natsuko (female,
30), who worked at a 'sushi train' restaurant in Sydney, compared her previously
uninspiring lifestyle in Japan to her present joy:

I'm a cashier so I get to know many customers, and now I've got used
to using English everyday. [...] I walk to work [in the city centre,
approximately 5km from her home in a suburb popular with
Japanese youth]. I love this walk, it makes me feel free. I enjoy my
daily life so much. [...] [In Japan], the feeling I had was that, working
so hard gave me very little in return. Even if I quit work, what would
I have left? Nothing.

It was telling how she described her current sense of joy in life together with her
enjoyment of the invigorating daily walk. This part of her interview narrative
conveyed the feeling of moving forward, and the sense of liberation that came with
it. This was clearly contrasted to her past feelings about her life in Japan. All her
hard work to achieve something, to get somewhere, had met with a sense of going
nowhere. Her physical relocation to Australia was for the purpose of ‘going
somewhere’ existentially, as opposed to feeling stuck (see chapter 3 above). As
Hage points out (2005: 471), this ‘somewhere’ is necessarily forward, not circular
or backward. As in Noriko’s experience, when the WHMs felt liberated from life’s
obstacles to the fulfilment they sought, the routine commute to work could become
part of progress and excitement in life. Whereas in Japan, the same walk could
easily symbolise a fruitless, circular motion.
This potential for liberation was a strong attraction of the Australian WH among the interlocutors. Even the smallest indication of forward movement was perceived as more meaningful and preferable to going back to a familiar place of birth that offered little sense of purpose. At the end of her first year as a WHM in Australia, Asaka (female, 26) looked forward to the second year:

I became a WHM because I wanted a chance [to live life fully]. [...] I still have no idea what I want to do in life long-term, but I want to keep making new efforts and searching for happiness. The WH is a great way to do that.

**The Final stages of the Working Holiday experience**

While Asaka had another year in Australia, the liminality of the WH was uniformly underestimated by other interlocutors on their way out of Australia. Retrospectively, their residence had been too brief to develop a deeper connection and attachment to the place and people they encountered. Even after the full term of two years as a WHM, a clear sense of ‘mission accomplished’ was rarely reported. The Australian WH had given a taste of a new life abroad, but the common feeling was that their time was up before they could fully engage in activities that would have fostered greater self-improvement.

My interlocutors’ self-evaluations of the outcomes of the Australian WH communicated a feeling of unfinished business. Uncertainty about the next step was conveyed in various forms:

[Kumiko: Today is your last day in Australia. Do you think you got what you wanted from your WH experience?] ...I don’t know yet. I’ll know better, once I move to Tokyo. I don’t think I could feel the change in me if I just went back to my routine with my family [in regional Japan] (Keisuke, male, 28).

[Reflecting on her feelings at the time of leaving Australia] I felt like I still had things I needed to do. I didn’t know exactly what it was, but I felt I had to go back [to Brisbane] (Keiko, female, 32).

[One week before leaving Australia] I’m looking forward to returning home, but at the same time, time flew so fast, and there are many
more things I wanted to do. I’m seriously thinking of coming back on a student visa some time soon (Mariko, female, 27).

The ‘open-ended possibilities’ that Japanese WHMs associated with the Australian WH did not materialise easily. My analysis revealed the significant connection between the pre-arrival expectations and how the interlocutors felt about the level of their achievement in meeting their objectives. Where they had concrete, achievable goals, such as acquiring a diving license in tropical Queensland, or travelling around Australia by bus, the migrants seemed more satisfied that their projects were complete. They tended to express uncomplicated and simple happiness about returning to their home country. Satisfaction seemed harder to reach in cases where goals were not met despite their efforts. For instance, Ryō (male, 30), previously happy with his ‘progress’ in Sydney, became highly frustrated when family illness forced him to return to Japan. Mariko (female, 27) and her quest for friendship with Australian people discussed above is another example. Those WHMs who desired non-nikkei jobs frequently felt lack of self-improvement when such jobs were out of reach because they lacked appropriate experience, language skills or time to develop these (chapter 5).

Some interlocutors were interested in continuing their life as a sojourner. Those in their mid 20s could still take a WH in other countries, such as Canada. Yukari (female, 24) and Asaka (female, 26) both talked about this possibility, because they wanted to ‘see more’. They were optimistic that they would be able to engage in targeted activities the ‘second time around’, to gain further experience and new skills. Others decided to remain in Australia by switching to another visa. For example, Katsuhiko (male, 23) ended up becoming a full-time student at a business college, while Shin’ichi (male, 28) obtained a student visa to earn time to look for a business sponsor for his skilled migration visa. These cases indicate that the shift from short- to long-term (and eventually permanent) migration may occur in an unplanned and unexpected manner. Hugo’s investigation into temporary migration to Australia also shows that a desire to remain in the host society is not always based on deliberate planning, but largely a result of the temporary migratory experience that precedes it (Hugo 2006: 228).
Contradictory social expectations sometimes created the dilemma of whether to remain in Australia or go home. Mariko's case is illustrative. She was interested in studying tourism at a college, as she found the air of worldliness in the word 'tourism' attractive. She also had a lingering attachment to her Sydney life. However, she was strongly pressured by her father to come back home, as he regularly reminded her that she was 'too old to be floating around (furafura suru)' (see chapter 7 for her experience of return and intergenerational frictions). Her visa expired before she could make up her mind, and she was forced to return. The question of returning home may haunt WHMs, long after they have decided to stay in Australia. Kayoko was a former WHM who has remained in Sydney as a de facto partner of an Australian citizen. Although she had just applied for permanent residency, she continued to weigh the pros and cons of her life choices between the two countries. Kayoko was unhappy with her job as an assistant administrator at a nikkei real estate firm, and generally found it difficult to live with linguistic and cultural barriers. However, her parents were against her relationship with her Philippine-born partner, so if she was to inherit the family farm business in northern Japan, she would have to break up with him. During the interview, she still portrayed Australia as a place of 'unlimited possibilities.' At the same time, she seemed fearful of her existential movement coming to a halt. As she discussed what her friends were doing back in Japan, all married with children in tow and beginning to buy properties, she openly wondered if, in fact, returning to her hometown offered her a better future.

A few interlocutors were determined to become permanent residents of Australia. For the females, the most readily acknowledged way to do so was to find a partner with Australian citizenship or permanent residency. For example, Noriko (female, 29) considered this path as ‘insurance’ against the potential failure of other plans, such as studying in Sydney at the postgraduate level. She said ‘Whatever happens, even the worst case scenario wouldn’t be so bad, I’d just marry someone.’ Natsuko (female, 30) was considering applying for residency as a de facto partner of an Australian permanent resident. Yoshie (female, 32) was already engaged to an Australian man she had met two years ago, during her WH. Statistics indicate that Japanese-born permanent residents of Australia contain a sizeable portion of women who have Australian spouses or fiancés (Hamano 2008: 8), and another
ethnographic study reported the case of WHMs subsequently becoming permanent residents through marriage (Denman 2009: 76; Hamano 2009: 15). The majority of WHMs in my study were, however, not (yet) in a committed relationship with an Australian partner, and therefore needed to devise other strategies if they wanted to continue living abroad.

The ‘qualification boom’ and the professionalisation of the Japanese migration industry

The Japanese migration industry offers a variety of service products to prolong WHMs’ stay. A mediation service to schools and colleges is not only popular with those who have study plans, but also others who want to buy some more time in Australia. Some schools are barely legal, and the façade of ‘education’ is only useful for the purpose of maintaining student visa requirements. For example, a martial arts school Shin’ichi enrolled in to extend his stay in Sydney was famous for its status as a sham school (biza mokuteki no gakkō). If one wants to apply for permanent residency down the track, migration agents can provide advice on the kind of vocational skills that are advantageous to survive the point system of Australia’s permanent skilled migration scheme (in order to sell particular training courses accordingly). Noriko (female, 29) was furious that her agent told her to go through two years of training to become a pastry chef only for the purpose of gaining residency, after which she could abandon this ‘career’.¹⁶⁸ This is a common way to negotiate the skilled migration system, and predictably, colleges and related businesses have flourished to churn out ‘professional qualifications’ for those seeking residency.

For those WHMs who want to, or must, return to Japan, the migration industry offers other products for the youth to kick-start their new life back home. Although it was rare among my interlocutors, anecdotal evidence suggests that Japanese WHMs do seek last-minute intensive courses to obtain a certificate of some sort, in order to avoid returning home empty-handed. These short-term courses are

¹⁶⁸ This situation dramatically changed in 2010 when the number of occupations classified as in need was significantly reduced by DIAC. A pastry chef is no longer on the list of skills shortage areas in Australia. The New Skilled Occupation List can be accessed through the DIAC website http://www.immi.gov.au/skilled/general-skilled-migration/whats-new.htm#1 (last accessed 23 February 2011).
usually affordable enough for cash-strapped people. A large number of accreditations and qualifications promoted are only recognised in Japan, including the Elementary English Instructors’ Certification (for children’s English instructors), and the RCA (Ryūgaku kyōkai-Certified-Advisor) for those who want to work as migration agents. While these two certificates are issued by government certified-Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), their practical usefulness is difficult to ascertain to say the least, as these pieces of paper are not required to gain relevant employment (that is, one can legally operate as a migration agent without holding an RCA). Simpson (2005: 452–453) voices similar concerns about the actual usefulness of qualifications that are popular with British gap-year travellers, and points out that the British migration industry markets all sorts of products in the name of career and other advantages, with no concrete data to back up their claims.

The RCA is an interesting case to illustrate the intersection between the migration industry’s revenue-making exercises and the widespread interest of lost generation WHMs in gaining qualifications. The RCA as a voluntary accreditation system for individual migrant agents was established in 2003 by Ryūgaku Kyōkai (literally, ‘Study Abroad Association’). In the background was a rising level of public distrust of the industry.169 The Association stated that the aim of the accreditation system was to reduce cases of client exploitation and to regain public trust in the profession. The effectiveness of the system in these regards is uncertain, because even if individual agents possessed the accredited status, the Japanese government allows migration agent businesses to operate without a government permit system, and there is no enforced standard of practice. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has been slow to regulate the economically promising industry group, which is unlikely to give up voluntarily the freedom to operate its highly lucrative businesses with minimal regulations.

Whether or not it results in trustworthy business practices, one of the consequences of the accreditation system is undoubtedly the commercialisation of

169 A dozen interlocutors spoke about business malpractices of Second Chance, one of the largest agent businesses I pseudonymously referred to in chapter 3. The highly publicised bankruptcy of the fraudulent school Gateway 21 in September 2009 is a recent example that caused a public outcry. The Japan Association of Overseas Studies has set up a website to support the victims through free consultations and discounts to attend schools abroad http://www.jaos.or.jp/info/gw21.html (last accessed 23 February 2011).
the accreditation process itself. Japanese migration agents in Australia profit from running training courses and the accreditation examinations. The tests are held twice a year in Japan, the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. One of the high profile agent businesses in Sydney advertises their course with a marketing line:

RCA accreditation – the official qualification and skill that will directly lead to job interviews and career paths upon returning home. [...] it is a] great qualification/skill if you are thinking about making a career by using your English.\(^{170}\)

Their two-hour-a-day, two-week course cost over $1,700 (current in October 2009), including an administration fee for the examination application. Self-studying customers can purchase the teaching materials for the price of $200, and the exam fee for these people is $300. These amounts are not impossible to pay, if returning WHMs want a piece of paper to assist their job-hunting upon returning to Japan. The migration industry has always absorbed countless migrants as workers and business owners, but the new accreditation system now makes entry into the industry an institutionalised career path. This recent development not only raises the accredited agent’s status but also the industry’s revenues. In this sense, the young people’s project of increasing their employability meets the migration industry’s project of maintaining its credibility, and of profit-making.

The RCA is only one example of newly established qualifications in Japan. The lost decade saw a shikaku būmu (literally, ‘qualification boom’), which promoted created a variety of ‘skill areas’ in which people can be qualified as experts. The culture of entrepreneurial, self-responsible individuals that permeated lost decade Japan undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of adult learning for the purpose of self-development (as opposed to the direct requirements of a chosen vocation). The long recession and widespread job uncertainty among lost generation workers also contributed to an unprecedented interest in obtaining qualifications. In chapter 8, I will return to a discussion of the ‘qualification boom’ in relation to returned WHMs and their future plans.

Conclusion

As my interlocutors' narratives show throughout chapters 5 and 6, the way Japanese WHMs navigated new terrain was typically unplanned and based on trial and error. At least in the early period of the WH, such flexibility and openness were frequently valued because the young people were keen to change their routines, explore themselves and re-consider their future. However, despite their pre-arrival optimism, the acquisition of English language proficiency and quality work experience was time-consuming. As Bourdieu has explained:

[the] accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state [...] presupposes a process of em-bodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor. Like the acquisition of a muscular physique or a suntan, it cannot be done at second hand [...] (Bourdieu 1986: 244).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the time- and energy-consuming nature of settling into a new country worked against WHMs' plans of capital accumulation in the field of cosmopolitanism. Their status as newly arrived Asian migrants with limited economic, cultural and social capital was a decisive factor contributing to their peripheral position in the Australian labour market. They were marginalised in the nikkei niche where their employment was concentrated, as well as in the non-nikkei workplaces where a boost to their cosmopolitan identity came with the price of exploitation. In particular, Australia’s national interest in the use and abuse of migrant labour through the second WH scheme had determining power over WHMs’ ability to resist the conditions of rural work.

The predicaments of Japanese WHMs as lost generation youth were in stark contrast to their parents’ generation. My interlocutors were typically at an age when their parents had already been married and had children, careers and mortgages. As discussed in chapter 2, the parents had made their transition to adulthood in an era when the tremendous growth of the national economy made upward social mobility a real possibility for a great number of people. It is worth pointing out that this generation collectively and often personally gained from internal migration to rapidly expanding cities in Japan. For my interlocutors,
however, their class status rarely improved as a result of relocating to Australia, the imagined West.

Their isolation from mainstream Australian society as disadvantaged migrants did not match their pre-arrival expectations of compatibility with Australians, and this reality affected the young people’s project of developing a cosmopolitan identity. Chapter 6 examined the ways in which WHMs negotiated their new social position on the margins of the imagined West. Exploitation of existing power relations was a common recourse against their marginality. While both female and male WHMs could unite against other ethnic groups on the basis of their imagined Japanese superiority, their gender relations were profoundly affected by their differential social positioning according to the cultural logic of Australian society. The women tended to capitalise on their countrymen’s emasculated status to feel empowered, as well as portray themselves as caring and attractive Asian ‘sweethearts’, as opposed to ‘unfeminine’ Western women. The men had few avenues to reclaim their dominant social position, and resorted to discursive aggression towards Australian men and a ‘rejection’ of Western women, as well as those co-national women who favoured Western males.

Even though Japanese WHMs’ experience of Australia was highly shaped by structural factors, they maintained an individualistic understanding towards their serious game of self-making. The power of the late modern discourse of self-cultivation and the neoliberal discourse of self-responsibility seemed significant, as WHMs actively sought challenges and even hardships for purposes of self-improvement. However, the transformative effect of international migration in the form of the Australian WH was not as dramatic as some had hoped for, and the accumulation of cosmopolitan capital was unfinished business for most. Whether they were satisfied with themselves at the end of their WH, my interlocutors were not fully certain in what ways their experience in Australia would help them get closer to the fulfilment they sought when they left Japan. How, then, did these young people fare on return to Japan and what happened to their projects of self-improvement? In part 4, I will discuss how WH experiences shaped my interlocutors’ lives after returning to Japan.
Part 4

Return to Japan
Chapter 7

Re-entry into the Japanese labour market

Introduction

Some Japanese Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) in my study left Australia against their will, due to lack of alternatives, or unexpected family problems that prompted an earlier return. Others were mildly satisfied with their Working Holiday (WH) experience, although still unsure what exactly came of it. A small minority of returnees remained in Australia, or went back there after a short break in the home country. Whatever their level of contentment, almost all WHMs in my study reported that their emotions ran high immediately after their return to the homeland.

Seeing familiar places again was exciting, as was seeing family and friends after a long period of absence. In addition, Japan’s extensive consumer culture seemed to impress even the unhappiest returnee. For the great majority of my interlocutors, the comfort and convenience afforded by a greater choice of products and services confirmed Japan’s superiority over Australia. Megumi (female, 28) reported her excitement a week after her return:
It was so nice to see my family. I think my parents wanted to spoil me, because they got me the latest mobile phone! I was so happy to go shopping and there was so much to choose from. Australia was great in its own way, but Japan is the greatest when it comes to shopping.

However, the honeymoon period tended to be short-lived. First, reunions with friends regularly disappointed returned WHMs, who felt an unexpected sense of isolation, instead of intimacy and warmth. Their meetings usually started with the question ‘So, how was Australia?’, followed by a broad ‘summary’ of the WH experience, and a reciprocal question ‘So how have you been?’ Soon, their conversation turned to more mundane matters, quickly leading to friends’ usual complaints about work and other aspects of daily life. During our interview, Kōji (male, 30), who had been back in Japan for three years, expressed his appreciation of an opportunity to talk about his Australian experience ‘without fear of judgment,’ When asked for clarification, he said:

[s]ome people think I’m boasting when I talk about Australia. It just often comes up in my talk because obviously, a lot had happened in the year I was away...I felt like this especially when I had just come back. Basically, my friends weren’t that interested in my stories.

Second, a sense of regret and self-blame was notable from frequent expressions of the young returned migrants that that they could, and indeed should, have brought back home more stories of personal success, and that they still had a lot to improve in themselves, just like when they left for Australia:

I really think I should have studied English more seriously when I was in Australia. From half way onwards, I kind of lost my focus and became lazy, I guess (Yoshio, male, 25).

If I had been younger, the WH might have opened up more options, like remaining in Australia to study full-time...I had fun and became more confident through the WH, but now that I’m back, I don’t think things have changed so much (Keiko, female, 32).

In chapters 7 and 8, I discuss the trajectories of returned WHMs. This chapter examines the WHMs’ re-entry into the Japanese labour market. Employment is a major issue, which all WHMs in this study faced upon returning. Dissatisfaction with their status and prospects as workers underlined their motivations to take a
WH. We have seen that chances to find a new career direction or strengthen existing skills were scarce for Japanese WHMs in Australia. To what extent could the young people utilise their experience of the WH to find fulfilment as workers?

Chapter 8 will explore returned WHMs’ expectations for the future. The way the youth discussed their desire for marriage, one of their major concerns, will illustrate the impact of wider discourses on their sometimes conflicting aspirations. I will also examine what avenues of self-development were popular with the returned youth migrants, and their implications. At the end of the chapter, my findings will bring our attention back to the characteristics of neoliberal late modernity, and question the way young people are encouraged to develop their selves.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that not every WHM returns to Japan, never to see Australia again. Some go back and forth on various visas, spending from a few months to some years in both countries over a long period of time. Others decide to remain in Australia, and only take occasional short ‘vacation’ trips to Japan. As explained in the introductory chapter, the primary focus of this thesis is WHMs who returned to Japan after their Australian WH. While I will not include detailed stories of those who became international students, skilled migrants or permanent residents to remain in Australia, the end of this chapter will discuss the influence of the WH experience on some people’s preferences for future residence abroad.
Returned WHMs and employment issues

For all WHMs in my study, finding employment was, first and foremost, a matter of financial necessity. Having come back with empty bank accounts, the overwhelming majority relied on their family, especially their parents, for housing, food and small ‘loans’ as they re-established their lives. All returnee interlocutors spent the first few weeks (and up to six months in four cases) mostly unemployed, re-settling and looking for work, or with sporadic casual jobs along the way. In the early stage of seeking re-entry into the Japanese workforce, the young people could still afford to take it easy, maintaining curiosity for new employment opportunities, as well as a certain level of optimism for the future.

This relaxed attitude faded quickly, especially for those who sought full-time employment in a new career field. While family and friends often acted as support networks, they also became a major source of social pressure to conform to ‘the way things are done in Japan’. As I will argue, the hard reality for lost generation workers continued to impact the way returned WHMs experienced employment. Even for those who felt their WH was advantageous, this was frequently insufficient to offset their underprivileged positions in the Japanese labour market. In what follows, I will first examine casual employment as the most common place of re-entry into the workforce upon returning from Australia. This will then be contrasted with the experiences of full-time, permanent employment. Cosmopolitan career opportunities were commonly sought, but with difficulty. A comparison between lost generation WHMs and former WHMs of the economic growth period of the 80s will highlight the historicity of the employment practices in the lost decade, and how WHMs of the two eras made their transition to adulthood on different grounds.

Casual employment as a trap

During the initial period of return, often-used phrases such as ‘at first’ (Megumi, female, 28), ‘for the time being’ (Mamoru, male, 27) and ‘money first’ (Kōji, male, 30) highlighted the temporary nature of their employment choices, as well as the lack of clear long-term plans. Of all the employment opportunities available, casual
jobs gave returned WHMs much-needed, speedy access to money. As explained in earlier chapters, changes in the youth employment practices in the lost decade made this form of employment readily available and widespread. All but one interlocutor gained a casual job as their re-entry point in the Japanese workforce. This trend is also visible in a 2004 survey on returned Japanese WHMs, conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. According to its findings, 20.2 percent of the respondents had held non-permanent jobs since their return, even though only 12.6 percent had been engaged in such work before departure. The difficulty of accessing full-time employment upon return is illustrated by the fact that only 39.4 percent secured such a job, compared to the pre-migration rates of 58.5 percent (MHLW 2004 kaigai shūgyō taiken).

Ten interlocutors, mostly females, actively sought a casual job for its flexibility and the non-committed nature of the worker status. For example, a month after returning to her hometown, Megumi (female, 28) used a haken agency to find a customer service and administrative support position at a local branch of a major telecommunication company. She explained her motives:

For now, I just work for money because I really need to, and in the meantime I will think about what I want to do in the future. [...] The pay is not so bad and I can go home at 5pm on the dot. [Kumiko: How long is your contract?] It’ll be renewed every three months, so I better behave if I want to stay longer (laughs).

The relatively young Yukari (female, 24) was also taking it easy in terms of career building. She was enjoying juggling two casual jobs, one for weekdays, the other for the weekends. Her plan was that while living with her family and slowly saving money, she would take a part-time course to teach herself a new skill, and try a WH in Canada in a couple of years’ time. In addition, three female interlocutors, two with a confirmed wedding date and one with extreme keenness to find a husband, explicitly stated that their casual work was purely a source of income until they married and had a child.

In contrast, others fully intended to gain permanent positions as soon as possible, but the scarcity of such positions forced them to engage in casual work as an interim option. Two female returnees fit this description, but this tendency was the
strongest among males. For example, Keisuke sought a full-time position as a camera operator in the film industry, but the competition was fierce. In the meantime, his job-hunting efforts had to be complemented by precarious work as a casual video editor. Similarly, it took Kōji a full six months to find a permanent position, and until then he hopped from one precarious job to another, just to keep afloat financially. During this time, he accumulated a debt to his parents.

While casual work provides relatively easier and speedier access to income, this form of employment has more than its share of negative aspects. As extensively discussed in the introductory chapter, there is a lack of job security, and its temporary nature renders the lost generation workers relatively expendable. They have a lower status in the workplace hierarchy (‘Nobody calls me by name, but ‘haken-san’’ [Yukie, female, 30]), and few opportunities exist for promotion and skills development. What makes such features of casual employment more worrying is that it is notably difficult to escape, because the path to permanent employment is not readily available. This is despite the impression given by recruitment advertising. For example, one popular haken recruitment website tells the viewer ‘Haken is a foot in the door to build industry experience and knowledge.’ Arubaito job advertisements commonly include lines such as ‘Paths to the permanent position available (seishain tôyô seido ari).’\(^\text{171}\) These claims tend to be exaggerated in order to lure potential ‘clients’, and statistics have shown that cases of upward mobility from non-permanent to permanent employment are relatively rare (Koyō jōhō sentā 2008: 15).\(^\text{172}\) As the majority of casual workers, women are more likely to hold low paying, non-career oriented positions (see chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on gendered recruitment practices in Japan). Moreover, recent

\(^{171}\) Recruitment websites such as the popular an allow viewers to seek specifically casual jobs that may lead to permanent positions http://hataraku.en-japan.com/to_perm/ (last accessed 23 February 2011).

\(^{172}\) The future of haken workers is made more uncertain by a recently implemented law, despite its initial intention to provide more protection for such workers. In order to make the path from haken to a full-time position more widely available, the 2004 amendment of the Worker Dispatch Law obliged businesses to limit the use of the same haken worker to a maximum of three years. The intention behind the amendment was to encourage employers to re-employ long-standing haken workers as permanent workers. The actual effect of this law, however, has been devastating for many longstanding haken workers. In order to avoid the ‘costs’ of having to give benefits and security to haken-cum-permanent employees, businesses began terminating the haken contract just before the three-year mark, and simply replaced them with new haken workers.
years have seen this trend encroaching into the male population, as more and more men enter the casual workforce (for recent figures, see chapter 2).

Recruiters are notoriously resistant to hiring casual workers for permanent positions, because of the image of the furīta as irresponsible, non-committed and unskilled. To make matters worse, the ageism of Japanese graduate recruitment practices discriminates against those older than the typical graduate’s age (chapter 2). All the interlocutors except Daisuke, who was still 21 years old and attending a university, were in their late 20s to early 30s at the time of their return. This meant that their age effectively barred them from applying for full-time graduate positions.\(^{173}\) For these reasons, whether out of financial necessity or by choice, re-entering the Japanese labour market as casual workers may end up tainting returned WHMs’ ‘marketability’ for more secure positions.

Given the pattern of increased participation in casual employment on their way out of Japan (as more than half of the interlocutors had done—see chapter 4) as well as immediately after returning, a sizeable proportion of returned WHMs were likely to become a contingent of lost generation precarious workers. Whether or not they were precarious workers prior to going to Australia, they all engaged in casual work as WHMs. In the meantime, their WH experience unavoidably created an absence from the Japanese labour market for a considerable period of time. Once they returned to Japan, they were again encouraged to take up casual jobs, either out of financial necessity or as their ‘own choice’. While the flexibility of such work was valued by certain WHMs, there are invisible and not-so-invisible barriers to their entry into the permanent workforce. Potentially, one of the unintended consequences of taking a WH is the young returnees’ exclusion from stable work with career development opportunities. In other words, returned WHMs in casual work may get trapped, as if as a punishment for trying out an alternative life option in the form of the WH.

\(^{173}\) Since the mid 1990s, a practice of treating jobseekers within a few years of graduation in the same manner as fresh graduates (sometimes called dai ni or dai san shinsotsu, literally the ‘second/third-fresh graduate’) as a reaction to a growing trend of job mismatch and lower retention rates among graduate employees. Most returned WHMs do not fit the category of the second timer. Prejudice against second timers has also been reported, painting the picture of ‘quitters’ who are a potential risk to businesses (Jo 2006).
**Problems faced by ‘privileged’ permanent workers**

There were, however, some WHMs who did secure permanent contracts, most commonly with small- to medium-sized enterprises where recruitment is more flexible, and on-the-job training for novices is more readily available. This is how interlocutors Kōji and Masanori, both in their early 30s, found permanent positions at an outbound tourism agency. Their daily tasks included administration and phone-based customer services, sometimes in English but mostly in Japanese. Their employment history had been characterised by periods of permanent work cut short due to their WH and other reasons, interspersed with some casual work. With no previous industry experience, and in Masanori’s case no experience in a white-collar job, their learning curve was steep, and they had not progressed from the baseline pay level for two years and over a year, respectively. Initially, they were glad to escape more tenuous work to move into permanent jobs, and having some relevance to their Australian experience was an added bonus. But after some time in their professions, their salaryman lives seemed to be a trade-off between relative stability and the hope for ‘something better than this’.

It took me a long time to change my direction... It’s great when I deal with something related to Australia... [But] the hours are long and exhausting (Masanori, male, 33).

I was relieved to finally start a proper job. [But] I don’t have previous industry experience, so obviously I had to start from the lowest salary level (Kōji, male, 30).

Just as in larger corporations, overtime work is chronic in small to medium-sized workplaces in Japan (Genda 2007). When Masanori arrived two hours late to our appointment on a Friday night, he made the following remark.

Leaving work at 8.00pm is totally normal for me. It often gets much later than that. [...] I’m constantly exhausted. [Asked about overtime payment] Overtime what? Are you kidding? Overtime is about catching up with what you are supposed to finish by the end of the day, not doing ‘extra’ work.

The heavy workload of permanent workers is partly related to the growing casualisation of the workforce. The sudden decrease in the number of permanent
workers has meant heavier responsibilities for those who remain, because the management of increasing numbers of casual employees is a heavy burden, especially for the young and inexperienced. They find themselves caught between the ‘foot soldiers’ and the senior management, to whom they need to demonstrate their ability and motivation. Busy balancing work relations with below and above, they must tie up any loose ends after hours and, if necessary, on the weekend.\textsuperscript{174} The sudden increase in responsibility and workload has been associated with deteriorating mental health among lost generation permanent workers. According to a study conducted in 2006, over 60 percent of companies surveyed indicated an increase in the number of employees who suffer from mental illnesses, and about 60 percent of the sufferers are in their thirties (Industrialist Mental Health Research Centre 2006, cited in Jō 2006: 83).\textsuperscript{175} Under heavy pressure, the presence of casual workers functions as a daily reminder of the ‘privileged’ status of permanent workers, and what could happen to ‘dropouts’.

The stability of employment seems, at first, a trade-off between quality of life and job security. However, salaryman-style workers in the lost decade, in fact, lack stability. This is because the casualisation of the workforce is hardly sufficient as a cost-cutting measure, especially for small- to medium-sized firms which form the majority of Japanese firms, and employers’ ability to protect permanent employees has diminished. Masanori’s employer is a somewhat extreme case in point. At the time of the interview, the company was close to financial ruin, and in Masanori’s understanding, everyone from the branch manager to the lowest ranking worker such as himself was paid the same salary, in order to keep the business afloat. The possibility of imminent job loss loomed large and morale was low. It was only six months into his employment when Masanori was approached to take on the position of sub-manager:

\footnote{\textsuperscript{174} Young elite workers at large corporations also endure the culture of overwork. Yukie, whose marriage plans will be discussed in part 2 of this chapter, complained on more than one occasion that her soon-to-be-fiancé worked ‘all the time.’ He was a career-track system engineer for a major Japanese freight company, and during a particularly busy period, ‘slept in his office for three nights to meet deadlines. He often goes to work on weekends and public holidays. He told me the other day, he’d rather be sacked if his work time was going to be so painfully hard (tsurai)’ (Yukie, female, 30).

\textsuperscript{175} Sudden deaths of, and suicides by salarymen have drawn social as well as scholarly attention in recent years. See Palumbo and Herbig (1994) for details of the karōshi (death from overwork) phenomenon.}
They keep asking but I said no every time. It just means more work with no pay-rise. I’m still new to tourism anyway; how can I be a sub-manager? It’s crazy. [...] I’m looking for another job, but it’s not easy to switch (Masanori, male, 33).

Masanori’s story vividly illustrates the reality of many permanent workers of the lost generation. Unlike the previous generations of ‘corporate soldiers’ (kigyō senshi), today’s young salaryman-style workers cannot be confident that the company will protect them in return for their loyalty. Just as casual workers feel cut off from the path to upward corporate mobility, permanent workers suffer from worsening working conditions and insecurity. Given their lack of control over their working conditions, lost generation salaryman workers are, in practice, also leading precarious working lives (Obinger 2009). The grass might seem to be greener on the other side. These groups of young workers, however, are the two sides of the same coin; the increased precariousness for lost generation workers, regardless of the mode of employment.

The obvious strategy for WHMs who are struggling to start or reactivate their careers might be to return to their previous occupation, so that they can enter the profession at a more senior level rather than starting over. However, this was not an attractive option for many returned WHMs in my study. Breaking away from their past work routine and avoiding a predictable and unattractive life course were some of the major drivers for their decision to become WHMs. For instance, Tomoe (female, 30) was reluctant to return to the kindergarten where she had eight years of full-time work experience. Pressured by the need to start earning an income as soon as possible, she settled on the compromise of working as a precarious arubaito babysitter at private homes, while seeking better employment opportunities. Tomoe explained her reasons:

It’s not like I don’t like looking after kids. But I just don’t feel like working like before. I know what it’s like and it will be all the same. [...] I’m interested in administrative work (jimushoku). But I have never used a computer for work before, so I’m totally disadvantaged (Tomoe, female, 30).
As a casual worker, Tomoe was not eligible for an employee’s pension plan, healthcare insurance, unemployment insurance, paid sick leave, holidays or bonuses. Her hourly wage was 800 yen, which was certainly not high, considering her qualifications and work experience. Even then, the sense of engaging in something new was still preferable to feeling stuck in the past, as if she had never experienced a WH. Her market competitiveness might have been greater, had she gained new and sought-after skills while in Australia. However, as chapter 5 explored in detail, WHMs as disadvantaged migrant workers rarely provided such opportunities. This tendency was also made clear by the aforementioned survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW 2004 Kaigai shūgyō taiken): Of the 1,121 former WHMs, only 23.4 percent said that a WH brought to them new technical knowledge and skills.

For those returnees who sought a career change, earning a living by using the English skills and cosmopolitan experience they gained in Australia was a popular idea. This is not surprising, because their motivation for the Australian WH often included accumulation of the cultural capital of cosmopolitanism. Below, I will explore how the hopes and aspirations of returned WHMs shifted as they attempted to begin building their dream career.

**In search of ‘a job where I can use my English’**

Before leaving for Australia, the majority of WHMs in my study sought direct experience of the West, and the associated image of a cosmopolitan life. Having returned to Japan, this aspect of their WH was still something they highly valued and appreciated:

It was great to have met people from all over the world. I shared a room with a Korean girl, and made many friends at my English school. I always wanted to make foreign friends (Yukari, female, 24).

I feel I've now seen the world out there. ...When I was younger, I really idolised America. But Australia looks to Britain and other directions. Through my experience there, I felt there is more to the world than the American view (Kaori, female, 32).
However, starting a cosmopolitan career based on their new experience proved difficult. English language proficiency is one barrier. Typically, the WHMs had elementary to intermediate levels of English when they arrived in Australia. As many of them realised later on, their WH experience was often insufficient to dramatically improve their language skills. Over 90 percent of my interlocutors reported this to be the case, many of whom expressed regret about not having studied harder. As an indication, Masanori, a four-year university graduate who spent a year in Australia, had a score of 500 on TOEIC (out of 1000, based on reading and listening comprehensions) immediately after returning to Japan. According to a popular website promoting English language learning,\textsuperscript{176} 600 is the level at which one can order food at a restaurant (presumably by using grammatically correct and culturally appropriate sentences). Kaori’s (female, 32) TOEIC score was 820, but even then, \textit{haken} agents would bluntly tell her the uselessness of her proficiency level. She lacked computer and other skills, and there were plenty of others who had scores of over 900 and still struggled to find jobs. Two months of disciplined door knocking and registering with numerous \textit{haken} agencies was beginning to wear on Kaori:

   For the first three weeks, I definitely wanted to find a job where I could use my English, but now I’m starting to give up on the idea. I might have been more advantaged if I had work experience at a Japanese trading company or something, but now, I’m starting to think any job would do.

Furthermore, Japanese employers who offer cosmopolitan white-collar jobs view language ability as merely a tool for accomplishing the required tasks, rather than a qualification in itself. This attitude is effectively summarised in the words of the recruitment officer of a major foreign-affiliated international freight company:

   I often receive inquiries from people who say ‘I’d like a job where I can use English’ (\textit{Eigo ga tsukaeru shigoto ga shitai}). My usual answer is ‘English is used in all sections of the company, so it is a simple requirement. By the way, what else can you do?’ (laughs)\textsuperscript{177}

For the majority of WHMs, the question ‘what can you do at work by using English?’ proves a difficult one to answer, because their English learning focused on

\textsuperscript{176} \url{www.eigotown.co.jp} (last accessed 20 July 2010).

\textsuperscript{177} \url{www.alc.co.jp/eigodeshigoto} (last accessed 25 March 2008).
everyday usage and was not linked to concrete career plans. Evidently, not all WHMs are ignorant of the values attributed to English language skills in the current employment market. Nor is there a lack of a ‘real’ strategy behind a wish to use English as a career-enhancing tool specific to WHMs. What is specific to WHMs is the fact that the vagueness of future plans is, in many cases, inherent in the nature of their participation in the WH scheme. The opportunity to take the Australian WH was attractive for a large number of interlocutors because it seemed to offer open-ended possibilities. Anticipation and a hope for something new and unknown were part of the deal. From the business world’s point of view, however, this just demonstrates lack of planning and concrete goals.

Comments about an increased level of confidence, the ability to take the initiative, and the value of seeing the ‘outside world’ were very common in my data:

I’ve become more confident about my ability to take on new challenges. I have more courage to speak up now (Takashi, male, 26).

I supported myself in Australia by busking [performing in public spaces] and later travelled in Europe. So I know I can make a life for myself anywhere in this world (Kōji, male, 30).

These accounts resonate with the findings of a larger survey conducted in 2004, which concerned Japanese nationals and their work experience abroad.\(^{178}\) When asked about the benefits of working overseas, 81 percent of the 1,150 WHMs in this study responded by saying it had given them a cosmopolitan sensibility (kokusai kankaku), the ability for cross-cultural adaptation (ibunka tekiō nöryoku), and a proactive attitude (sekkyokusei), while 79 percent said it had given them communication skills.\(^{179}\) Other high-ranking answers include a broader perspective (habahiroi shiya) (78 percent), and perseverance and endurance (nintairyoku, gamanzuyosa) (72 percent). By contrast, the same survey shows that more than 10 percent of these former WHMs said that their foreign language skills had not improved at all, while 48.7 percent indicated ‘modest’ improvement, defined by the survey designer as an increase of approximately 50 TOEIC points. My own data


\(^{179}\) Percentages are my calculations based on the number of WHM respondents in the survey.
highlighted the same contrast between satisfaction with improvements in certain personal qualities, and insufficient gain in English language skills.

It was disappointing for the interlocutors that the personal qualities developed through exposure to a cross-cultural environment did not seem urgently sought after by employers. For example, Ikezawa Naomi, a ‘global career counsellor’, explains in her online column that domestic employers perceive young Japanese job seekers with study abroad experience as ‘good at asserting themselves, but poor at being humble and cooperative’. A similar opinion was voiced by a ‘career expert’ at a careers expo in Tokyo which specifically targeted Japanese university graduates with experience of studying abroad. At an open seminar on interview skills and ‘impression management’, participants were told to maintain a good posture, sunny smiles and appropriate appearance (hairstyle, makeup and dress styles). According to this expert, it was of utmost importance to present oneself as a clean and cheerful candidate who thrives on adversity and works cooperatively as part of a group. In concluding the seminar, the young job seekers in the room were reminded that they had to ensure they possess suitable Japanese language skills for the business context. During fieldwork, several interlocutors reported similar opinions among employers and ‘temp’ agency staff:

When I made a mistake with keigo [polite language], a senior colleague (senpai) sarcastically said ‘Are you one of those kids who grew up abroad?’ (Kaori, female, 32).

I was drinking water out of a plastic bottle during my break, and the older woman I work with told me off, saying ‘People who’ve been overseas (kaigai gaeru) have bad manners’ (Megumi, female, 28).

In essence, ‘young cosmopolitans’ are required to re-train themselves as ‘proper’ Japanese, in order to fit into the workplace on their return to Japan. This is especially the case at the kinds of workplaces where the interlocutors tended to find themselves: despite their majority status in Japan, small-to medium-sized enterprises are considered to have a low-status compared to large ‘brand’ corporations. These smaller companies are unlikely to favour the cutting-edge,
imported management practices such as ‘diversity-management’\(^{181}\) or employees’ cosmopolitan skills. Instead, these employers tend to value ‘extra’ skills such as cross-cultural awareness and cosmopolitan sensibility only after their employees prove themselves as ‘proper Japanese workers’. This frustrating reality became painfully clear to interlocutors such as Kaori (female, 32) during job-hunting:

> I really feel I learnt a lot in Australia, and I was pretty confident about my ability to endure difficulties and come out well. But I realise all this means nothing if I want a job in Japan.

The discussion above has shown the relative inaccessibility of jobs where using the English language featured prominently. Cosmopolitan personal qualities WHMs cultivated through their experience in Australia were seldom required by potential employers of returned WHMs. In the next section, I will introduce the cases of those who managed to obtain the coveted cosmopolitan jobs, in order to examine their work conditions and the level of satisfaction.

**Cosmopolitan jobs: The gap between ideal and reality**

Securing a cosmopolitan job in itself did not necessarily signal a happy ending to the experience of WHMs. In fact, the reality of such jobs often further increased the sense of frustration and disappointment. Some of my interlocutors found work in the travel and hospitality industries, holding positions such as tourism agents, airline ground staff, and help desk staff at international events and in hotel receptions, all of which typically absorb jobseekers with moderate English language skills. In addition, these service jobs more readily accept candidates without previous experience for entry-level jobs. As mentioned above, Kōji worked for a discount flight-ticketing agent with a total of 12 employees. In our conversation, he evaluated his work life as ‘not too bad’, but he used English for administrative transactions only, and his daily tasks were ‘basically office work with lots of stressful phone conversations with customers. Nothing glamorous.’

Maki (female, 25), who worked as ground staff for a domestic airline on a one-year contract, also complained of the routine nature of much of her work:

\(^{181}\) It is a current fad that portrays diversity among workers as a productive force behind increased competitiveness and performance of a corporation (Igarashi 2010: 34–37).
I wanted to work as ground staff because I wanted to look after customers from all over the world. It looked like a really cool job. But in reality, I hardly used English while working. Actually, I hardly talked. It’s like working on an assembly line rather than doing ‘customer service’.

Disillusioned, she did not seek to extend her contract, and at the time of the interview, had just begun working for a small gift shop in her neighbourhood, just as a way to earn money and buy time to think about her next move. Kengo (male, 25) was one interlocutor who gained a job as a migration agent. Within the first few months of returning, he paid a visit to a migration agent where he had previously spent time as a client. The director of the business realised that Kengo was looking for a job, and offered him a newly vacant position as an ‘Australian WH specialist’. At the time of the interview, he had worked in this capacity for roughly a year. Kengo portrayed himself as more akin to an aspiring WHM than a migration ‘expert’:

People say it’s a good job because it’s permanent and I can use English and my experience in Australia. But ... the pay is low, I work on weekends, and it’s not something I wanted to do anyway. I’m sending people to Australia everyday, but I’m the one who wants to go back.

Japan’s migration industry closely resembles the nikkei workplaces in Australia, in that the vast number of inexperienced and less knowledgeable ‘newcomers’ support thriving businesses of ‘old-timers’ who pioneered this growing business domain, taking advantage of experience abroad, which was still novel at that time. The reality of the migration industry as a workplace for novice workers like Kengo is discernable from a job advertisement. For example, the following was found on a Japanese website:
From this description, a sobering picture emerges of a position that does not require high-level skills, involves menial tasks, and offers a similar wage level to working as a waitperson at a casual eatery. The irony is that this job advertisement was found on a very popular website which is run by a well-known English language promoter and regularly features glamorous images of cosmopolitan jobs for marketing purposes.

In regional and rural Japan, English-language related jobs are even scarcer. In chapter 4, the regional case of Takakura was discussed in the context of the unequal distribution of cosmopolitan imaginaries in Japan. The personal experience of Sachiko, one of the first migration agents in Takakura, illustrates the two-fold difficulties for cosmopolitan job seekers in non-metropolitan areas: inaccessibility and low salary levels. Sachiko returned to her parents’ home in Takakura after gaining a degree, a short stint in Sydney as a language student, and several years of work experience as a bilingual administrator at a major English school franchise in several parts of Japan. At a local employment agency, she suggested a humble 170,000 yen as her desired baseline monthly salary, already 20 percent lower than her previous level. This was met with ‘That’s impossible in Takakura.’ The ‘bargaining’ process continued until her asking price reached 120,000 yen inclusive of welfare benefits. At this level, there were various available jobs. However, when it came to jobs where she could use her English skills, there was only one: giving private English lessons to a group of primary school children.

It is clear that in lost-decade Japan, the louder the marketing drum was banged for image-based cosmopolitanism, the greater the chances of disappointment for
returned WHMs. This gap between expectations and reality contributed to the anti-climax after successfully gaining a cosmopolitan job.\textsuperscript{182} Marketing materials of the English and migration industries frequently feature fictionalised stories of young characters who dream of becoming a cosmopolitan worker. In these scenarios, there is little room to doubt the desirability of cosmopolitan jobs, and details of job descriptions and day-to-day tasks are seldom brought up. The claim that the WH and other forms of youth temporary migration are useful for employment due to their cosmopolitan ‘soft power’ has been largely untested to date.\textsuperscript{183} My study offers one piece of evidence that such a claim does not always reflect the reality of young returnees.

The circumstances were quite different, however, during the previous economic boom time when independent travel was still a novelty. Below, the stories of former WHMs of the 1980s will draw attention to the specific historical circumstances which shaped the experience of lost generation WHMs in my study.

**Early WHMs of the 1980s as pioneers of cosmopolitan niches**

Osamu (male, 45) is a typical example of a successful former WHM from the ‘good old days’. He arrived in Australia on a WH visa in 1984, soon after graduating from a prestigious private university in Tokyo. He travelled around the country and enjoyed adventures and challenges in the new environment. Osamu reflected on his return from Australia:

> When I came back to Japan, I bummed around for a couple of months. Then my friend needed an editor for his guidebook company to write about the WH. I put my hand up immediately. Independent travel was becoming more popular, and a lot of my WH friends rode the wave of the trend like I did.

\textsuperscript{182} The gap between the perceived glamour of cosmopolitan jobs and the everyday practices on the ground seems widely shared beyond the WHM population. For example, a past study on two-year university students majoring in English shows the same trend. The current students tended to overrate the importance of English skills as a career tool, while the experience of the alumnae indicated their actual occasions to use the language ability were much more limited, and was only a minor part of their daily routine (Lambert 2001: 12).

\textsuperscript{183} Heath (2007: 100) voiced a similar concern in the context of the British gap-year.
The company grew exponentially during Osamu’s engagement, and he, along with
other pioneering youth, ‘gained the status of being on the frontier of promoting
independent overseas travel.’ Today, the guidebook series is the most successful
one for independent travellers in Japan, and the overwhelming majority of my
interlocutors consulted the WH edition of the series before arrival, as well as
bringing their copy with them to Australia. Osamu continued his work for over a
decade before establishing his own business in the mid-1990s, to promote WHs and
other various forms of youth temporary migration. His small office in central Tokyo
now had one full-time employee, a former WHM, to support his small-scale, but
successful venture. Located next to Osamu’s office is his friend Teruo’s business.
Teruo had a similar career trajectory to Osamu’s. He returned from an Australian
WH in 1985, finished the university degree that he had suspended, and upon
graduation, gained employment with one of the largest independent travel agencies
in Japan. He built his 15-year career at the same firm, then opened a small travel
agency specialising in adventure trips to Australia.

One critical difference between such experiences of WHMs of the bubble economy
era and of the lost decade is Japan’s socio-economic circumstances at the time of
their return. When asked whether he was anxious about his future career before he
stumbled upon the job with the publisher, Osamu shrugged:

Not really. I knew many other guys [former WHMs] who were like me...[...] some were getting by with casual jobs and cruising along
for months, or even a couple of years in one case. But most of us had
good education, and back then, jobs and opportunities were
abundant. Having some gap in a CV didn’t mean much, especially for
university graduates.

The still novel nature of overseas experience and the relative rarity of English
language skills also worked in favour of returned WHMs in the past. Teruo
explained that young people’s decision to live in a foreign country alone used to be
highly regarded as a sign of their courage and proactive nature. Moreover, in the
mid- to late-1980s, haken was a matter of choice for skilled workers. For instance,
Akemi, who was introduced in chapter 2, registered with a haken agency and
worked as a translator upon her return from Australia. She remembered that, even
though she had no formal training or qualifications, there was no competition for the well-paid professional job.

These circumstances contrasted with returned WHMs of the lost decade, who work precariously rather than ‘flexibly’, and whose experience and skills from abroad tend to be undervalued by demanding recruiters. The shift in the social climate was remembered vividly by Taichi (male, 43). His experience was unusual, because his border crossing was of a dual nature, that is, his physical border crossing between Japan and abroad was simultaneously his crossing of two different eras, the bubble-economy time and the lost decade. He left for Australia in 1985, and having spent nearly a year there, briefly returned to Japan to save some more money. He later took a WH in New Zealand where he settled for several years by switching to various visa types, and lived life as ‘a bit of a wanderer (chottoshita hōrōsha).’

Before he left for Australia, as well as during his brief return to Japan, Taichi earned a living by engaging in casual seasonal work. An exclusive swimming pool at a five star hotel in central Tokyo, and ski resorts in northern Japan were his usual employers. Taichi looked back on the ‘golden age’:

There were a lot of jobs in Japan, and I was asked to go permanent all the time. But I didn’t have a good reason to, because my wages kept going up anyway. It was a great time of fun and luxury, even for guys like me [without a university degree]. [...] When I finally returned to Japan in 1995 [after Australia and New Zealand], the situation was totally different. No more well-paid and easy jobs for high school leavers (kōsotsu) like myself. My English skills didn’t mean much, because I had no qualifications, and there was so much competition.

The former WHMs I encountered characteristically succeeded in taking advantage of the emerging niche as ‘cosmopolitan’, created by rising consumer demands and shortages of relevant skills during Japan’s economic growth. In contrast, returning WHMs in the lost decade had much less bargaining power in the labour market, especially as they were non-elite, and without specialist skills or established careers. Because of the sheer numbers and ubiquity of youth with overseas experience and English skills, lost generation WHMs were more likely to become the providers of cheap labour, even in the sectors in which their association with cosmopolitanism would have been welcomed under different conditions.
The Australian WH as a disruption to a career in Japan

Analysis of WHMs’ experience of return has highlighted lost generation hardships relating to employment, and the narrow range of sobering options that awaited them in Japan. Before leaving Japan, they were moderately educated, and worked in a variety of settings, mostly in white-collar occupations and/or service sectors. These young people characteristically belonged to the non-elite group, and exploring different life courses was a major part of their motivation for taking a WH. Once in Australia, all interlocutors worked precariously in low- or un-skilled positions. On their return to Japan, the type of work they found was frequently low skilled, and involved few responsibilities, little industry knowledge and few opportunities for skills acquisition. Even where they have gained positive experience and new skills in Australia, my analysis indicates that this is often insufficient to offset the negative impact of their relatively long absence from the Japanese labour market, and their lack of marketable skills.

There is a clear pattern of returned WHMs ending up in jobs that are, at best, at the same level as their pre-departure experience, and frequently worse. In other words, WHMs often ‘moved down’ in terms of occupational prestige and position in the workplace. This points to the observation that work experience in Australia rarely helped to build career credentials for the returnee youth. The WHMs had intended to use their overseas sojourn to seek a breakthrough from the ‘circular movement’ that got them nowhere, and to find more fulfilling and exciting experiences at work. Instead, their WH mobility became an interruption to their career, in much the same way that having children commonly is for women. The narratives of returned WHMs illustrate, in a concentrated manner, the major problems of current youth employment practices in Japan. Once they deviated from the idealised norm of linear progression, it was difficult for lost generation youth to flexibly (re)establish their careers, let alone become valued core members of corporations.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Inui (1997) points out that even university graduate employees find it difficult to become part of the small number of elite experts who are the most valued corporate employees.
Popular sentiments have suggested that, in this difficult economic climate, young people, especially the furitā, should seek jobs that are within their reach (i.e. precarious, boring, routine, repetitive and low-status), rather than ‘aiming high’ and stubbornly seeking yrātaikōto (a vocational passion). Such advice is also heard from academics (Kosugi 2001 and Nagasu 2001). Public and private initiatives to aid youth (re)employment often share a similar perspective. The government-run employment security office Hello Work, and its associated programs,185 all funded by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, do not currently include mechanisms to streamline suitable jobs for returned WHMs and other youth who have previous, sometimes extensive, work experience in Japan. Tateiwa (2007: 29) points out that in the name of support for ‘youth independence’, these government initiatives function to give the moral lesson that satisfying jobs are hard to come by, so young people should become realistic in their expectations and do what they can, rather than what they want to do.

The report compiled and released in 2005 by the aforementioned Overseas Vocational Training Association also argued that more initiatives are needed to address the needs of WHMs and other young people with work experience overseas.186 (OVTA 2005). Recognising this problem, the JAWHM, the only publicly funded institution for Japanese WHMs, began running ‘re-employment promotion’ seminars in late 2007, in the hope of increasing the employability of returned WHMs. However, this has been an isolated effort to date. Instead of genuine job matching services, what has recently emerged is the marketing strategy of haken agencies to promote their businesses to Japanese WHMs while they are still in Australia. Brochures and flyers are placed at migration agent offices and on websites popular with WHMs, enticing soon-to-be-returnees with a promise of ‘quick access to jobs’.

The desire to engage in satisfying work and to be recognised for their contribution is widely shared by diverse members of Japanese society, from the privileged elite

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185 They include the YES (Youth Employability Support) Program, the Young Work Plaza (outreach branches of Hello Work targeting younger job seekers), and the Job Café (a one stop shop offering information and advice).

to others such as WHMs. In late modern Japan, as discussed in the introductory chapter, there is pressure to consider labour from an ‘aesthetic’ viewpoint. Referring to Bauman (1998: 33–34), I have explained that in late modern consumer society, occupations are valued according to their ability to offer aesthetic experience, such as excitement, adventure and challenges. In such a society, it is understandable that many young people seek stimulating work opportunities within the mainstream economy as part of their self-development. To suggest that unemployed or precariously working WHMs have no other choice but to tolerate the lowly regarded jobs is to reinforce the structural forces that disadvantage them in the first place. The question that needs to be asked is, who has the ‘right’ to access desirable jobs, and what factors determine this? I will return to this question in the concluding chapter.

Home sweet home?: Housing conditions in the lost decade

In this last section, I will discuss the issue of housing as an indicator of WHMs’ social status. It is not unusual for single young people in Japan to live with parents until they are married. In addition, the need for a financial guarantor and the advance payment of four to six months’ rent act as barriers to renting a property. There are, however, some young people who do not have the option of living in the natal home. My discussion will focus on both scenarios, which will contrast the impact of differential access to economic and social capital, but also bring up a crucial similarity among returned WHMs in the lost decade.

The homecoming of the adult-aged ‘child’ and intergenerational frictions

Returned WHMs are even more likely than other young people to live with their parents for practical support, because their leaving and returning to Japan render their living and work conditions particularly unstable. All but one of my interlocutors lived in the natal home immediately prior to their departure, and for these young people, it was also the place of return after their WH. Even for those who had previously lived independently, their reliance on parental support increased during the re-establishment period. Over 80 percent of interlocutors
lived with parent(s) at least for the first six months after returning, and approximately 60 percent remained dependent for longer than two years.

For those who had always lived with parents, only minor challenges were reported, and it was soon business as usual. Yukie (female, 30) explained that ‘at first it felt strange to live at someone else’s house, but I got used to it again pretty quickly.’ Some enjoyed returning to the familiar environment where the parents encouraged their ‘adult-aged children’ to stay as long as they liked. Yukari (female, 24) was joyous when describing the first six months of her return:

I enjoy spending time with my family so much, especially my dad. He always says ‘You don’t need to get married, you can stay here as long as you want.’ We get on with each other really well, and it suits me to live this way at least for a while.

Others were not so lucky, however. Mariko (female, 27) found it painful to face her father’s nagging and scolding. Her father considered the daughter’s WH meaningless and only grudgingly accepted it as her last ‘holiday’ before growing up. Straight after returning, he expected Mariko to find a stable job, followed by meeting a future husband to inherit the family business of a small noodle restaurant. Mariko desperately described her situation during the first month of her return:

My dad yells at me the first thing in the morning. ‘You are already 26 years old, and still wandering around aimlessly. When I was at your age, I had been married already and managing the business! I’m too ashamed to talk to the neighbours about you!’

When Mariko revealed to him that she was thinking of returning to Australia to study at a tourism college for three months, he threatened to disown her. Takashi (male, 26) similarly complained about his mother:

My mum insists on taking rent in proportion to my salary, and even asks for a pay slip so I can’t cheat. She is constantly pressuring me to stay with my current job and find someone to settle down with. She said she would kick me out if I ever talked about going back to Australia again.

Unfavourable employment circumstances make it difficult, or undesirable, for
returned WHMs to live alone and become financially independent. Even if intergenerational conflicts were distressing at times, all interlocutors saw the financial advantages of living with parents compared to living alone. Frequently, parental support through free or ‘discount’ rent, help with chores or provision of meals and other necessities, helped sustain lost generation WHMs during unemployment. With no children of their own and parents still physically and financially independent, the responsibilities WHMs in my study had were mostly to look after themselves.

For the interlocutors, seeking life opportunities through the WH did not always coincide with their other goals in life, such as achieving financial independence. As they began settling back in Japan and considered their next move, parental concerns often intensified, because of a different understanding of what their children’s WH was about. The parents tended to view the WH as the youngsters’ last chance to resist adulthood. Therefore, the return to Japan meant the end of their ‘childish’ lifestyle, and the beginning of financial independence, a career and a family of their own. WHMs’ parents in my study were typically around the retirement age of 60–65 years old. As they approach the twilight of their lives, it is natural for ageing parents to worry how long they will remain capable of supporting their children, especially because it should soon be their turn to be supported by the younger generation, physically and sometimes financially (Asano and Shirahase 2007: 147).

The cases of intergenerational conflict in my data involve a clash of projects. Some parents pursued their project of ensuring that their children stayed on the conventional life course. According to the expectations of the previous generation, this was the way to reach adulthood. This project did not fit well with the kind of late modern self-making the lost generation WHMs were experimenting with, as reflexive individuals. The young people’s ability to continue engaging in self-development after returning to Japan was partly enhanced by parental support, but at the same time discouraged by conflicts at home. This clash was played out in the context of the competitive and flexibilised workforce in neoliberal Japan and the young people’s lack of the economic, social and cultural capital that is necessary to reinvent the self in response to ever-changing ‘market needs’. While their worries
and anxieties may be understandable, parents of returned WHMs frequently failed to understand the new pressure to become unique individuals, or to grasp the impact of the socio-economic shift in the lost decade on their children’s ability to make the transition to adulthood. Chapter 8 will discuss how social expectations of the parent’s generation were still influential in youth aspirations for marriage.

‘Guesthouses’ and risks

There were three interlocutors in my data who could not rely on material support from their parents. Here, my focus is on two WHMs\(^\text{187}\) who lived at what is called a ‘guesthouse’ (gesutohausu), backpacker-style temporary accommodation.\(^\text{188}\) Hiroshige decided to live in Tokyo to pursue professional training as a therapeutic masseur, but lacked savings to rent an apartment. Even if he could, Hiroshige explained, he would encounter problems, because his parents, retired farmers in a northern Japanese village, were not qualified to act as his financial guarantors.\(^\text{189}\) Masanori’s parents were on a low income and suffered from ill health. He managed to live independently for the first three years of his return, usually living at employer-provided accommodation, or at a girlfriend’s place. This situation changed when his father passed away. Masanori (male, 33) said ‘I had to give all my savings to help my mum. I’m not close to my family, but they are still important to me.’ These were the circumstances under which these male interlocutors found themselves living in an expensive, but poor quality guesthouse.

\(^{187}\) The third interlocutor used her aunt’s house as a base, as she disliked living with her mother and the stepfather. Prior to the WH, she usually lived with her boyfriend.

\(^{188}\) A guesthouse is similar to a backpacker’s hostel in many regards. Residents are not required to provide a guarantor or fees, and in exchange for a small key deposit and monthly rent in advance, they are granted access to a (sometimes shared) bedroom, the kitchen, showers, and other common facilities. The rent varies depending on locations and properties, and usually includes utilities. However, compared to a standard property of a similar quality, the rent is high. The rooms are generally small, and mercilessly so in the case of brand new guesthouses. Old guesthouse properties are usually refurbished from former company apartments and small office buildings. However, new ones are custom-built and their floor designs are highly compartmentalised, in order to make maximum profits from the limited floor surface. Through websites and publications targeting Japanese WHMs, a great number of advertisements show the diverse choices of various guesthouses in urban areas of Japan. For an example of a guesthouse in Tokyo and an interview with a returned WHM by an activist-writer, see Amamiya (2007:109–111).

\(^{189}\) In Japan, it is a standard practice for real estate agents or landlords to ask the tenant to provide a financial guarantor, usually someone in the family.
Originally begun as short-term accommodation for budget travellers from overseas, the guesthouse phenomenon has spread rapidly in recent years, catering for young Japanese who have few resources to rent a property, especially after returning from abroad. According to Hiroshige and his fellow Canadian ‘housemate’, such living arrangements are WHM-friendly, because many WHMs are already familiar with, and accepting of frugal, communal living conditions which they experienced in Australia and elsewhere. Particularly in the initial period of their return to Japan, guesthouses seem to provide a perfect place of residence for WHMs without parental support. Both Hiroshige and Masanori explained additional advantages of communal living as ‘Good to avoid loneliness because there is always someone around’ (Masanori, male, 33) and in the case of ‘mixed’ guesthouses where Japanese and foreign nationals live together, ‘useful for practicing English’ (Hiroshige, male, 34).

It is striking that neither interlocutor had previous experience of living in a guesthouse prior to their WH. In other words, it was the Australian WH that introduced them to communal living. Numerous WHMs I encountered in Australia associated their often substandard living conditions with the temporality of their existence in the host society. One of the interlocutors in Sydney summed this up one evening: ‘I can put up with shared rooms and shabby housing here, because it’s part of my overseas experience. It’s not forever’ (Noriko, female, 29). In a sense, returned WHMs who become guesthouse residents are required to continue a ‘WH-like’ experience in their homeland. But unlike an Australian WH, such an unstable living condition in Japan does not offer the same symbolic capital of a cosmopolitan life in the imagined West. In sum, a simple comparison between the pre- and post-WH shows that, in the case of interlocutors who lived at a guesthouse, the living standard had gone down since they first left Japan.

Hiroshige and Masanori subsequently continued their guesthouse living for four years and a year and a half, respectively. Despite the portrayal of ‘fun group living’ in the advertisements, the risks of guesthouse living are not negligible. With little legal and social protection for guesthouse residents, they could easily be evicted if rent payments were delayed. For low-income earners such as Hiroshige and Masanori, illnesses, injuries, income reductions and job losses may well signal the
loss of their housing.\textsuperscript{190} Besides, lost generation ‘youth’ are ageing, as the oldest of the generation reached 40 years old in 2010, and the largest cohort, the second baby boomers, turned 37 in the same year. Statistics show that the combination of an older age, a single status and low income is more likely to force people to live in poverty (Iwata 2007: 147, 156).

\textbf{The widening abyss: the difficulty of access to upward social mobility}

Despite their various and often humble class origins, a great proportion of WHMs’ parents’ generation can provide prolonged financial support to their offspring, because their generation rode the waves of national wealth accumulation when they were young workers. For example, Masanori’s father was ‘very poor (\textit{sugē binbō})’ (Masanori, male, 33) as a child. He grew up to become a labourer, and later managed to buy a house and support an ill wife and five children, including paying for the eldest son Masanori’s four-year private university education. Indeed, the major difference between the lost generation and their parents’ generation is their access to upward social mobility \textit{compared to their own parents}. The salaryman ideal of the economic boom time was born in the context of an expanding urban middle class and a plentiful supply of jobs for a greater number of workers (chapter 2). Countless young workers of this time benefited from employment opportunities in cities to rise above their parents in terms of material wealth. In contrast, the majority of the lost generation youth began their lives as city dwellers and grew up in an era when the middle-class aspirations of the salaryman ideal were still dominant in social imaginings. Given the sudden change of this landscape, the ‘employment ice age’ hit the lost decade youth hard.

As precarious workers, lost generation WHMs in my study expressed uncertainty about their future, and youth in other wealthy countries seem to share the feeling of anxiety. For example, in her investigation of the Generation X phenomenon, Ortner (2006: 90–91) discusses that, regardless of the class origin, the majority of the parent generation had enjoyed tremendous economic growth as part of the

\textsuperscript{190} In the case of employer-provided accommodation, a job loss directly leads to a loss of housing, putting people at immediate risks of homelessness and poverty (Iwata 2007: 163).
expanding middle class. While Ortner highlights the fascinating difference between these two groups of young people, the upper-middle-class and the lower-middle-class youth, my interest for the purposes of this chapter is their commonality. Whether the upper-middle-class youth were anxious about possible downward class mobility, or the lower-middle-class kids were frustrated about the seemingly inaccessible upward class mobility, the source of the unhappiness felt by both groups can be traced back to one factor. It was increasingly evident to them that they were unlikely to achieve the kind of upward social mobility that their parents enjoyed. Ortner observes (2006: 101-102):

Lower-middle-class rage and depression, and upper-middle-class terror and whining, are thus two sides of looking into the same abyss ... From the lower side, this abyss seems increasingly impossible to cross; from the upper side it seems all too easy.

While the majority of Japanese still perceive their social location within the middle stratum, the abyss has certainly become wider in the lost decade, pulling apart the previously admired image of Japan as a ‘universal middle stream society’ (sōchūryū shakai), and replacing it with the image of a kakusa shakai (society with the gap between the rich and the poor) (see chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion). WHMs are certainly not the poorest in society, and still largely identify with middle-class consumer patterns. However, their precarious positions in production after returning from Australia suggest that they were standing on the lower edge of the chasm, and my analysis of their experiences of employment indicate that they, too, found it hard to cross the widening abyss. In this challenging environment, what were their future aspirations and plans with regards to their project of reaching middle-class adulthood? What other projects did they pursue as part of their self-improvement after returning from Australia? These are the questions I attempt to answer in the next chapter.
Chapter 8

Expectations for the future

Upon returning to Japan, Working Holiday Makers’ (WHMs’) narratives exhibited a marked decline in references to ‘open-ended possibilities’, a previously strong focus of future expectations. In particular, older interlocutors expressed the primary feeling that, having returned from Australia, their youthful time of self-exploration and experiment was being replaced by the need to make ‘realistic’ life choices. There were several ways in which the interlocutors responded to this mounting pressure and negotiated a future path. The deployment of competing or contradictory discourses was a commonplace. The diversity and confusion in returned WHMs’ accounts of plans and expectations for the future highlight the muddy nature of late modern self-making. In the context of the ‘new vocationalism’, Morgan (2006: 150) states that the new economy in neoliberal society makes it hard to predict the future, and this may contribute to young individuals remaining vague and evasive about their future plans. Simply put, there is a sense that it is difficult to know what exactly will help in their transition to adulthood. In this chapter, I will examine the life options the young returned migrants discussed as their preferred courses of action into the future, and what these accounts reveal about becoming adults in late modern Japan.
Marriage: A symbol of adulthood and gendered social expectations

In Japan, the ability to create and maintain a family of one’s own signifies the conventional idea of maturity as responsible adults (Morley 1999: 71). Compared to the pre-return period (i.e. before arriving in, or while in, Australia), returned WHMs seemed much more conscious of marriage as a life event. The majority of interlocutors expressed a strong desire for marriage and family making. Age in general, and ‘already’ being in their thirties in particular, was a recurrent theme. For men, the discourse of the male breadwinner proved its durability across generations, and still had a powerful influence on their idea of what it meant to be an adult. Women talked about marriage in a different way. While they were equally keen to find a marriage partner for personal, social and economic reasons, some of them framed their desire for marriage in the context of continuous efforts for self-actualisation. Below, I will discuss and contrast the desire for marriage as described by male and female WHMs.

Japanese masculinity and the discourse of the breadwinner

When asked, all men in my study expressed their desire to marry. However, they uniformly expressed the view that their job insecurity and/or low-level salaries rendered them less attractive as prospective marriage partners. Despite their unconventionality as men who left Japan in their mid- to late-twenties, their attachment to the ideal of the male breadwinner was still strong. Kōji and Keisuke expressed their desire for marriage in the following manner:

But you gotta work full-time. Maybe girls get away with doing haken (‘temp’ work) or pāto (part-time work). And, not to be disrespectful, but they always have the option of becoming housewives, don’t they? But men can’t be doing haken or baito (permanent casual work) forever. Even with my full-time salary, it’s not really possible to get married and support a family for god knows how long (Kōji male, 30).

I do have a desire to marry (kekkon ganbō). I’m ready to get married now (laugh). And I want at least two kids. But it’s just as well that I don’t have a girlfriend at the moment. I need a proper income before I can talk about marriage (Keisuke, male, 28).
CHAPTER 8 EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Since permanent, full-time work remains the social expectation for Japanese men, deviating from this ‘norm’ often carries stigma and attracts negative attention from family and friends. Keisuke’s circumstances illustrate this well. His life at the time of the interview was quite different from his ideal of supporting a wife and two children. In between odd casual jobs, he mainly busied himself with seeking jobs in the film industry and managing household chores, while his father worked as a dental mechanic and his younger sister studied at a vocational college to become a nurse. He used the term ‘full-time house-husband’ to describe himself, with a hint of irony and defensiveness.

While he himself valued this family role, Keisuke explained how his friends’ opinions differed. Once, he nearly had a fight while drinking with friends from his academically competitive high school. His friends now earn high incomes in esteemed professions such as doctors or accountants, and, apparently out of concern, tried to convince him to ‘settle down’. A heated discussion about the definition of the ‘good life’ followed, until Keisuke asked them to drop the topic altogether. The social pressure felt by young Japanese men was plainly explained by Takashi (male, 26), a former precarious worker who was in a full-time permanent position at the time of the interview: ‘All my friends have permanent jobs (shūshoku shiteru) so there is this concern about how people would think of me (sekentei ga kininaru), and the constant competition.’

The expectation for an adult man to work full-time is inseparable from the Japanese idea of the male breadwinner. The Japanese equivalent of the English term ‘breadwinner’ is daikokubashira, which literally means the central pillar that is fundamental to supporting the entire house (Gill 2003: 144, 156). The resilience of this ideal notwithstanding, attaining it has become much harder for the lost generation men. The returned WHMs of the lost generation have good reason to be pessimistic about their chance of finding a wife and fulfilling the breadwinner ideal. Government statistics shows (Shūgyō kōzō kihon chōsa 2007 cited in Hirao 2009: 216) that only 28 percent of male irregular workers between the age of 30–34 were married, compared to 59 percent of their full-time permanent counterpart. For the 35–39 age bracket, the numbers were 27 percent compared to 60 percent, respectively. Male income-earning power is closely related to their marriage
prospects, and the less they earn, the less they are likely to find a willing woman to marry (Iwata 2007: 146). In addition, when lost generation men do marry, it is more likely for them to form a double income household, rather than assume the sole breadwinner role, whatever their preference (Kashima et. al 2007: 96–97).

These social trends indicate that Japanese men whose career paths were disrupted by their Working Holiday (WH) experience, and associated increase in precarious work, are at risk of not meeting their expectations of marriage. While many married women would not think twice about being the secondary income earner, men are unlikely to be comfortable depending on their wives’ income for economic survival. Whether real or imagined, failing to live up to social expectations may have a negative impact on young men’s sense of self. In a roundtable discussion on the topic of future financial stability and prospects for marriage, one of the furitā men in his late twenties expressed his low self-esteem: ‘if I was a woman, I’d never want to marry a furitā like myself’ (Amamiya 2007:171). My findings point to the fact that not only precarious furitā, but permanent workers may share the same anxiety about marriage prospects based on low levels of income and lack of job security.

My findings also reveal that these marriage-desiring men were not only influenced by the social expectations of the previous generation, but also by the neoliberal, late modern discourse of reflexivity and self-development. Even as the returned WHMs sought a ‘traditional’ way to achieve adulthood as a family provider, they did not forget to express their commitment to striving for the best, and making smart, strategic choices in life. For example, Keisuke, the self-proclaimed ‘house-husband’, stressed that such status was temporary and he was actively engaged in other activities such as looking for permanent work, writing for an online magazine and helping out his university lecturer friend as a guest speaker. Similarly, Kōji spent a good amount of the interview time explaining why he was planning to stick to his full-time job, even though he was not particularly thrilled by it. He spelt this out:

Most of my musician friends work full-time, doing all sorts of things for economic reasons. These days I also think it’s better to live like that than work as arubaito and try to make it in the music world. I want to keep playing [the trumpet], and I want to make a family too, so I think keeping a stable job is important, a respectable choice even, because it helps me to do what I want to do.
The emergence of the neoliberal discourse of the self has meant that the appeal of the salaryman lifestyle has decreased symbolically, if not materially. Takeyama states (2010: 242) that in neoliberal Japan:

politico-economic and popular discourses have increasingly promoted entrepreneurial creativity in contrast to the salaryman-centered corporate and economic model.

This discursive paradigm shift has prompted lost generation men to react in a variety of ways. In Takeyama’s discussion of ‘hosts’ (hosuto) (2010: 241–243), young men who work in Japan’s sex and entertainment industry, the conflicting impact of dominant discourses on Japanese male subjectivities is intriguing. On the one hand, these working men of entrepreneurial spirit discursively position themselves in opposition to the salaryman, in order to highlight their freedom, initiative and creativity. On the other hand, they prefer to work as part of an exploitative host club rather than independently as ‘freelances’, because belonging to a workplace to make their own living validates their status as legitimate citizens, unlike ‘pimps or gigolos, or social losers’ (Takeyama 2010: 242). In other words, the salaryman ideal still guides their behaviour, even as they reject it. Returned male WHMs similarly showed their responses to incompatible ideals in the context of limiting material circumstances. Even while finding salaryman-style job security and the breadwinner role desirable, these men resist being seen as simply following convention to ensure stability.

Strange bedfellows?: Women’s aspirations for marriage and self-actualisation

In contrast, under no serious social pressure to maintain a full-time career throughout their working life, the women in my study were much more relaxed about their status as precarious workers. This was especially the case for those in their twenties. According to Japan’s ageist recruitment practices, this group are seen to be highly employable for precarious positions. Some, like Megumi (female, 28), cited flexibility and the low levels of commitment required as reasons for staying in casual employment, while Kaori (female, 32) and others wanted
permanent positions primarily for job security, as opposed to greater responsibilities or prospects for promotion. Those who preferred casual work tended to view precarious work as a bridging option before marriage and motherhood. None of the female interlocutors ruled out marriage as a life option, although more than half of them were in no great hurry, and one was quite passive (‘if it happened that way...’ [Tomoe, 30]). About a third made no secret of the urgency of their desire to marry, and three actually married within a year of returning to Japan.

Keiko was one of the interlocutors who expressed a pressing desire for marriage. She returned from Australia at the age of 31, and was more than happy to work as *haken* until she found a husband. Keiko had worked for the same construction company for seven years before going to Australia. She had reached a level in the organisation as high as an *ippanshoku* (non-career track worker) could hope for:

I've seen it all. Really, I want to get married soon if I can find a nice person. ...Until then, *haken* will do. I am doing a similar kind of work as before, but earn more cash now. All I need now is a husband, but that’s the difficult part (laugh).

A similar feeling was expressed by Yukie (female, 30), who became engaged to her boyfriend six months after her return to Japan. She did not conceal that her decision was a result of compromise: she had just turned 30, and her fiancée was on a career track at a major logistics company, with a promising future income level. She said in a tone of resignation, ‘It’s OK...I don’t think anyone better will turn up anyway.’ This attitude of hers contrasts with her comment on the eve of her return to Japan. Two days before returning to Japan and reflecting on the year she spent in Sydney, she told me that a Japanese-speaking flight attendant position at Qantas was being advertised. She thought she had a good chance, and said that she would have applied for it, had she been younger and single. Yukie also reported that her last employer at a local branch of a major Japanese tourism company offered to sponsor her skilled migration visa. I was reminded how, throughout the year that I had known her, she constantly vacillated between returning to Japan to marry her boyfriend, or betting on other possibilities such as continuing to work in Sydney.
There was a tension in these women’s accounts. On the one hand, there was a sense of fatigue and concern for future security, economic and emotional. A dramatic experiment such as taking the Australian WH demands energy and determination, and maintaining the same level of enthusiasm and readiness for more experimentation can be draining. On the other hand, these women were under pressure to respond to the newly hegemonic neoliberal discourse of the entrepreneurial and self-actualising self. Both Keiko and Yukie emphasised that they were not planning to settle into the prescribed role of the wife/mother by ‘simply’ putting the needs of the family before their own. Instead, they shared their imaginations as to how they would, after marriage, continue broadening their horizons through paid and unpaid work, as well as learning new skills through adult education courses.

According to feminist psychologist Ogura Chikako, such ambitions are typical of graduates of two-year colleges and lower-ranked universities (Ogura 2004 cited in Bardsley and Hirakawa 2005: 121–122). What she calls a ‘new housewife orientation’ is women’s aspiration for marriage with a twist. Instead of accepting the role of the salaryman’s wife that their mothers’ generation might have taken on more readily, these young women treat marriage as a way to continue their self-improvement. In the context of women’s self-actualisation through consumption, Bardsley and Hirakawa boldly claim that this new yearning for housewife status comes from the fact that ‘without exceptional educational credentials in contemporary Japanese society they can only hope to pursue self and individuality after finding a well-off husband’ (Bardsley and Hirakawa 2005: 122). I am less certain if this claim is accurate, for there are high-income earning women without exceptional educational credentials, and not every woman would necessarily consider self-exploration as an expensive endeavour. However, one thing is clear. Whether or not women in my study were ‘truly’ serious about seeking self-improvement through marriage, the idea of self-improvement as a life-long activity is so widespread that it seems increasingly unacceptable to deviate from this new ‘norm’ at the discursive level, if not in actual behaviour.

For single women such as Keiko, seeking marriage as a way of making a living may be risky. The conventional avenue for finding stable salaryman husbands has
diminished as a result of the casualisation of the workforce in the lost decade. Female graduates of two-year colleges or four-year universities used to be popular candidates for the ippanshoku, or non-career track permanent positions. With their moderate education and employment history, these female ‘support workers’ were, according to the logic of the salaryman-as-the-model-citizen, a perfect match for career-track male workers to create a middle-class family together. In the lost decade, these former ippanshoku jobs came to be dominated by female irregular workers, most notably the haken staff (Yamada 2004: 73–76). It is no coincidence that the proportion of single youth has increased since the beginning of the lost decade. If precarious workers remained single, uncertainty would be a constant feature of their work life, due to job insecurity and low levels of income and employer welfare protection. As the recent economic downturn has proven, short-term contracts may not be always renewed, and finding a new employer or a haken agent will get harder and harder as they age. These factors, in addition, have implications for the retirement years.

The ‘parasite single’ debate and the limit of individualisation under late modernity

Debate and a sense of social panic have followed the rise of the single youth population in the lost decade. Spearheading the debate on the ‘problem of single youth’ was sociologist Masahiro Yamada. Yamada’s pejorative term ‘parasite singles’ (parasaito shinguru) refers to adult unmarried youth (mostly in their twenties) who live with parents as financial dependents (Yamada 1999). Most of my interlocutors fit this definition. Yamada considers them parasitic, because he believes that they make inadequate contributions to the household, monetary or otherwise, and this enables youths to maximise their disposable income and enjoy a luxurious consumer lifestyle (Yamada 1999: 10; 41). The implications were that these young people were selfish, and their individual attitude needed to improve so that they could become responsible adults (that is, to build a family through marriage and procreation).

The parasite single debate has some important parallels with the furitā debate (see chapter 2). Just as the furitā was considered to be a problem of the young male
population, the parasite single was mostly assumed to be female.\(^{191}\) Despite his apparent focus on ‘young people’ in general, central to Yamada’s problematisation of the parasite single was that women were remaining single and childless, and this was having a negative impact on Japan’s already decreasing birthrates. Just as the *furitā* were portrayed as young men’s refusal to become salaryman-style ideal male citizens, the parasite single was cast as challenging the ideal of the devoted and dutiful housewife. As Dales correctly points out, young men who continue to live with their parents and young women who work precariously do not attract the same level of social attention, because ‘the implications of these choices do not reflect on the gendered social maturity of the actors, and thus allow the individual to pass as a mature adult’ (Dales 2005: 142). These two major social debates in the lost decade reveal how marriage continues to be portrayed as a path to middle-class adulthood in Japan, and to the durability of gender roles within this institution.

However, as Yamada himself admits in his later publication (Yamada 2004: 21), the image of the parasite single he portrayed as consciously (and ‘selfishly’) defying social expectations comfortably applies to young singles today.\(^{192}\) As proportions of female and male precarious workers further increase, more youth are predicted to delay marriage or remain single. This is because, firstly, males are reluctant to marry until they can find stability and a secure income (Iwata 2007: 146–147). Keisuke and Kōji’s comments above come to mind. Secondly, their female counterparts also wait until they meet financially stable men. As the available number of eligible men falls, the ‘competition’ among marriage-seeking women may increase, especially among precarious workers. Yukie’s rush to marry her salaryman boyfriend whom she met through a ‘traditional avenue’—while working

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\(^{191}\) Prior to the parasite single, there was the *dokushin kizoku* (‘single aristocracy’) of the 1980s. These ‘single aristocrats’ were targets of envy, because remaining single was, at least for men, beginning to gain a certain level of social acceptance as a legitimate life choice (Iwata 2007: 146). This is because these singles were implicitly male and in contrast to the duty-bound salaryman with a family. On the other hand, women of the 1980s were still expected to marry. Even in the early 1990s, it was said that ‘single women are like Christmas cakes’—worthless after 25.

\(^{192}\) The original characteristics of Yamada’s parasite single were based on the circumstances during the very early period of the post-bubble economy, before the full impacts of negative economic events began reverberating. The situation of the time can be glimpsed in a book by the best selling author and a self-proclaimed parasite single, ‘Sarada’. In her book, she describes living at her parental home as a conscious strategy to maintain relative financial freedom for her consumer needs, and writes that it was the second best after the bubble-economy dream of a high flying single life in an up-market ‘bachelor’ apartment (Sarada 1998: 3).
as an *ippanshoku* support worker in the same workplace—is rational from this viewpoint.

I have discussed returned WHMs’ gendered desires for marriage. This topic was one way in which they discussed their transition to adulthood as they looked forward into the future. The youth were pulled in different directions by ‘traditional’ social expectations of the parent generation, neoliberal late modern discourses and individual aspirations. While they were reluctant to declare that their search for originality and self-actualisation was over, social expectations of their parent generation strongly guided the young people’s understanding of life experiences (Nayak 2006), in this case, marriage. Consequently, those interlocutors who sought marriage were at pains to emphasise that it did not signal the end of their quest for self-actualisation.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 40) point out that contradictory forces operate in late modern society. That is, individualisation co-exists with acute pressure for people to follow social conventions, and the extent to which individual decisions can be exercised depends strongly on external factors. Based on my analysis of WHMs’ expectations for marriage, I also exercise caution against exaggerating the level of individualisation in late modern societies (see chapter 1 for my discussion of Giddens’ exaggeration in this regard). Instead, what has been revealed by my findings is the durability of two markers of social positioning, gender and age, as factors shaping the desires and aspirations of young people in the lost decade, even as the young people each seek their unique, individualised path towards self-actualisation.

In order to achieve the goal of self-actualisation and reach the state of fulfilment, returned WHMs continued to engage in self-improvement. In the next section, I will look at their efforts with focus on their desire to accumulate cosmopolitan capital, which remained a sought-after form of cultural capital for my interlocutors.
Cosmopolitan capital for self-improvement

Talking about the future frequently brought up returned WHMs' plans for further self-improvement. Even when returned WHMs were satisfied that they had made their best efforts during the WH, they never once expressed unqualified fulfilment. Instead, the prevailing feeling was that there were more things they should do in the future. Particularly prevalent among my interlocutors was a continued interest in accumulating cosmopolitan forms of cultural capital.

The English language remained highly valued by many returned WHMs, even though, as discussed in chapter 7, some interlocutors experienced first hand that their level of English proficiency was neither a rare commodity nor a sought-after skill. Such a realisation made some returnees cynical about the Japanese social obsession with English, and disillusioned with the place of English proficiency in the recruitment market (see, for example, Kaori's earlier comment in chapter 7, page 202). But others were still mesmerised with positive images of the popular foreign language. Takashi (male, 26) returned to Japan a year and a half prior to our meeting, and openly admitted that his English had not improved very much during his stay in Australia. His intention was to go back to Australia and work on his language skills, as well as to gain a long-term visa one day. He explained this wish:

Whether or not I can return to Australia, I just wanna be able to speak English. That's what I want before anything. ... English has such a cool image, besides, it will help me get a good job in Japan. [Kumiko: Can you tell me how it might help?] My friends told me that haken agencies value your English ability over 600 or 700 points on your TOEIC score, even if you are looking for jobs unrelated to using the language. You see, it's because English is seen as an extra skill, almost like a qualification. When I heard all this, I thought to myself, 'English is really necessary, after all.'

Keen to combine her interest in working abroad and a future career, Megumi (female, 28) enrolled in a part-time evening course to gain a certificate to teach Japanese while working full-time hours as a haken administrator at a communications company. It took her a year and a half to complete the course. As Megumi began discussing employment options with her teacher, she recalled how,
suddenly, she became unsure about what she wanted to do with her new qualification. She spelt out her change of mind:

My teacher said I could find a job in Thailand, but getting paid in Bahts on a local level salary isn’t particularly attractive. I don’t speak Thai, and now I’m coming to realise moving there to work full-time isn’t the same as going there for a holiday. It seemed like a good idea when my memory of Australia was still fresh, but now...I don’t know. I guess I will keep my current job until I really know what I want to do with myself.

Interest in qualifications is a widespread phenomenon in the lost decade. Dubbed *shikaku būmu* (the ‘qualification boom’), obtaining all sorts of certificates and qualifications became a new trend. In addition to traditional vocational training such as nursing and accounting, numerous areas of interest emerged as new ‘skill’ categories. In the past, all qualification tests had to be accredited by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The abolition of this requirement in 2006 led to the mushrooming of new, sometimes obscure ‘skill areas’.

Associated businesses seek profits by establishing schools, running courses, overseeing the test processes, publishing textbooks and selling other learning materials. The number of existing qualification tests is estimated to be over 1,000, but due to the lack of an accreditation system, accurate statistics are unavailable.

The qualification boom is an expression of faith in a ‘culture of experts’, which has thrived on the widely shared feeling of the neoliberal, late modern lost decade that individuals should continuously cultivate their abilities to access upward social mobility as well as to improve themselves as a ‘moral’ act. The long recession and widespread job uncertainty among lost generation workers has also contributed to an unprecedented interest in obtaining qualifications. For the lost generation...

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193 New ‘qualifications’ include some obscurities, including the comprehension and memorisation of the Tokyo City Guide, a popular guidebook, Anime Proficiency (Japanese animation drawing skills) and Timetable Reading (the ability to use proficiently a publicly released major train timetable).

194 In order to control the increasingly opaque operations of new and unknown organisations, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has recently released guidelines to encourage all organisations to assess themselves against set criteria and publish the result (‘Ryūgaku chūkai ōte ga hasan: Gyōkai dantai ya hōkisei ga hitsuyō’. *Yomiuri Shinbun* 25 October 2008).
WHMs in particular, heightened future uncertainty or unmet ambitions play a part in their strong will to invest in themselves and maximise their life chances. In the spirit of in late modern risk culture, they exhibited an entrepreneurial desire for self-improvement. This proactive attitude, furthermore, co-existed with the evasiveness and vagueness prevalent in many narratives of contemporary young workers, as noted by Morgan and discussed above (Morgan 2006: 150—see the chapter opening). In the above examples, Takashi (male, 26) treated English language ‘qualifications’ as insurance against unknown risks in the future and portrays himself as being strategic, while his wish to return to Australia kept altering its tone and strength. Megumi (female, 28) doubted her career choices after a significant investment in the teaching qualification, and postponed her decision indefinitely by remaining in her precarious job as a casual administrator.

It is not surprising that returned WHMs gravitated towards capital accumulation in the field of cosmopolitanism, given their initiative to migrate to Australia in the first place, and the different values they placed on the experience. While the forms of cosmopolitan capital they sought were diverse, it was noticeable that their efforts were inseparable from the consumption of products and services offered by a variety of business interests. With this in mind, in the next section I will examine returned WHMs’ continued appetite for temporary migration.

**Temporary migration as an act of hope**

It was not unusual for returned WHMs to express their strong desire to leave Japan again. Some were in their twenties, and therefore still eligible for the Canadian or New Zealand WH. Mariko (female, 27) was one repeat WHM who headed for Canada exactly two years after her return from Australia, because she wanted to ‘really improve English skills this time, and to do something that I can’t do later.’ Yukari (female, 24) had decided she would take part in the Canadian WH while she was still in Australia. Other returnees such as Keisuke grew discontented with their post-WH life in Japan over time. This group yearned most intensely for chances to go abroad again. They exhibited a strong inclination to consider undesirable aspects of their life as inherent in Japanese society, and thus unavoidable. For these interlocutors, out-migration yet again signified hope for change.
A small minority of interlocutors found ways to leave Japan as temporary skilled workers. After ending my physical presence in the ‘field’, news about various movements continued to be reported by certain interlocutors. For example, following nearly three years of precarious work and being a ‘house-husband’ for his father and sister, Keisuke secured a two-year full-time contract as a camera technician in Samoa, as part of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers Program (seinen kaigai kyōryokutai), funded by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He lacked interest in Samoa as a country, but noted that it was an English-speaking environment and close enough to Australia for him to make occasional visits. Masanori, the full-time precarious worker at a tourism agency, was another example. After four years of seeking to return to Australia, the first chance to get out of Japan appeared in the form of a one-year project assistant position to help build a school in Fiji. He grabbed it immediately. Masanori’s rationale was almost identical to Keisuke’s: ‘Fiji is English-speaking and also in the Pacific, so I might meet someone who knows someone in Australia.’ For both men, their destination was accidental, and they had few and vague expectations for the new temporary jobs, or plans for afterwards.

As seen in these examples, international mobility does not always have a clear endpoint, and uncertainty plays a much more central role in migrants’ trajectories than previously emphasised by most scholars. Grillo (2007: 209), however, points out the unstable relationship between permanent and temporary migration, and observes that while some have clear-cut objectives, others muddle their way through, as they react to changing circumstances. The open-ended nature of transnational mobility and potential for repeat migration is well expressed in the words of Haines et al. (2007: 967):

Migration often involves a series of incremental shifts in migration options that lead to geographical moves of indefinite duration. Those movements, in turn, become the basis for additional decisions about possible future moves – also of indefinite duration. The implication is that migration is not a rending of the social fabric, but an iterative and cumulative reweaving of that fabric. To move is human, and to move again is perhaps even more so. Migration thus emerges as an open-ended process, rather than one that necessarily leads to closure.
On the one hand, the option of leaving for overseas again became possible to contemplate, because, as discussed earlier, the majority of returned WHMs were single and had no dependents to take care of. On the other hand, a number of obstacles existed for the young returnees to turn this ‘option’ into reality. The availability of visas was a major problem affecting most people. The difficulty in gaining a work permit was a significant factor contributing to the popularity of the WH for self-funded young people, or those with insufficient financial support from the family. The WH was, however, no longer a possibility for the majority, due to the age limit. Alternatives were to become a full-time overseas student, or find a business visa sponsor. The former was prohibitive due, again, to costs, and the latter was inaccessible unless migrants possessed highly sought-after expertise or useful social contacts. Even for those who managed to secure skilled-worker status abroad, the work itself tended to be precarious. As my data suggest, the interlocutors were inclined to find the WH mobility attractive, partly because they lacked marketable specialist skills and economic capital. This same lack haunted them after returning to Japan, and restricted their chances to live and work abroad on a long-term basis.

Insufficient access to economic, social and cultural capital has made it difficult for the majority of interlocutors to follow their wish to live and work abroad. For instance, Takashi (male, 26) must first jump through a number of hoops before eventually gaining permanent residency in Australia:

Learning to be a chef would give me an advantage to apply for residency, but first I need to pass the English test to enrol [in a vocational college in Australia]. But even before that, it will take two to three years to save 2,000,000 yen [for the school fees and living expenses while studying]. The best option would be to borrow money from my parents so I don’t have to waste these years. But there is no way my mum would agree, so... I suppose I have no choice but rob a bank? (laughs)

Returned WHMs’ limiting circumstances contrast with elite Hong Kong transnational migrants in Ong’s study who strategically accumulate desired forms of capital through their mobility. The Japanese youth in my study were largely unable to ‘respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic
conditions’ (Ong 1999: 6). While they were fully aware that such a form of flexible capital accumulation was unavailable to them in practice, the air of advantage and glamour associated with flexible migration still affected them in their imaginations. Asked to describe an ideal situation in the future, a number of interlocutors responded in a manner similar to the following:

I’d like to buy a house in Japan and Australia, so I can come and go (ittarikitari dekiru kara). I don’t want to get stuck in one place. Each place has good things (Yoshie, female, 32).

I’d move between the city and the countryside every five or 10 years, as if I go between work and retirement. For example, I love the intensity of Shinjuku [an area of Tokyo popular for its entertainment industry], but also would like to go fishing in northern NSW and enjoy rural living (Mitsuru, male, 31).

The ability to come and go between places as they please was a widely-shared fantasy among returned WHMs, regardless of whether they actually wanted to move out of Japan again. Australia tended to represent a more relaxed lifestyle and a place of escape from the drudgery of life in Japan. Japan was still an important place for the majority of the youth to remain connected, because of family, friends, and familiar cultural practices such as eating habits and entertainment. The desire for flexible movement in the case of interlocutors was a fantasy of being able to pluck themselves out of a particular place whenever disadvantages associated with that place became a stumbling block. This way, they would be able to enjoy the ‘good things’ about each place without feeling stuck. It is in this sense that I argue that the act of international mobility is about maintaining hope for the future (chapter 3). As Hage explains (2005: 470), ‘We move physically so we can feel that we are existentially on the move again or at least moving better’.

I have shown, however, that in reality the large majority of returned WHMs cannot maintain endless migration. First and foremost, they lack the means to sustain the ‘coming and going’ lifestyle. In addition, as chapter 5 documented, becoming functional in a new society is a very time- and energy-consuming affair, and thus not a practical ‘solution’ to life’s problems, unless there is sufficient economic, social and cultural capital to draw on. Continuous mobility across borders in search of fulfilment is also existentially unsustainable, if it is not accompanied by a sense of
moving forward in life. Forever moving ‘sideways’, with the ever-present fear of downward mobility, may pose the risk of eventually replacing the sense of hope with alienation, displacement and pointlessness.

Whatever the after-effects, one unintended consequence of international mobility for the interlocutors was the reinforcement of their exploited position in the consumption-driven, post-industrial economy. As already seen, returned WHMs’ persistent efforts for capital (re)accumulation frequently led them to consume more goods and services, such as English textbooks, private language lessons, and various adult learning courses. In particular, their drive for further temporary migration usually turned them into repeat customers of the ‘merchants of cosmopolitanism’. As the low-income, precarious workers spent their hard-earned money in this way, the return for their self-investment seemed easily claimed by multi-billion-dollar industries promoting international migration, English language learning, and other sought-after ‘products’.

In the next section, I will further delve into the narratives of the ideal future. Not merely an escapist dream, the young people’s desire to lead a cosmopolitan life reveals the complexity of the individual fulfilment that they earnestly sought, and what acts as an immediate impediment.

The pursuit of fulfilment: individual success and social contribution

Theorists of late modernity tend to give weight to the consumption-based aspects of life, and highlight the individualistic nature of self-making. In chapter 1 I referred to Giddens’ exaggeration of the individualisation of society, and Bauman’s over-pessimistic attitude towards late modern society as producing people who live to consume, and the corresponding meaninglessness. My data complicate such views by indicating that the desire for self-improvement is not always an individualistic search for superficial satisfaction through ‘consumption.’ Asked to imagine their ideal life scenarios without financial and other material constraints, returned WHMs recurrently described their ideas as follows:
I’d like to use my fortune for the world. For example, I’d provide hospital services to the ill, or give food to the hungry. And if these things are happening because of lack of education, I want to build a school for them (Yukari, female, 24).

I would want to donate money to starving children, then buy my own house, one in Tokyo and one in Sydney (Emi, female, 27).

I’d build and operate a school in South East Asia (Yoshie, female, 32).

On the one hand, the seriousness of the interlocutors’ interest in helping the ‘needy’ is unclear. That these comments all emphasise helping disadvantaged children in developing countries suggests that this may be a currently fashionable aspiration. Hollywood and Japanese celebrities have been publicly engaged in such activities in recent years, and this trend may have played a role in these imaginings. On the other hand, there was a strong sense of wanting to be useful to the society at large, beyond seeking immediate gain as individuals. The desire to make a contribution was both an expression of eagerness to work in a context in which they are valued, and an indication that this was not happening in the present. After a lengthy explanation of the reasons why he ‘chose’ to work full-time instead of following his dream of becoming a professional jazz trumpet player; Kōji (male, 30) was still not completely reconciled with salaryman life in Japan, at least at the level of the imagination:

I’ve survived Australia, and later travelled Europe, so I am confident to set up a life for myself anywhere in the world. [...] If someone needed me to go overseas and complete some task tomorrow, I’ll go immediately and I know I can do well.

Hiroshige (male, 34) decided to become a remedial masseur after a physiotherapist helped him recover from his chronic back pain during his WH. He described his plan to open a practice in his regional hometown one day, so that he could ‘help old people relieve their pain.’ Similarly, Masanori (male, 33) passionately stated the following, while discussing his dream of running an eco-tourism business in Australia for Japanese tourists:
I loved working in rural areas [during his WH], and I’d like to use my knowledge and language skills to educate people from Japan about nature in Australia. I want to be the bridge between the two countries in a useful way.

When asked about their dream life, all but one interlocutor said, without prompting, that they would continue working, even if they never had to worry about money. Their various imaginings for the future were sometimes understood as unattainable and at other times portrayed as reachable, but distant, goals. In any case, they verbalised their readiness to put effort in activities they consider worthwhile, if given a chance to do so. Whatever the personal interest at the time of the interview—and their idea of a desirable future life course was often no more than a vague image—returned WHMs expressed keenness to combine personal passion and their individual abilities, to make some kind of positive impact in this world, most notably through their labour. Regardless of how serious and realistic their preparedness was, the dominance of such accounts in my data indicates that they thought it important to demonstrate their wish to strive for the improvement of themselves, and the world that surrounds them.

The common thread running through narratives of returned WHMs about their future was a particular idea of fulfilment in adulthood. The young people longed for opportunities to explore their personal potential and cultivate new knowledge and skills. This was so that they could earn a decent living and increase their sense of self-worth, as well as gain respectable social status and make a contribution as valued members of society. Far from being a jumble, this mix of achievements the Japanese youth seek reveals an important but neglected aspect of self-making in late modernity. That is, subjective measures of individual success in their quest for self-actualisation and ultimate fulfilment are often inseparable from social recognition. While individual ambition and the desire for social status are often cast in opposition to wanting to make social contributions, these aspirations are not mutually exclusive. Instead, it is much more productive to see the young people’s desire to give something back to society, and be recognised for it, as an important part of the self-actualisation they pursue. In other words, doing good, knowing that one is good, and being seen as such are all important for one’s sense of self, and of fulfilment in life.
WHMs moved between Japan and Australia in pursuit of a place where they could be the person they wanted to be, and the person they wanted others to see in them. However, as their experience of return to Japan indicates, WH mobility to Australia rarely resulted in their wish becoming reality, be it as a cosmopolitan professional or as a fulfilled worker in a new career path. Among the many potential ways to make social contributions and develop a positive sense of self, work, especially paid employment, emerged as particularly important for the young people in my study. There was a strong interest in finding exciting work opportunities in the mainstream economy, which would help them actualise themselves in adulthood (Tateiwa 2007: 29). As discussed extensively, however, lost generation WHMs had a hard time finding secure forms of employment that could also become a source of satisfaction. Seen in this light, I agree with Bauman, at least partly, when he voices his pessimism regarding the aestheticisation of labour in late modernity:

Work that is rich in gratifying experience, work as self-fulfilment, work as the meaning of life, work as the core or the axis of everything that counts, as the source of pride, self-esteem, honour and deference or notoriety, in short, work as vocation, has become the privilege of the few; a distinctive mark of the elite, a way of life the rest may watch in awe, admire and contemplate at a distance but experience only vicariously through pulp fiction and the virtual reality of televised docu-dramas (Bauman 1998: 35).

However, while they might experience obstacles in their path towards finding a valued and satisfying vocation, my interlocutors do not fit the image Bauman portrays of the vast majority of workers: helpless, passive observers of someone else’s ‘good life’. The young Japanese in my study actively identified with the idea of self-actualisation, and pursued certain consumption patterns as well as chances to attain valued social positions as workers.

The personal fulfilment, satisfaction and pleasure one seeks by investing in a certain identity is often intertwined with the issue of social recognition, because these feelings partly derive from the fact that one’s identity is socially approved. Moreover, social recognition is not just about obtaining a favourable evaluation of the self in society, but attaining certain power that derives from it. For example, if a returnee WHM established an identity as someone who actively acts on their yaritaikoto (vocational passion), the alignment of this identity with the neoliberal
discourse of entrepreneurial spirit may help legitimise the act of quitting a job and becoming a low-income earning furitā or a single male precarious worker in his thirties. Complicating the choice of identities is the fact that various, completing social discourses make available multiple and contradictory subject positions (Moore 1994: 64). To continue with the above example, this particular identity may be at odds with the salaryman value of the parent generation and certain employers, and may lead to intergenerational frictions because of not holding permanent jobs. As my analysis has shown, my interlocutors attempted to discursively merge competing and sometimes clashing identities into one coherent story. This is because each identity offered a distinct platform on which to claim a reward, be it social approval, respect, a status or even economic benefits (Moore 1994: 66). In other words, each subject position allowed a different possibility for the young people to exercise their agency, in order to pursue their project of self-making, and ultimately, fulfilment.

On the surface, people living in a late modern society seem to have a greater variety of life options available to them than in the past. However, the neoliberal language of individual freedom and entrepreneurial pursuit of ‘success’ masks the fact that most young people living in late modern society do not share the same level of resources – various forms of capital – as members of privileged social groups do. Furlong and Cartmel call the gap between subjective perceptions of life’s possibilities and ‘objective’ reality the ‘epistemological fallacy’, and argue that:

because there are a much greater range of pathways to choose from, young people may develop the impression that their own route is unique and that the risks they face are to be overcome as individuals rather than as members of a collectivity (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 7).

My findings support this argument to a great extent, in that even while WHMs were at pains to cultivate their unique individual life paths, difficulties they experienced as lost generation workers in Japan, and migrant workers in Australia, were firmly based on structural factors, such as their classed, gendered and ethnicised social position. Moreover, as Furlong and Cartmel speculate, the disappointment or

195 As Moore emphasises (1994: 66), the act of choosing identities in which one invests is largely subconscious and emotional, rather than a result of rational choice.
frustration the youth felt with regards to their self-improvement tended to be rationalised as due to individual shortcomings such as insufficient efforts or the need to change strategies. Rather than considering life’s risks as unfairly distributed and beyond their control, my young Japanese interlocutors were inclined to take responsibility for their own ‘failure’. They then had to either renew their commitment to continuous endeavours towards self-actualisation as something in which they ‘chose’ to invest in, or to reconcile somehow their reality with the image of the life they could have had.

However, I warn against naturalising such a gap between the subjective understanding and the objective reality of growing up in late modern society. While Furlong and Cartmel in their influential *Young People and Social Change* (1997 [2009]) devote their attention to the persistence of structural influences on the lives of young people, their very choice of the word ‘epistemological fallacy’ to describe this gap places weight on the young people themselves. My case study of lost generation WHMs as workers on the move shows that common impediments to their search for fulfilment were frequently a result of structural factors, such as difficult upward career mobility, increasing job insecurity and lack of alternatives to working under unfavourable conditions for financial necessity. To overcome such structurally imposed barriers, the returned WHMs would have needed economic capital. In the introductory chapter, I shared a concern of critics of Giddens that not everyone may live their life as a self-reflexive project to the same degree. My findings resonate with the following sentiments:

[...] Michael Jackson and Elizabeth Taylor have been able to redefine themselves as mythic figures only because they have the money to do so. In this context, we must suggest that hyper-differentiation, disembedding and the ‘globalized commodification’ of subjectivity and personal identity demand – first and foremost – that actors are well funded. (May and Cooper 1995: 80)

This seemingly simple fact is too often overlooked in lost-decade Japan and instead, the neoliberal discourse of self-responsibility and the entrepreneurial self has the power to trap returned WHMs in continuous and potentially risky endeavours for self-improvement, without a sufficient safety net. Under these circumstances, a
sense of individual success and fulfilment, as well as social contribution remained goals yet to be achieved.

**Conclusion**

This final part of the thesis has traced WHMs patterns of life after Australia and their shifting emotions about their return to Japan and the future ahead of them. The experience of return contrasted sharply with the hope and excitement of the WHMs outlook prior to going to Australia. Compared to the pre-departure optimism, there was a heightened awareness that choosing one path may mean missing out on others.

In chapter 7, the focus was on employment issues. Within the first few years of return, there was a clear pattern of returned WHMs ending up with jobs that were worse than, or at best the same level as, those they had before embarking on the WH. The findings highlight the lasting impact of their pre-migration social position on their post-return predicaments, and reveal that, despite the promise of prestige and social advantage associated with cosmopolitanism, many returned WHMs ended up reinforcing unfulfilling future career prospects. Such a disappointing result is both paradoxical and damaging, given that increasing their access to a ‘second chance’ was a primary motivation for their transnational mobility in the first place.

Chapter 8 inquired into returned WHMs’ expectations for the future. Men uniformly referred to their future role as the breadwinner. This tendency showed that the salaryman ideology still had a firm grip on the young men at the psychological level if not in practice, and that alternative discourses were largely absent. None of the women rejected the idea of marriage as a life option, although not all expressed an intense desire to marry. Even as the WHMs employed the individualistic discourse of self-actualisation and sought their own unique life course, gender and age were two social markers that heavily influenced their expectations for life.

My findings highlight the clash of the individualistic language of neoliberalism in late modernity, and social expectations of the parent generation. The ways in which
the young people negotiated the dilemma in their narratives illustrates the nature of identity formation as a way of achieving personal fulfilment, and to gain social recognition. Without sufficient resources to draw on, they sought an environment in which they could better exercise their agency, and faced the possibility of suffering the consequences of the risks they were taking.
Conclusion

In this thesis, I have presented a case study of Japanese Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) and their mobility between Japan and Australia, with the understanding that it is a form of youth sojourn, undertaken by individuals for the purposes of self-exploration and development. I have explored the role this kind of temporary migration plays in young people’s self-making under neoliberal late modernity, focusing, first and foremost, on the dominant discourses and socio-economic and cultural practices which shape individual imaginations, desires and aspirations, and the ways in which individual migrants as agents negotiate these wider forces.

Both the topic and the approach taken in this dissertation are distinctive, for the investigation of the Australian Working Holiday (WH) has been rare, even though it epitomises features of contemporary international mobility. Furthermore, few studies have examined the whole course of temporary migration—before, during and after – with the understanding that migration is part of the wider life trajectory of the migrant.

My research is also unusual in having tested major theoretical concepts that developed out of western societies in relation to an East Asian society, paying particular attention to the socio-economic characteristics of WHMs’ location in a specific place at a specific time, that is, Japan in the lost decade. This socio-historical perspective is vital in understanding how WHMs’ social positions, desires, aspirations and expectations are shaped by the wider events that surround them, and in making sense of the ways in which the migrants exercise agency.

While youth mobility between ‘rich’ countries is an unlikely context in which to explore the issue of labour, this thesis shows that an approach which foregrounds
the ‘work’ in ‘working holiday’ is fruitful for linking issues relating to WHMs’ subjectivities and experiences with questions about capitalism and neoliberal governmentalty. Given the blurred boundary between work and leisure in the world in which they live, it is particularly important to understand the interlacing of economic with non-economic factors in WHMs’ migratory experiences. As I have shown throughout this thesis, a focus on these Japanese migrants as classed, gendered and ethnicised subjects is also crucial in interpreting their personal experiences.

With regard to the social, cultural and historical factors which make the Australian WH attractive to Japanese youth, I argued in chapters 3 and 4 that the cultural pull of the imagined West, the supposed centre stage of the globalised world, remained strong in Japan in the 1990s and 2000s, despite the existence of contesting discourses. Japan’s long fascination with the English language, and its status as a lingua franca also made Australia alluring as a WH destination. Direct experience of Australia was then made possible by the availability of international travel, and the escalating commodification of border-crossing mobility by relevant industries. It is not surprising that young women became the majority of Japanese WHMs in Australia, given their crucial role in the growth of international travel by the Japanese since the 1980s, when travel abroad became widely accessible.

Following the collapse of the ‘bubble economy’ in the 1990s, the greater unattainability of the salaryman ideal in the lost decade opened up new possibilities, but also exacerbated Japanese youth’s sense of risk and uncertainty. Hitting the ‘employment ice age’ head on upon completion of education, some lost generation WHMs became casual workers as fresh graduates. Others quit their full-time jobs due to job mismatches, before joining the casual workforce. Without job security, training opportunities, career prospects or sufficient avenues to move ‘up’ to the permanent workforce, these young people, the demonised furitās, tended to struggle to find satisfaction and stability as workers. Gendered social expectations made it psychologically harder for men than women to leave the Japanese labour market, especially if they had an established career and/or were older. The flipside of this was that female WHMs found it easier to make bold choices such as going on a WH, regardless of their type of employment, due to lower social expectations
regarding women’s career. These social constraints—some new and others continuing from the previous generation—contributed to propel some young people out of Japan on the WH, in search of a better environment to search for fulfilment.

As explored in chapter 4, lost generation WHMs, living in a society with all of the hallmarks of neoliberal late modernity, portray themselves as self-responsible, reflexive and eagerly seeking opportunities to explore and cultivate a unique life course as individuals. Apart from their initiative, what makes their departure from Japan possible is the fact that they can imagine the Australian WH as a real possibility in life, and mobilise resources, such as support from parents and casual employment opportunities to boost their funds, in order to turn the possibility into a reality. In contrast, the regional case of Takakura makes it plain that international mobility as a method of self-development is not accessible to all, either in practice or as an imagined goal.

The employment component is crucial to the popularity of the WH among young people, because their migration is mostly self-funded. Work experience abroad is also valued as a way of gaining the cultural capital of cosmopolitan experience and marketable skills such as English language proficiency. Behind these desires are Japanese public policy discourses of self-responsible, ‘globalised’ English-speaking individuals as being the key to Japan’s future survival, and commercial interests that relentlessly promote cosmopolitanism to generate profit. For lost generation WHMs, the Australian WH has a particular meaning, which is shaped by the travellers’ individual agency to pursue better life chances, the limited forms of capital they possess, and the wider interests and socio-cultural trends that surround them.

In response to the question, ‘What projects do youth pursue for the purpose of self-development through the WH, and what forms of capital do they seek to accumulate while in Australia?’ I found in chapter 5 that, while working hard in Australia to maintain their independence financially and psychologically, my interlocutors frequently pursued a project of voluntary assimilation. The experience of ‘living like locals do’ was itself valued, alongside other projects, such as learning English,
working in an English-speaking environment and befriending Australians. These projects were believed to be helpful in accumulating highly valued and heavily promoted forms of cultural capital in Japan. Further, these WHMs sought international networks of friends and acquaintances for their value as social capital in the field of cosmopolitanism. Consistent with their pre-departure attraction to the imaginary of the West, the temporary migrants endeavoured to fit in with the majority white Australian population, even though they frequently consider the Southern continent to be second best to cultural powerhouses such as the US and the UK.

Regarding the question of power relations which characterise the social positioning of WHMs as temporary migrants in Australia, and how their positioning affects the young people's exercise of agency, I demonstrated in chapter 5 that WHMs are enmeshed in local power relations in Australia in which they occupy a marginal position. Their newly arrived status, language barriers, and lack of social capital mean that they often reside in substandard accommodation with other disadvantaged migrants, and mostly engage in menial jobs below their skill levels. In ethnic Japanese nikkei workplaces, they are doubly marginalised, first as workers in an already peripheral ethnic niche, and second, as providers of expendable labour prone to exploitation. Access to non-nikkei employment is limited, and where it occurs, the workers' temporary existence and status as members of a non-English speaking ethnic minority make them vulnerable to further exploitation. In particular, their engagement in harvest work in regional Australia illustrates how WHMs tend to be trapped in certain disadvantageous patterns. My analysis has revealed that, regardless of their background in Japan, WHMs' socio-economic status most commonly declines in Australia.

Chapter 6 illustrated that the newcomers' isolation from mainstream society and lack of effective local networks negatively impacts on their project of developing a cosmopolitan identity. The ways in which they negotiate their unsatisfactory social position reflect unbalanced power relations. Interlocutors were unanimous in their claims of Japan's superiority over Australians and others such as South Koreans, as they saw themselves as coming from one of the world's largest economies. When it came to gendered power relationships, however, they were not so united. This is
because females and males had differential access to means of resistance against the imposition of an inferior status. The women could exploit the stereotype of Asian ‘sweethearts’ to contrast with the image of ‘unfeminine’ Western women, as well as that of ‘emasculated’ and undesirable Japanese men. The men found it difficult to claim the dominant social position, and frequently resorted either to discursive aggression towards, or defensive rejections of, Australian people, and Japanese women who favour white men. In their own ways, the WHMs used gendered and ethnicised discourses to invest in more satisfactory identities as Japanese migrants in Australia.

Chapter 7 provided answers to the question, ‘what are the main factors that impact on the WHMs’ access to fulfilment through employment upon returning to the Japanese labour market?’ I argued that, upon re-entry into the Japanese labour market, WHMs’ are prevented from accessing stable and decent career paths. Contributing factors range from their prolonged absence from Japan and insufficient accumulation of cultural capital while in Australia, to Japan’s ageist recruitment practices and conventionally low career mobility. In terms of job prospects at home, the WH experience turns out to create obstacles in much the same way as childbirth makes it difficult for women to return to the workforce. Returned WHMs’ difficult circumstances also expose the gap between their positive image of cosmopolitan jobs and the reality. In contrast to the extensively promoted glamorous image that induces consumption activities in the field of cosmopolitanism, non-elite youth, such as returned WHMs, are generally barred from meaningful work opportunities in this field. In this context, the personal gains derived from the migratory experience are often insufficient to counter the concrete disadvantages that lost generation returnees encounter.

Chapter 8 dealt with the question of the impact of WHMs’ limited capital accumulation and conversion on their feelings about, and plans for the future. I showed that, despite the prevalent language of individualism, the influence of structural factors such as age and gender, as well as the expectations of the older generation and the lingering salaryman ideals, strongly mould returning WHMs’ ideas about adulthood. Reconciling these with the individual(istic) goal of self-actualisation does not come easily, and interlocutors’ attempts to tell a coherent
story of the self and future directions were often at odds with the multiplicity, contradictions and vagueness widespread in their narratives. Further accumulation of cosmopolitan capital was a popular ‘solution’ to their sense of stagnation, considered useful for self-improvement. As one of the main ways to accumulate such capital, international mobility continued to have a coveted status among returnees. It was in this way that those seeking to live and work abroad became potential repeat consumers of goods and services offered by the migration industry. My data indicate that Japanese WH returnees search for a pathway to adulthood characterised by financial independence, a vocation-as-passion, and the ability to make positive contributions in society. As pointed out at the end of chapter 8, however, none of these goals is easily turned into reality for WHMs after returning to Japan.

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed many facets of the Australian WH as experienced by Japanese youth. This example of temporary youth migration is simultaneously a story of individual resistance, an act of hope, the workings of a consumption-driven economy, and a flow of youth labour between developed nations. In all of these domains, there is a tension between individual migrant agency and structure, and the influence of neoliberal discourses is recurrent and powerful.

My investigation of the personal experiences of WHMs provides a view from the margins of a changing Japan. In contrast to the image of the ‘all middle-stream society’ to which Japanese nationals widely subscribed in the 1980s, the experience of Japan among the lost generation was characterised by widening inequalities. Even though the lingering salaryman ideal continues to position unmarried, childless WHMs as deviant and marginal precarious workers, their cases are far from anomalies. If anything, the ‘margins’ are expanding in deflationary Japan, now called ‘lost two decades’ (ushinawareta nijūnen). My case study has illustrated a particular position within this swelling periphery that lost generation WHMs occupy, and their negotiation of it in transition to adulthood.

WHMs’ exercise of agency is marked by a simultaneous resistance against, and reproduction of, the late modern, neoliberal capitalist order. My data provide
CONCLUSION

abundant evidence that, rather than tolerating the sense of getting nowhere, many young Japanese people strive for something new, and take the challenge of self-imposed hardships, in order to improve themselves. However, in the eyes of some, Japanese society is unable to reward their hard work, or offer a way out of their lonely battle against dissatisfaction, boredom and lack of hope.

For these young people, the WH provides one temporary stopgap measure to fill the future emptiness. Taking this option is made possible by young people’s identification with middle-class consumption patterns, and the financial ability to practice these. Even though my interlocutors were some of the underdogs of the Japanese economy in the lost decade, they nonetheless had enough resources for international travel. In this sense, WHMs’ willing use of the consumer power at their disposal played an important part in their resistance against their unsatisfactory predicaments as young workers.

In narrating how they sought a fulfilling life passionately, optimistically, playfully and sometimes desperately, interlocutors exhibited personal attributes that are highly valued in neoliberal society, such as self-motivation, individualistic and entrepreneurial thinking, and the willingness to reinvent themselves flexibly and constantly. That is, they embraced the very subject positions celebrated by the logic of advanced capitalism which oppressed them as unappreciated workers in the economy of late modern Japan. The youth in my study were also sensitive to the discourse of cosmopolitan capital, and tended to take at face value the usefulness of such capital, which the migration and English industries vigorously advocate as useful assets in the post-Fordist labour market.

Throughout their border-crossing movements, the blurred boundaries between work and leisure prompted the WHMs to discipline themselves constantly and continuously in their daily life. They were proactive in their attempt to adapt to a new and unfamiliar environment, and as they moved between jobs and lifestyles in each country, their ability to be flexible was tested. The neoliberal subjectivity of the young migrants drives a tireless pursuit of fulfilment, and some may even succeed in turning the fluidity of their existence to their advantage. However, I have
shown throughout the thesis that the agency of young people to enact their interests is constrained by the competing interests of other actors.

Following WHMs’ trajectories across the border and then back has explicated the complicity of more powerful actors in both Japan and Australia in exploitation of the young migrants. For example, the Australian government invites WHMs from an increasing number of developed countries for their tourist dollars, as well as their labour. Japanese WHMs purchase goods and services that they believe will advance their self-improvement, and spend thousands of dollars in the process. The migration and English language industries are two major examples of larger interests capitalising on, and actively creating, such ‘market demands’. The Japanese government has been complicit in this profit-making bonanza, as it has been very slow to regulate exploitative and barely legal business activities.

Not only the WHMs’ purchasing power, but their labour power is fully exploited. In lost decade Japan, dominant business lobbyists heavily impacted my interlocutors’ ability to exercise agency, by pushing the government to erode existing worker protections, with the effect that the vast majority of lost generation workers have been kept in precarious strata of the labour market. In Australia, Japanese WHMs, together with other young people from developed countries, are exploited as a source of cheap, temporary and disposable labour with relatively low ‘immigration risks’. The Australian government has deliberately re-designed the WH as a quasi-labour migration scheme over time. In particular, it uses the carrot of a one-year visa extension to lure travelling youth to the rural agricultural sector, without equal enthusiasm for cleaning up an industry renowned for its exploitation of precarious workers. In addition, the majority of nikkei Japanese businesses in Australia are highly dependent on WHM labour, which they employ at low rates, often below the minimum salary level and as part of the ‘black economy’. When the WHMs return to Japan, they are most typically (re)incorporated into the sections of the workforce where the requirement for cosmopolitan skills is minimal. Some returnees gain jobs in the migration industry, becoming part of the mechanism of maintaining profits for business owners and/or shareholders, in exchange for low incomes. Seen in the light of WH mobility as a whole, then, Japanese participants form part of a growing flow of border-crossing precarious youth labour from post-industrial societies,
whose physical movement, more often than not, is accompanied by sideways, rather than upward social mobility, with a risk of downward mobility.

In both Japan and Australia, WHMs’ youthful dreams of cosmopolitan experience and self-actualisation are mercilessly exploited to serve the serious games of money-making that powerful players, including governments and capitalist employers, enact so skilfully. Despite the fact that the decision to take part in an Australian WH is partly a rejection of social expectations in Japan, my empirical findings have found just how willingly and proactively a large number of young people in Japan pursue activities that bring certain profits to the already powerful, without equal benefits to themselves. My investigation of the WH phenomenon as undertaken by the Japanese points out that, while the subjective evaluation of the Australian WH experience is mostly positive, the degree to which the WH mobility can challenge the status quo to bring social change is severely limited in its current form.

Even so, it is not unusual for returned WHMs to try to use their (limited) consumer power as a strategy for self-development, and in some cases, repeat migration. The life trajectories of young people in my data suggest that their individual(istic) endeavours in search of fulfilment continue well into their thirties. Perhaps to reflect the prolonged period of ‘youth’, WH destinations such as Canada have begun raising the age limit from 30 to 35 years old for citizens of certain countries. And, as discussed in the introductory chapter, Australia continues to increase the number of participating countries in the WH scheme, as well as its cousin, the Work and Holiday scheme, for middle-class youth in other, mostly poorer countries. These trends indicate that WH mobility and its mutations will become even more significant in the future.

**Future directions**

The WH as an area of academic investigation is still in its infancy, and there are many potentially fruitful future avenues of research, especially for comparative studies. For example, the number of WHM arrivals from countries where youth unemployment has surged, such as Ireland and France, has especially increased
since the global financial crisis in 2008. From this trend, we can hypothesise that WHMs from countries other than Japan are also heavily influenced by socio-economic circumstances in the home nation. The examination of the Australian WH experience by migrants of different nationalities might further test some of the arguments made in this thesis.

Conversely, a study of lost generation Japanese WHMs in countries other than Australia may reveal thought-provoking differences, even though they come from the same society. This may especially be the case where the destinations are non-English speaking (e.g. Germany, South Korea), or less popular with the Japanese, such as Ireland. Lastly, research into Australian WHMs in Japan will provide an account of migration from the other side of the Pacific. Living in a different set of power relations, the advantages and disadvantages that young Australians experience are certain to differ from those their Japanese counterparts encounter in Australia.
Appendix 1

List of Interlocutors named in the thesis

The list in the following pages includes only those who experienced an Australian WH, and were referred to by name in the thesis. All names are pseudonymous first names. Details such as age and education levels were accurate at the time of the last interview.

Interviews in Australia and Japan

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Primary occupation prior to migration</th>
<th>Primary mode of employment prior to migration</th>
<th>Time of Australian WH</th>
<th>Year of the last interview</th>
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<td>Primary occupation prior to migration</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiromi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Technical high school</td>
<td>Childcare worker</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ryō</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
<td>Cinema receptionist &amp; care worker</td>
<td>Casual (cinema) Permanent full-time (care work)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2007</td>
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</table>

**Interviews in Australia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Primary occupation prior to migration</th>
<th>Primary employment mode prior to migration</th>
<th>Time of Australian WH</th>
<th>Year of the last interview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asaka</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Retail assistant</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
<td>2008–2009</td>
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<td>Daisuke</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Four-year university (still enrolled)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Technical college</td>
<td>Various (e.g. waitress, hostess, dancer)</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noriko</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shin'ichi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Four-year university &amp; later technical college</td>
<td>Film &amp; TV editor</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
<td>2004–2005</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<td>Shoko</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>Primary occupation prior to migration</td>
<td>Primary mode of employment prior to migration</td>
<td>Time of Australian WH</td>
<td>Year of the last interview</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Kaori</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>High school</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maki</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masanori</td>
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<td>Four-year university</td>
<td>Children’s fitness instructor</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
<td>2003–2004</td>
<td>2007</td>
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## Interviews in Japan (pre-WH)

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<th>Primary occupation prior to migration</th>
<th>Primary mode of employment</th>
<th>Planned time of Australian WH</th>
<th>Year of the interview</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reiko</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Technical college</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shizue</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Four-year university (still enrolled)</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Interviews in Japan (WHMs of the 1980s)

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<th>Education</th>
<th>Primary occupation prior to migration</th>
<th>Primary mode of employment prior to migration</th>
<th>Time of Australian WH</th>
<th>Year of the last interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akemi</td>
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<td>45</td>
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<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Osamu</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teruo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Four-year university</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Consent Form

In Search of Fulfilment
Japan’s Lost Generation and the Australian Working Holiday

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN PHD RESEARCH PROJECT

Kumiko Kawashima
Department of Political and Social Change, Australian National University

I, [print name] __________________________ hereby give my consent to participate in the project ‘In Search of Fulfilment: Japan's Lost Generation and the Australian Working Holiday’. I recognize that participation in this research project is completely voluntary. I have understood the aim of this project and that I am free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the project with no penalty whatsoever.

[Signature]________________________________________[Date]__/__/_

1. I also give my consent to be taped during interview(s).

[Signature]________________________________________[Date]__/__/ _
In Search of Fulfilment

Japan's Lost Generation and the Australian Working Holiday

オーストラリア国立大学 ジェンダー関係研究所 博士課程

川崎美子

研究参加同意書

1. 私 [________]（氏名記入）は上記の研究に参加する事に同意します。参加は自由意志によるもので、いつでも自由に参加を取りやめる事ができます。

______________________________（サイン）／___／___（日付）

2. インタビューの録音を許可します。

______________________________（サイン）／___／___（日付）
Appendix 3

Interview Questions

Interviews conducted were semi-structured. Therefore, the questions included here were guides only and not all topics were discussed in every interview.

Questions/themes for interviews with WHMs

- Personal history before arrival in Australia (birthplace, education, employment, living arrangements, family details, international travel and cross-cultural experience)
- Motivations for the WH
- Reasons for choosing Australia
- Expectations for WH experience
- Pre- and post-arrival image of Australia
- Initial plans for the WH and changes over time
- Experience of Australia so far (problems encountered, sources of enjoyment, daily routines, holiday, racism, friendships etc)
- Current employment and living conditions
- Communication with family and friends back home (how, how often, topics of conversation)
- Changes regarding self-identity and lifestyles since arrival
- Experience of return trips (if any)
- Future plans and aspirations
- Image of ideal life
- Advice for those who are planning to leave Japan for Australia

Questions for interviews with returned WHMs in Japan

- Personal history before arrival in Australia (birthplace, education, employment, living arrangements, family details, international travel and cross-cultural experience)
- Experience of the Australian WH (motivations, reasons for choosing Australia, employment, holiday, living arrangements, friendships, problems encountered, changes regarding self-identity, life trajectory etc)
- Pre- and post-arrival image of Australia
- Experience of return migration (the initial resettlement, changes over time regarding self-identity, social networks, lifestyles, interests etc)
- Image of returnees in Japan
- Employment history since returning
- Methods used for job hunting
- Living arrangements since returning
- Impact of the WH experience on the subsequent life trajectory
- Future plans and aspirations
- Image of ideal life
- Advice for those planning to leave Japan for Australia

**Questions for interviews with migration agents**

- Services provided by the business
- The target market and client characteristics
- Customer needs
- The number of employees
- History behind the business (when and how it started, changes experienced)
- Differences between Japanese agent businesses based in Australia and Japan
- Advertising (how, where?)
- Common issues experienced by WHMs
- Changes observed regarding the WH phenomenon
- Available statistics and other information regarding WHMs
- Personal history (agent business as a career choice, reasons for migration to Australia)
Appendix 4

Glossary

kaisō  social stratum
kaikyū  class (in a Marxist sense)
girigiri wākingu horidē/girihi  last minute working holiday (maker)
sōchūryū shakai  universal middle-stream society
ushinawareta jūnen  lost decade
ushinawareta sedai/rosuto  lost generation
jenerēshon/roshu  employment ice age
shūshoku hyōgaki  casual workers
furitā  literally ‘thing(s) one wishes to do.’ In this thesis, it implies ‘personal passion for a particular vocation’
yaritaikoto  a dispatched worker
haken  a non-career track, permanent position
ippanshoku  casual job, casual worker
arubaito  overseas Japanese, or ethnic Japanese (literally ‘Japanese-related’)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>もの</th>
<th>英語</th>
<th>意味</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>現地</td>
<td>local</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>オージー</td>
<td>‘Aussie’ (Australian)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ピッキング</td>
<td>harvest work (‘picking’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>留學生協会</td>
<td>Study Abroad Association</td>
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**Japanese-language newspaper articles**