

Anxious Intimacy
Negotiating Gender, Value and Belonging
among Japanese Retirees in Malaysia

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Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is the result of original work carried out by the author.

Shiori Shakuto

Acknowledgements

‘Life is strange, don’t you think?’ One of my informants asked me during an interview. ‘Watching the TV program about Malaysia, finding this apartment, meeting Kosaka-san; if one of them did not happen, I wouldn’t have been sitting here chatting with you’, she continued. Likewise, meeting a group of Japanese retirees during my wedding in Penang, receiving the ANU PhD Scholarship to study at the ANU, finding an encouraging supervisory panel and an inspiring cohort of fellow PhD students, if one of them did not happen, I would not have been able to undertake this project. I am extremely grateful for all the people and life events that brought me here at this moment. I especially thank the Japanese people in Malaysia who so generously offered to be part of this project.

Research is often said to be the work of an individual; in my experience, it was a team effort. The Australian National University (ANU) was a dream for an aspiring anthropologist. Francesca Merlan, my supervisor, helped transform my recounting of my informants’ lifeworlds into a fully-fledged ethnography. Carly Schuster, my advisor, opened a door to feminist anthropology and inspired me to pursue publicly engaged research. Ashley Carruthers provided early guidance on the topic of migration. They saw the depth and width where I did not. The responsibility for any inadequacies that may remain in this work is entirely my own.

It was here at the ANU that I became a fully conscious feminist anthropologist. The Thesis Writing Group—Faisal, Joyce, Kathy, Mandip, Rosita, and Steph—provided a first and a big step in this direction. We workshopped each other’s drafts with the feminist eye of Carly Schuster. By the end, we saw gender in every thesis! The Feminist Reading Group provided a theoretical grounding for my thesis. The members of the Gender Writing Group provided invaluable comments on the earlier draft of Chapter 4. Kumiko Kawashima invited me to give a guest lecture at her gender course in Macquarie University. This experience, coupled with the opportunity to tutor Ashley Carruthers’ first-year course in anthropology, allowed me to appreciate the importance of not only researching but also teaching about gender.

Ideas formed through these encounters were further developed through conferences and workshop participation, including at the Australian Anthropological

Society's Annual Conferences (Canberra 2013, Melbourne 2015), IUAES Conference (Tokyo 2014, Bangkok 2015), AAS in Asia Conference (Singapore 2014), Modalities of Feeling Workshop (Kyoto 2016), the Inter-Asian Intimate Connections Workshop (Canberra 2016), and the Trans-Asian Mobilities and Encounters Conference (Bangkok 2017). My participation and organisation in some of these events were supported by generous grants from the ANU Japan Institute, the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, the ANU Vice-Chancellor's Travel Grant, the ANU IARU Travel Grant and from the Ritsumeikan University. I thank the scholars I met during these conferences for their sharp feedback.

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Abstract

This is a study of Japanese retirees who have elected to retire in Malaysia. I arrived in Kuala Lumpur in 2014 to study sensory responses of Japanese retirees to the Malaysian landscape, but discovered instead that the gender differences in the experiences of their overseas move into retirement were dominating everyday discussions among the retirees. Retired baby boomers had lived through Japan's high growth period in which family and firm were strictly demarcated into a normative division of labour between women and men. Men's retirement seemed to have unsettled many taken-for-granted categories including gender and intergenerational norms. I observed that their movement to Malaysia led retirees to reimagine and restructure relations between themselves and their spouses, with their children, and the wider Japanese state.

The thesis focuses on three aspects of their lives: (1) their partial refashioning of retirement as affective labour; (2) their reconstitution of relationships with wives, children and other retirees; and (3) the sense of anxiety they felt around these transitions, and how that shaped the new relationships. I engage with a growing body of literature in feminist economic anthropology that looks at how economic transformations shape people's intimate lives and how their lives in turn shape wider economic practices. The anxiety around belonging felt by those who were outside the productivist scheme was a kind of experience profoundly entwined with a contemporary global economy. The distinctiveness of the Malaysian field site provided a unique place from which my thesis addresses larger debates over the politics of intimacy and productivity. I move outward from their sense of anxieties to theorise how intimate relations are both shaped by, and shaping, the operations of society's multiple regulatory forms in global capitalism today.

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Dramatis Personae

Mrs Ando	When she came to Malaysia, she felt liberated from social obligations. But at the same time, she felt that her value could not be realised in Malaysia. She persuaded her husband to return to Japan to look after their grandchildren.
Mr and Mrs Iida	Mr Iida was a leader of the Malay Class in the Japan Club. He also wrote blog posts for fellow Japanese retirees and for his grandchildren. Mrs Iida liked to make cotton books. She exhibited these cotton books at the Japan Club and the University of Malaya.
Mrs Iwatani	She couldn't study overseas when she was young. She stopped working when she had children. Her husband was a participant of the Malay Class at the Japan Club. She and her husband eventually returned to Kumamoto, her natal home, to look after her parents.
Marie Kawashima	Marie was a conductor for the Village Concert in the Japan Club. She used to teach the piano in her neighbourhood in Japan. She and her husband, Kenny, started the Helper's Club in Malaysia.
Claire Koreeda	She lived with her husband in a condominium unit in Mont Kiara. She missed her grandchildren.
Mr and Mrs Kosaka	Mr Kosaka liked to live a life 'on stage'. He volunteered regularly to help new migrants and he was later appointed as the new officer of the Senior's Club. Mrs Kosaka gave the author a packet of yoghurt that she brought from Japan.

Mr Kutani	He was appointed as an IT officer of the Senior's Club. A self-claimed 'radiation refugee', he and his wife had relocated to Malaysia to make a safe-haven for their children.
Keita Onishi	He wanted to become a diplomat in his youth. He taught Japanese at a local Chinese high school in Kuala Lumpur.
Mr and Mrs Sakamoto	They are the founders of the Second-Home Club, which subsequently became the Senior's Club. Mr Sakamoto was also the author of <i>Gohoubi Jinsei Mareishia</i> , a book widely read by retirement migrants before coming to Malaysia. Mrs Sakamoto organised a wake for Choro-san.
Mr Sasaki	Mr Sasaki was the promoter of 'give and give' relationships. He started the Helper's Club. He called his wife, <i>waifu</i> , and wished that his wife would call him <i>daarin</i> (darling), but she called him <i>oto-san</i> (father) instead.
Steve	He organised <i>The Failures</i> Concert. He was also a blogger and a painter at the Painting Club in the Japan Club.
Ricky Tanaka	He came without his wife to Kuala Lumpur. A graduate of Keio University, he was a good friend of Kenny Kawashima. He returned to Japan for eye surgery.
Mr and Mrs Wakase	They were a retired couple in Penang. Mr Wakase regarded Malaysia as his new home. In contrast, Mrs Wakase viewed their movement as a prolonged tourism.
Mr and Mrs Yamamoto	They started the Helper's Club. They lived in the Saujana Villa Condominium with their dog, Komugi.

Prologue

May 2013, Japan

It was 2 am. They couldn't sleep again. That thought, which they had swept under the carpet for a long time. That thought, which they could forget when they were working. That night, it was there to stay. The thought. The worst nightmare. *Could I have lived my life differently?*

Mrs Iwatani contemplated.¹ She wanted to study abroad when she was young. But her father didn't let her. After graduating from high school, she sold cosmetic products at a department store. She was proud of her job. When she got married, her husband asked her to quit her job and to stay at home. 'Until our children go to high school', he said.² She never returned to work. Their daughter also wanted to study abroad but her husband didn't let her. Instead, he sent their son to the USA even though the son wanted to remain in Japan. She missed him. She stood alone in an alley of a supermarket. She saw her son's favourite chocolate on the shelf. 'Was it my life?'

'But what could I have done?' Mr Hashimoto contemplated. He worked for an electric company for 40 years. He worked hard to support his family. He bought a house in a suburb. It was two hours away from his workplace, but the suburb had good schools and parks for his children. Every day he left home before dawn and came back after midnight. When he reached 50, he knew that his career wouldn't progress further. Many of his peers had gone to managerial positions. But there were only so many managerial positions. By the time he retired as a mid-level manager of a small branch office, his children barely knew him. 'Was it all a waste?'

'It's not over yet'. Mr Kosaka contemplated. After retirement, he went on a three-month cruise trip with his wife. Every night, an extravagant dinner was followed by ballroom dancing on a stage. He didn't know how to dance. Enviously, he watched

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis where appropriate. For formal interviews and focus group interviews, I gave out a consent form and asked my informants to sign the document beforehand. For more impromptu participant observation, I constantly reminded them of my research projects so that they could make their own decision about the nature of the conversation. Some had written or spoken to me afterwards to exclude their conversation from my research notes. I deleted those notes. I thank all my informants discussed in this thesis for the permission to use their narratives and pictures.

² All Japanese words and conversations are translated into English by the author.

couples dance on the stage. When they returned from the cruise, he asked his wife to join him in ballroom dancing classes. ‘If I can choose to be onstage or offstage, I will choose to be onstage’.

It was 3 am. They still couldn't sleep. They switched on the TV. There was an advertisement for a retirement visa for Malaysia. ‘This is it’. They instinctively knew. They would re-enter life onstage in Malaysia.

May 2014, Malaysia

Dancing onto the stage with a microphone, Steve introduced the audience to the music band. His real name was Toshihiko Yoshioka, but he liked people to call him Steve.³ ‘Let me introduce you to *The Failures*! They flew all the way from Tokyo to be with us tonight!’ The crowd cheered with excitement. The band comprised four Japanese men and Steve’s wife, Yoshie. Steve continued, ‘Despite their name, they are not failures in their real lives. They are all *eriito sarariiman* (élite salaried men) who work for big companies! They formed *The Failures* when they were students at Keio University back in, well, a long time ago!’

The concert was held in a cosy, British-style pub in an old suburb, Sri Hartamas, which Steve preferred to the plusher, touristic suburb of Bukit Bintang. The pub was crowded with 50 or so Japanese people in their late 50s to their 70s. At 5 pm, the night had just begun but the crowd was already in high spirits. The band sang a few Japanese and American pop songs from the 1960s and the 1970s, including *Top of the World* by the Carpenters.⁴ A few couples went onto the stage to dance along, while others gently shook their bodies as they sat in their seats.

Almost 65 years old, Steve came to Malaysia five years previously, after retiring from an investment company in China. He changed his pair of glasses every day. He wore a red pair that day. He looked around the pub. His glasses reflected the multiple lights on the disco floor. ‘If I were in Japan, I would just sit at home, quietly sipping tea. But this is the kind of life that I like, and I can make’. As he finished saying that, he jumped onto the centre of the stage. By the end of the night, everyone was on the dance floor.

³ Many retired Japanese people referred to each other by their nicknames in Malaysia. Most of them adopted English nicknames. I will explore this practice in full detail in Chapter 3.

⁴ Japanese songs included, for instance, *Amairo No Kamino Otome*, *Makka na Taiyo*, *Minato no Sindobatto*, *Sotsugyou Shashin*, and *Yesterday Once More*.

This thesis is about a group of 4000 or so elderly Japanese people who moved to Malaysia after their retirement. Their ethnography resists the sense of decay in anthropological studies of ageing, which have too often focused on the past and the memories of the elderly. Instead, this thesis will articulate an anthropology, or a philosophy of life (Ingold 2011), which tracks ‘the continuing vitality of life, both terrible and wonderful’ (Tsing 2012, 506) from the intimate experiences of retired Japanese people who negotiated their lives and relational belonging with fellow Japanese in Malaysia. The ethnography tells us that retirement migration was as much a reflection on one’s past as about the imagination of future; how they extended productive personhood and relationality through different cycles of time. It is not my intention to romanticise their vitality; instead, it is to argue for a place for a forward-looking perspective on the study of ageing. Growing up was complicated and the complications continued, no matter how old they became, and no matter where they were. This ethnography documents the sticky and sweaty process of ageing with others in the aftermath of retirement.

Introduction

Neoliberalism through the Lens of Japanese Retirees in Malaysia

In the earlier days of my fieldwork in Malaysia, one of my informants arranged for me to meet Mr Sasaki at the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur. ‘He is very knowledgeable, and you will learn a lot from him!’ the informant assured me. As I entered the Club’s lobby, I saw a man standing still in his crisp business suit. He must have been in his late 60s or early 70s. With his grey hair and sharp features, he reminded me of Mahathir Mohamad, a controversial former Malaysian Prime Minister. When I nervously approached him, he looked surprised. Later, I found out that Mr Sasaki was expecting an elderly client. He ran a freelance consultancy to advise prospective Japanese retirement migrants about the application processes for a Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) visa.⁵ Through his consultancy work, he constantly collected and shared information with others. Mr Sasaki was an eloquent orator, widely acquainted with topics from Malaysian and Japanese politics to fine distinctions between anthropology and sociology. We formed a close friendship over the duration of my fieldwork. A voracious reader, he often recommended books for my research.

Throughout our friendship, he repeatedly emphasised the importance of being useful (*yakunitatsu*) in old age. ‘One needs to keep giving (*atae tudukeru koto ga daiji*)’, he said. ‘However old one becomes, he or she needs to continue gathering information and give that information to others’. I imagined a group of retirees exchanging information with glee. I nodded in agreement and said, ‘that’s a great way to survive in a foreign land. You give out what you know, and you take what other people know’.

He immediately launched a protest. ‘No! I hate the concept of ‘give and take’ (*gibu ando teiku*). Why can’t one keep giving?’ Noticing me looking puzzled, he elaborated. ‘You see, “give and take” is two-dimensional’. He lifted his right finger in the air and drew a horizontal line from left to right. ‘You give’. He then drew back the line from right to left. ‘Then you take’, he said. ‘You repeat that movement—give and take. You forever stay at the same height’. While keeping the finger in the

⁵ Most Japanese retirees stayed in Malaysia on this visa. I will explore the requirements for this visa in Chapter 2.

air, he asked me, ‘But what if we call it “give and give” (*gibu ando gibu*) instead?’ He drew a same horizontal line from left to right. ‘You give. Now, instead of taking from another person, that person will also give to you’. He took his left finger and drew a horizontal line from right to left above the first line. Now we had an additional line on top of the first line. ‘See, “give and give” is three-dimensional’, he smiled. ‘Every time you give, you can uplift yourself’. He repeatedly drew new horizontal lines above the previous lines with two fingers. When he couldn’t draw any higher, he looked at me. ‘Shiori-san, to live is to add different layers of colour to your life. Each person you meet will give you a different layer of colour, and this is how you get your own colour’.

Like Mr Sayama, many Japanese elderly men whom I met in Malaysia emphasised the importance of giving oneself for the service of others. The commitments to offer mutual support were in turn seen to uplift oneself. Mr Sayama and other male Japanese retirees in Malaysia reminded me of Mr Tada, the main character in Hiroaki Miyazaki’s famous article, *Economy of Dreams* (2006). Mr Tada worked as a financial engineer at an investment bank in Tokyo. Although showing a strong commitment to work, Mr Tada posited an equally strong hope for an early retirement. He dreamed of travelling around Asia with a backpack once he had accumulated 200 million yen. Miyazaki (2006, 160) argues that his dream of an early retirement displaced his agency in the market and hence represented a reorientation of his rational thinking from the market to himself.

This ethnography is about people like Mr Tada, urban, élite male ex-*sarariiman* and their spouses from a middle to an upper-middle class background,⁶ who went ahead and realised this dream. The definition of ‘elderly’ varies,⁷ but this thesis will use the term for those who are from the cohort of the baby-boomer generation

⁶ Although the backgrounds of silver backpackers varied from ex-corporate workers to self-employed, to academics and to housewives, this paper will focus on the experience of ex-corporate workers and their partners, who marked the middle-class belonging in the 1980s high-growth Japan. They were not the upper class, like those who belong to a business family (cf. Hamabata 1991). Many informants told me that if they had an unlimited amount of money, they would have gone to Hawaii or Australia for their retirement. Their financial background will be examined in detail in Chapter 2.

⁷ According to the United Nations, the definition of the elderly applies to those above the age of 65. In Japan, the sixty-first year after birth is celebrated as it marks the entry into *kanreki* period (the return of the calendar) (Izuhara 2006, 162). Socially, it could be when one becomes a grandparent. It could also be when one retires. In 2013, the retirement age was 61.

(*dankai no sedai*) and have retired from their permanent jobs.⁸ After their retirement, they lived in Malaysia for a few years to a decade. The relatively short duration of their stay in Malaysia should be noted. Many of them told me that their move to Malaysia was a first chapter in their long retirement life. This first chapter was defined by good health and wealth. Many of them had just retired from their corporate jobs, had savings, and still possessed good mental and physical capacities to live in a foreign country. Many of their children had left home to go to universities and their own parents had passed on. They, hence, described the move to Malaysia as a time to live a life for themselves. When their health declined or when their children needed them to help look after their grandchildren, many of them returned to Japan. As I will address later in the thesis, many of them also returned, much earlier than expected, due to the re-negotiations of spousal relationships.

The relatively short period of their stay in Malaysia makes it difficult to define them in conventional migration terms. Some of them called themselves, *shirubaa bakku pakkaa* (silver backpackers). Mr Yamamoto, one of my informants, articulated for me what it meant to be a silver backpacker. ‘Unlike young backpackers, we have no energy, but we have money. So instead of staying in hostels, we rent an apartment in KL, and fly around the world with our hand luggage’. Indeed, the group of Japanese people, especially men, gave themselves various labels, all of which showed their aspirations in Malaysia. I will address them in more detail in later chapters. In this thesis, I will call them ‘retirement migrants’ to be consistent with the terms used in earlier literature to refer to the same group of Japanese communities in Malaysia (Toyota 2006; Ono 2008). Pioneering studies on Japanese retirees in Malaysia by two anthropologists, Mayumi Ono and Mika Toyota, have provided an invaluable foundation for my research. They focused on the transnational structure of retirement migration and the commodification of medical tourism (Toyota 2006; Toyota and Xiang 2012; Ono 2008, [a] 2015, [b] 2015). My goal is to complement this body of scholarship. I will also use my informants’ own labels interchangeably with it.

When they were not traveling, both women and men met almost every day in the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur for some activities. For instance, I first met Steve (see

⁸ *Dankai no Sedai* refers to those who were born between 1947 to 1949. They began to retire in 2012. They constitute about 5 per cent of the total population of Japan in 2012 (Cabinet Office 2012a, 8).

Prologue) in January 2014 at a painting class in the Japan Club. He was painting alone at the back of the class but he stood out with his wavy grey hair, a pair of colourful glasses and a bright red T-shirt. I soon learnt that he was the author of a famous blog read by many Japanese retirees in Kuala Lumpur (KL). Steve spent most of his time socialising with other Japanese retirees, painting and playing golf, and occasionally organising parties, such as the one described in the Prologue.

In the Prologue, I quoted Steve mentioning that had he stayed in Japan, he would just sit at home, quietly sipping tea. Like Steve, Japanese silver backpackers in Malaysia readily distinguished themselves from retirees in Japan, seeing the latter as either continuing to work or being isolated and inactive, having not found anything meaningful to do. These elderly people's criticism of retirees in Japan as having 'nothing to do' not only anchored their criticism of the ageist society and the failure of welfare schemes but also framed their moral debates over what constituted meaningful retirement in contemporary Japan. One of the key questions that carried my research concerned with the existential angst around one's belonging as it was negotiated in a fresh place, separated from their past, family and the Japanese state.

Anthropology of Ageing and Retirement

To learn how the elderly from around the world navigated the ambiguity of retirement period, I turned to anthropologists who have studied the fashioning of everyday lives by the elderly. Classic anthropological works illuminated the connections between one's life course and the ideas about self in old age. For instance, Barbara Myerhoff's classic, *Number Our Days* (1978), offers an account of the elderly in a Jewish community centre in Los Angeles. She takes the community centre as a total institution in which the participants responded to their ambiguous status through rituals and religion. Dorothy Jerrome (1992) conducted a study of age-related groups and church fellowship on the south coast of England. In addition to rituals, she paid attention to the circulation of things, such as books and magazines, which formed and sustained their relations and defined their collective values.

Hochschild ([1973]1978), on the other hand, observes that the elderly in an old-age home in California continued to draw a boundary between work and non-work in a supposedly leisure-oriented period of their life. Her informants governed their

preparation for a charity bazaar by strict rules and regulations. They referred to it as 'work' and people were commended for their 'productivity'. This was contrasted with a Christmas party, which was considered pure leisure. She draws from Hannah Arendt's concept of leisure and work to argue that 'leisure is not quite leisure when you do not have work' (Hochschild [1973]1978, 19).

Hochschild's research laid an important foundation for works by recent scholars who have situated the experience of ageing in industrialised nations within the 'successful ageing' movement. In the late 1980s, when most of my informants were in their late 30s to early 40s, a moral narrative of 'successful ageing' emerged against the backdrop of demographic and welfare crises in the West. The term 'successful ageing' was first introduced by two gerontologists, Rowe and Kahn, when they published the result of their interdisciplinary studies in the journal *Science* in 1987 (Ramirez-Valles 2016, 17; Bülow and Holm 2016). They set broadly two requirements for successful ageing: autonomy and social support (Ramirez-Valles 2016, 17). The first requirement encourages a sense of independence; the second encourages the elderly to have social networks to fight the decay of their health. Gerontologists have since expanded this idea, and now argue that older people must engage in 'productive' activities (Ramirez-Valles 2016, 18). The concept has had a wide appeal to the elderly beyond those in the West. For instance, in Brazil, an increased longevity has necessitated an extended program of elderly health care, and hence the individual health-promoting activities have become a central concern for the elderly (Brown 2013, 125).

Some anthropologists have critiqued the successful ageing movement as a 'neoliberal ideology' (Lamb 2014; Bury 1995). 'Neoliberalism' has been used broadly by numerous scholars, prompting a criticism that the use of the term is 'promiscuous' (Strakosch 2015, 35). The neoliberalism is generally characterised by the post-1980s' deregulation and privatisation of 'what had once been publicly held utilities and institutions' (Berlant 2011, 192). Strakosch (2015, 36), in her study of neoliberal indigenous policies in Australia, broadly divides the existing scholarship on neoliberalism into two types. The first scholarship is developed by 'political analysts', who are represented by scholars like David Harvey and Jamie Peck. They typically point to the decline of the state in favour of the market. The second is what she terms 'post-Foucauldian governmentality scholarship', represented by people like Nikolas Rose (Strakosch 2015, 36). Unlike political analysts, post-Foucauldian

governmentality scholars ‘erase analytic distinctions between the government of the state and the government of the self’ (Strakosch 2015, 36). The neoliberal state attempts to govern subjects ‘by reconstructing them as autonomous, economically productive, rational and competitive individuals’ (Strakosch 2015, 37). Hence the neoliberal society evidences the rise of liberal terms used in self-help manuals, such as ‘choice, responsibility, agreement and participation’ which help to construct an image of an active and free subject (Strakosch 2015, 37–39).

Anthropologists have generally lent their support to the post-Foucauldian governmentality perspective by providing ethnographies to show how the state and the self are closely intertwined in the neoliberal economy (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Ho 2009; Greenhouse 2010; Eagleton-Pierce 2016). Carla Freeman (2014, 1), for instance, defines the key signpost of neoliberalism as the making of ‘the self as an entrepreneurial “project” under constant renovation ... and its perpetual quest for flexibility in the changing global marketplace’. She observes that ‘in the contemporary neoliberal milieu every aspect of life is becoming subject to regimes of flexibility, quests, and commands for self-mastery and self-examination’ (C. Freeman 2014).

Taking on board this post-Foucauldian governmentality perspective, Jesus Ramirez-Vallex (2016, 26) recently critiqued the successful ageing ideologies. He argues that successful ageing assumes the self as ‘[being] grounded on a normative view of the body and time [as] productive and efficient’. As a result, a responsible elderly has become those who try to optimise the self (Katz and Marshall 2003; Bülow and Holm 2016).

In fact, with the spread of the successful ageing ideologies, anthropologists have documented the desire among the elderly in the industrialised nations to continue working past their retirement age in order to maintain their membership in the society (Lynch 2013). Greenberg and Muehlebach (2007), for instance, observe that many of the elderly in Western European nations—Germany, Britain, Italy and Switzerland—find themselves ‘unemployed’ rather than being in the ‘Third Age’ of leisure. The term, ‘the Third Age’, was coined by Peter Laslett (1989) to denote a period after retirement but before chronic illness. Elderly in this period are supposed to be filled with energy, and have time and resources to enjoy their lives. Instead, the elderly in these countries are called on to provide labour for societies facing a demographic crisis (Greenberg and Muehlebach 2007). In rapidly ageing Singapore

(Kua 2014), too, many people above the age of 70 continue to work out of need or desire (Fischer 2015, 208). Even when they are not officially ‘employed’, the elderly are trying to optimise the selves in the eyes of the state. Jessica Robbins (2013, 87) documents the female elderly in a Polish nursing home performing the normative ‘Euro-senior’ who is open-minded and outgoing. She argues that the female elderly were therefore seen to have contributed to active citizenship in the European Union.

Japan, like many other industrial nations, has had a ‘demographic crisis’ with a quarter of its population above the age of 65 years and a corresponding decrease in the size of the labour force. As Japan failed to recover from the long recession, the policies for the welfare of the elderly shifted from ones which emphasised familial care to ones that stressed individual responsibility. The Cabinet Office released a report in 2012, calling for a shift in the public perception of the elderly from ‘those who need support’ to ‘those who can support themselves and others’ (Cabinet Office 2012a). In particular, the cabinet report draws on the experience of the 2011 tsunami, where people offered mutual support (*gojo*) within their local communities to navigate their way through the hardship. The report refers to the spirit of mutual support, evidenced in the aftermath of tsunami, ‘the pride of Japan’. The cabinet report calls to apply the same concept of mutual support in the area of the ageing society (Cabinet Office 2012a, 25). It was in this context that the complementary ideologies of independent retirement (*jiritsu shita rougo*) and mutually supportive retirement (*sasaeau rougo*) emerged as the new model of the elderly citizenship in Japan.

By calling the principle of ‘mutual support’ the pride of Japan, the cabinet report linked the ideology of successful ageing to the Confucian notions of the individual as a member of a community (Long 2005, 106). In the Confucian framework, which had been cultivated in various social institutions throughout the history, individual concerns and interests are generally understood to be suppressed for the sake of society (Lock 2002, 194).⁹ In particular, the discourses of nurturance and care came to mobilise Japanese citizens. Amy Borovoy’s (2005) ethnography shows how the

⁹ Margaret Lock (2002, 204), a medical anthropologist of contemporary Japanese society, writes in 2002 that the idea of an autonomous individual has never taken hold to a great extent. In Chapter 1, I will present historical and structural analysis to discuss why this may be so.

idea of nurturance was especially cultivated among women in the domain of home.¹⁰ Here, although the new ageing discourse placed ‘an independent self’ at the centre of their ideologies, they posited attention to self as an act of care for the other (cf. Shea 2014). The elderly in these ideologies were represented as responsible subjects who could look after each other so as not to burden the younger generation. These ideologies have had a particular traction in the contemporary Japanese society in which the sentiment of not causing trouble (*meiwaku*) or not wanting to ask for assistance is very widespread (Long 2005, 60; Kavedžija 2015, 143).

In a country in which one’s subjectivity has been closely tied to the sense of productivity, the reorientation of life away from work or family to oneself in retirement has inspired important debates about the potential for a *dai ni no jinsei* (second life) or ‘post-retirement’ life (Thang et al. 2011; Morioka and Nakabayashi 1994). In promoting this self-oriented narrative, the word *ikigai* began to appear frequently in welfare policies (Ono 2015b, 614). Gordon Mathews (1996) defines *ikigai* as ‘what makes life worth living’. This self-actualising narrative of *ikigai* shifted the perception of elderly welfare from that which was traditionally the responsibility of the state or the youth to something that the elderly themselves work towards, and from which they are to attain self-satisfaction.¹¹

What do they want for themselves in their second lives? What types of relationships do they want to form, and with whom? Is there gender difference? For Japanese baby boomers who lived through the rapid economic growth and decline, these questions influenced myriad decisions they had to make; from which social activities to take part in, to more complicated issues of gender and intimacy in retirement. In Japanese bookshops today, one can find a self-help section devoted to topics ranging from encouraging people to fill their time with self-development activities, such as craft work or volunteering, to encouraging spouses to form new intimacies (Mathews 2002). It was in this context that retirement migration began to attract media attention as providing new opportunities for self-realisation (Ono 2015b, 615). Most of my informants watched TV shows or read popular books about retirement migration while they were still working and planned their move to Malaysia for their retirement.

¹⁰ Borovoy (2005) studies the group of middle-aged Japanese women who attended the support groups for wives of men with alcohol problems. Her female informants began to critically see the national discourse of nurturance as facilitating the relationship of codependency.

¹¹ In this thesis, I use the term *ikigai* and active ageing interchangeably where appropriate.

It is this intersection of the wider socio-economic forces and the shifting ideas about the ageing self and citizenship that my thesis tries to illuminate. The prevailing paradigm of ageing set by successful ageing discourse has promoted studies of medical and psychological aspects, such as health and emotional well-being, of the elderly. However, the experience of ageing is ‘not confined to illness, disease, and stigmatisation, and to a utilitarian pursuit of health until death’ (Ramirez-Valles 2016, 19). Anthropologists have been especially adept at illuminating how ageing is constructed within wider socio-political structures (e.g., Fry 1984; Vesperi 1986; Lock 1993; Lynch and Danely 2013). These structures influence how people narrate their sense of self and how they relate to each other in old age. Bringing together literature on ageing, political economy, migration, kinship, and intimacy, this study shines a spotlight on Japanese retirees in Malaysia, a figure represented across the nations-states and in the media as the embodiment of ‘active ageing’ (e.g., The Star News 2015; Spykerman and Mohd Ali 2016).

Although there are many examples of active retirees in Japan,¹² I focus on those outside Japan because it was the transnational context that illuminated how the emotional experience of ageing was shaped by their engagement with the national discourse. When I asked Japanese retirees about their experience of ageing in Malaysia, they often emphasised that they felt younger and healthier in Malaysia (*wakagaeru*). They then redirected the conversation to praise Malaysia for its vibrant economy (*genkiga aru*). The conversation often then turned to criticisms of the changes they saw in Japan. Many of them lamented Japan’s stagnant economy and predicted imminent default (cf. Klien 2016, 48). Some had transferred their assets to Malaysia. Others compared themselves to overseas Chinese and told me that they were the first generation of overseas Japanese migrants, and had relocated to provide a haven for their children to migrate in case another crisis hit Japan, whether it be a natural disaster or a financial disaster.

¹² Some of my informants were also active participants in senior community groups in Japan. For instance, Mr Arai told me that he and his friend started a group in Nagoya called *100 ninkai* (literally, 100 people group). <http://www.nagoya100nin-kai.net/> He told me that it is very similar to the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur. With a nominal monthly fee of 200 yen (around AUD2), members could participate in clubs and societies offered by the group. He said the group now has 300 members. ‘So I can say that at any point in time I have 300 friends waiting for me in Japan!’ he said with glee. He told me that most members were widows. He observed that those who signed up for movie night at the *100 ninkai* were not actually interested in the movie. Rather, they were interested in the dinner afterwards so that they did not have to eat alone.

At the same time, many were supporters of the current Abe government, which is said to be responsible for the rise of nationalism in Japan. Many volunteered to teach Japanese language and culture to the local Malaysian people at the Japanese cultural institutes. In doing so, they adopted the national narrative of *Cool Japan*, the soft power policy that the Japanese government has used to spread its cultural influence around the world (Iwabuchi 2002; Yano 2013). Witnessing these ‘cultural intimacies’ (Herzfeld [1997]2005) between their social life and the state ideologies, I came to recognise that people understood their own life experiences as intimately connected to national narratives, even as they tried to keep a distance from them (Jessica Robbins 2013, 79).

Hence, retirement migration offered a productive site for me to analyse how elderly Japanese people negotiated their ageing processes outside their home country, while simultaneously mediating the models of normative elderly behaviour propagated by the Japanese state’s welfare model. Through 15 months of fieldwork with silver backpackers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, I witnessed a growing significance of emotional culture as a site of labour and exchange among the retirees. Although the sense of moral community is often assumed to be located in an older generation (Muehlebach 2012, 137), I will argue that the desire to be useful to others was fundamentally shaped by and, in turn, influenced by the cultural meaning of the transition from work to retirement. I argue in this thesis that specific historical and gendered socialisation of the post-war, high growth period, as well as the present welfare policies, made these sentiments persuasive especially among the male baby boomers. This thesis will highlight the constant process of mediating the tension between the reproduction and the destabilisation of productive citizenship in retirement.

I will present a culturally particular story of Japanese retirees in Malaysia, which leaves us with a comparative perspective to hold up against or compare with retirement in other neoliberal societies. Retirement, I argue, is becoming not simply a time of leisure and rest. Rather it has become a ‘project’ of self-making especially for male ex-corporate workers. In a rapidly ageing Japanese society, the questions of how one wishes to live on ‘the edges’ (Allison 2013) was articulated in new ways

which were entwined with neoliberal ethic (cf. C. Freeman 2014, 5).¹³ Of course, not all women and men conduct themselves in the same way, neither are they opposed to each other. In this thesis, I will try to unpack diverse views to show the complexity of the ways in which my informants adopted, contested and at times exceeded the state ideologies.

Beyond Subjectivity: Relational Belonging in the Aftermath of Productivity

It is worth mentioning at the outset that my understanding of the relationships I observed among the Japanese retirement community in Kuala Lumpur is limited by the circumstances of my background.¹⁴ In contrast to my informants who were aged between 55 and 75 years, I was a Japanese woman in her late-20s who had spent the previous decade abroad. As I will argue throughout the following chapters, gender and age lay at the heart of negotiations of relational belonging among the retirees. In conducting participant observations, therefore, I became a very part of these negotiations. Navaro-Yashin (2012, xii) argues that only particular spaces and themes make themselves available and accessible for study by particular people. I, therefore, begin this section by briefly describing two of my initial fieldwork encounters that motivated my theoretical concerns and analysis that I present in this thesis.

¹³ While most retirees I met were not engaged in business, Carla Freeman's (2014) concept of 'entrepreneurs' seemed relevant here to describe their ethos. Freeman (2014, 2) defines an entrepreneur as 'one who creates and manages a business enterprise, taking financial risks with the hope of making a profit; a visionary figure, in other words, hailed for executing an innovative idea and, importantly, willing to undertake considerable risk to put it into practice'. Listing famous entrepreneurs, such as Henry Ford, Walt Disney, Madame C.J. Walker, Oprah Winfrey and Steve Jobs, she argues that entrepreneurs often highlight a 'relentless personality and capacity to anticipate and embrace change, whether technological or social, and, as one of [her] informants suggested to [her], the tendency toward self-sufficiency; in other words (the entrepreneur is) stubborn and rebellious' (C. Freeman 2014, 2). Freeman (2014) explores entrepreneurship, not as a vehicle for income generation, but rather as a generalised way of being and way of feeling in the world. My informants shared the characteristics of 'entrepreneurs' in that they were willing to take risks by migrating, and in a self-sufficient way took the business of their future in their own hands. In doing so, retirement migration has become more than a vehicle to maximise a retirement pension. Rather, it has become a generalised way of being and of feeling in the world.

¹⁴ While I drew insight from my participation in the community, I am in no way suggesting that my experience is same as that of my informants. Many anthropologists have suggested the problematic nature of such an assertion (most prominently, Clifford and Marcus 1986). Nor am I emphasising the differences between my informants and me, and trying to theorise from that difference (Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro 2014; For a powerful critique of this methodology, see Chua 2015). There were as many practices that I was familiar with as those that I was puzzled by. Neither representation nor co-presence was a determinant as I sought a way of approaching the ethnographic situation. I approached my brief encounter with them not only as field 'work' but also as a learning experience that offered opportunities for mistakes and teamwork.

My first encounter with the Japanese retirement migrants was in Penang when I conducted a month-long pilot fieldwork program in 2013. Particularly memorable was my encounter with Mr and Mrs Wakase. I met the couple in their condominium facing the coast of Batu Ferringhi. Mr Wakase carefully showed me around the condominium while his wife made us a snack in the kitchen. Mr Wakase seemed to have led the decision to move to Malaysia three years before. After the tour of the condominium, Mr and Mrs Wakase and I sat at a table in a living room. Mrs Wakase served me and her husband coffee and mangosteens, but not herself. In contrast to her energetic husband in his new bright orange T-shirt, she wore a faded white blouse. The blouse and its wearer both looked tired. 'How do you find Malaysia?' I asked her. 'Well', she paused and turned to her husband. He was busy reaching for a mangosteen. She chuckled nervously and said she had reluctantly followed her husband to Malaysia five years before. Her husband then looked up and asked me a question. 'So, why did you decide to study in Australia?' As I cracked open the mangosteen, I replied half-heartedly, 'My partner works in the same university'. Mr Wakase looked satisfied. 'Oh, I see. Since you needed to follow him to Australia anyway, you must have thought that you might as well study there'. Before I could answer, Mrs Wakase interrupted suddenly and firmly. 'Of course not!' I almost choked on the mangosteen. 'Shiori-san has her own dream and goals in her life!' Mr Wakase kept quiet. The tension in the room was palpable. The room echoed with the sound of mangosteen being forced down my throat.

I interpret the incident as evidence of the shifting forms of spousal relations in retirement and in Malaysia more specifically. As I will explore in more details in later chapters, most of my informants had married their spouses through arranged marriages, which generated various forms of gender obligations. Many women who are aged over 65 today had been housewives (Garon 1997, 185). They carefully managed the affairs of the household so that their husbands could devote their time to work.

With a husband's retirement from the market economy, however, there came a potential for a re-negotiation of spousal relationships. The cross-cultural literature documents the retirement period as a time of reward for many women. An anthropologist, Caroline Bledsoe (2010), points out that in Gambia, retirement from reproduction is a key social and moral moment for mothers because ageing is considered contingent on the cumulative physical, social and spiritual hardships of

childbirth. A Gambian woman's reproductive history provides her with a high moral and social status which would guarantee security and respect for her retirement (Bledsoe 2010, 251). Similarly, Sarah Lamb's (2000, 240) study of ageing in a Bengali village in India shows that older women gain more power as they age and become mothers-in-law. Arber and Ginn (1995a) suggest that, as women become more independent in old age, men tend to show more nurturing tendencies. Wilson (1995, 110–111) terms the men's emotional shift, 'an age affect'. He argues that in advanced old age, men become less concerned with the power aspects of gender relations than they have been in the past (Wilson 1995). In the scholarship on Japan, Katrina Moore (2010) observes the transformation of spousal relationship into 'sibling-like' relationship among the elderly couples. By 'sibling-like' relationship, Moore observes an intimate relationship without sexual activities. She argues that there is a great distance between the husband's and wife's ideas of intimacy, and she traces it back to men's tendency to have had extra marital affairs in their working lives.

In the case of Japanese retirement migrants, although the wives initially followed their husbands to Malaysia, albeit reluctantly in many cases, they gradually transformed their spousal relationships in Malaysia. Mrs Wakase's outrage at her husband's assumption that a woman would naturally follow her husband showed how such gender performativity was no longer a norm for her, even though it might have been so three years before. In Malaysia, the retirees constantly negotiated these gender norms, from participating in activities together to calling each other in romantic terms. Like Moore (2010), who has tracked the shifting gender relations in old age by looking at their practices in younger years, I will examine their gender transformation in the light of the strict division of labour in the earlier years. I will pay special attention to the sources of anxiety stemming from the gendered division of labour.

The negotiation of relationships in retirement and the anxiety stemming from it was not limited to spousal ties. Conflicts between male Japanese retirees erupted frequently in the Japan Club. One incident, to my greatest regret, involved me at the beginning of my fieldwork.¹⁵ An incident happened in the *Igo* Club (Japanese board game club). I joined the Club, naively believing the wording on the poster, 'Open to

¹⁵ I take comfort in Jane Collier's (1997, 18) statement, 'Every anthropologist participates in creating the evidence he or she cites'.

beginners'. When I appeared at the next Friday session, Mr Inuoe, one of the leaders of the *Igo* Club, was shocked that I did not know the rules. He subsequently sent an email to the mailing list, temporarily shutting the Friday *Igo* sessions to beginners. I immediately wrote to the mailing list, publicly apologising for my ignorance and the disturbance I caused. On the following Friday, a few members of the *Igo* Club spotted me in the lobby of the Japan Club and encouraged me to participate. They assured me that they had spoken with Mr Inuoe and that he had agreed to let beginners participate. When we walked back to the *Igo* class, however, Mr Inuoe had already left. He left chairs marked, 'Beginner's seat'. They called for an emergency meeting. At the meeting, they decided to remove Mr Inuoe from the leadership team. On the way home, Mrs Naruto, who offered me a lift, said to me regretfully. 'Mr Inuoe didn't have any bad intentions. He only misunderstood the scope of his power. It's just a club. It's just leisure. Yet it is really difficult!' The incident brought out the anxieties that were generated by the blurring of boundaries between work and non-work in the Japan Club.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I realised that what I initially thought was an empirical phenomenon—anxieties about intimacy—was generative of anthropological debates over gender and value. In crafting the neoliberal retirement model, the ongoing project of self-making (Giddens 1991, 53) was challenged in the most intimate domains, as one negotiated desire, love, and legacy with others in the aftermath of work. From solidarity between fellow Japanese silver backpackers to love between elderly spouses to distant intergenerational relationships, they in turn allowed new forms of sociality and meanings to emerge. I documented the negotiations of these taken-for-granted categories as they took new forms in post-work life.

Therefore, in this ethnography, I want to go beyond the making of neoliberal subjectivity in retirement to contribute a perspective which focuses on the relational aspects. I am interested in what these experiences of intimacy in the pursuit of retirement migration can tell us about how retirees made sense of their second lives, their gender, and their place in an ageing Japan. Here, I use the word 'intimacy' not only as referring to intense personal relations between two individuals (Giddens 1992) but also as that which produces the affective ties that incorporate individuals and groups into a larger chain of national discourse (Friedman 2005, 312; Berlant 1997; Povinelli 2006). This is my attempt to make sense of the generative capacity

of these multiple experiences of intimacy in relation to the regeneration of productive selves in retirement. By doing so, I aim at providing a more nuanced view of how people interpret, resist and reproduce forms of productivity in their making of independent retirement, and how this new kind of productivity is contested and shaped by the very relationships they form with people.

This focus on the intimate aspects of neoliberal ideologies contributes to a debate that is already well underway by feminist economic anthropologists. They focus on intimacy as a contested and yet generative site for national belonging (Weston 1991; Collier 1997; Yanagisako 2002; Povinelli 2006; Illouz 2007; Berlant 2011; C. Freeman 2014, 4). In their analysis, they typically highlight the emotional aspects of the social and economic transitions which have been sidelined by masculinist approaches to the study of society.¹⁶ I take inspiration from feminist scholars who have shown renewed interests in social bonds, including ‘solidarity’ and ‘intimacy’ as the society adopts a neoliberal social model (e.g., Rebhun 1999; Ahearn 2001; Constable 2003; C. Watanabe 2014). Carla Freeman (2014, 58), for instance, argues that some of the most profound, locally significant dimensions of the transformations brought by a neoliberal trend are seen in realms of kinship, conjugality, and parenting. Friedman (2005, 312) also argues that ‘marriage is an institution in which state regulation and sexual normalisation converge to link personal desires with state goals’. Other scholars have identified an anxiety among those who had to reconfigure the meaning of love and sexuality in changing economic conditions (Stout 2014; Osburg 2013).¹⁷

¹⁶ Illouz (2007), for instance, suggests the re-casting of ‘effervescence’ in Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* as ‘solidarity’. She argues that it is ‘nothing but a bundle of emotions binding social actors to the central symbols of society’ (Illouz 2007, 2). Indeed, Durkheim has provided the theories of two forms of solidarity which bonds the society: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Carol Greenhouse (2010, 3) offers a re-reading of the neoliberal shift in terms of a shift from a mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity, suggesting the relevance of social bonds even as society demands the mastery of self. According to Greenhouse’s (2010, 3) reading of Durkheimian solidarity, while mechanical solidarity is a social bond based on the common allegiance of individuals to the group through a religious or political authority, organic solidarity is produced through interdependence and self-knowledge. Under organic solidarity, society is made not by the allegiance of homogenous groups of people but by cooperation of diverse people who know themselves (Greenhouse 2010, 3). In organic society, therefore, difference becomes a social asset.

¹⁷ Noel Stout (2014), in her monograph *After Love*, discusses the anxiety among the queer community in Cuba as the country moves from a socialist to a post-socialist state. When the country opened its doors to tourism, there was an increased opportunity for trading sex for money. She documents their struggle to re-negotiate love and relationships within these wider socio-economic changes. Osburg (2013), on the other hand, studied the rise of elite networks comprising nouveau riche entrepreneurs who have taken risks and achieved success in the shifting Chinese

By analysing multiple forms of anxious relationships in my own ethnography among the elderly Japanese, I combine the aforementioned scholarship on neoliberal self-making practices and their effect on intimate relationships with classic research on ageing and retirement. Although few scholars have made this linkage (with the exception of Wentzell 2013; and Allison 2015),¹⁸ popular culture had begun to provide intimate pictures of ageing, or what Michael Fischer (2015) calls, an ‘aesthetics of aging’. In 2005, the term *jukunen rikon* (late-life divorce) was popularised by a TV drama with the same title. The drama told the story of Yoko, a middle-aged housewife, who decided to divorce her husband on the day of his retirement. She embarked on her second life, neither as a wife nor as a mother, but as an empowered individual fulfilling her own dreams later in life.¹⁹ In contrast, my male informants were reading *Tasogare Ryuseigun* (Like Shooting Stars in Twilight) (1995–2014), a popular comic series that illustrates the various middle-aged protagonists’ searches for love in later-life. My informants recommended to me that I borrow the series from the Japan Club Library.

Particularly germane to our understanding of retirement migration are the two successful films adapted from a novel, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) and *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2015). They show the social relations among a group of British retirees who decide to spend their retirement in India. In these films, the idea of retirement migration as a neoliberal project goes beyond the metaphor as they take on business ventures in India. Against the backdrop of these ‘projects’, the story highlights the negotiation of relationships between residents of the retirement hotel, who selectively form bonds of affection among themselves.

market. His ethnography illustrates how anxiety about growing social inequality in China is manifested in morality discussions about men and women (Osburg 2013, 1).

¹⁸ Wentzell (2013) documents the emergence of new forms of national masculinities among elderly Mexican men who have erectile dysfunction. She documents her informants narrating the period after the husband’s erectile dysfunction as ‘the second era of marriage’. ‘The second era of marriage’ was characterised by more closeness and less infidelity. One of her female informants told Wentzell that her husband followed her everywhere after retirement and after developing the erectile dysfunction. The ‘age appropriate’ masculinity was then re-developed by the men, who associated this new masculinity with the idea of the modern Mexican citizen, and juxtaposed it with ‘traditional’ macho identity. Allison (2015, 139), in her study of seniors in contemporary Japan, argues that ‘relationality is the crucible around which a politics of life and death is ambivalently pitched in Japan today’.

¹⁹ A similar theme was explored in a more recent film, *Kazuku ha Tsuraiyo* (What a Wonderful Family!) The film shows the dramatic unravelling of family life after Tomiko announces her wish to divorce her husband of 50 years.

This ethnography thereby contributes to the growing popular cultural interest in the formation and the negotiation of intimacy within retirement communities.²⁰

My focus on intimate relationships among Japanese retirees allowed me to consciously pay attention to the experiences of women, which, curiously, were absent from the current scholarship on retirement migration (cf. King, Warnes, and Williams 2000; Gustafson 2001; Huber and O'Reilly 2004; Oliver 2008; Benson and O'Reilly 2009).²¹ Initially, my adherence to feminism was incidental, but I soon became a fully converted, 'feminist fieldworker' (Reinharz 1992). For instance, my fieldwork soon revealed how the view of their movement to Malaysia differed between spouses. Although wives often called their stay in Malaysia 'prolonged tourism' (*chouki ryokou*), their husbands tended to call it, 'permanent migration' (*ijuu*). This had a consequential effect on their perception of home: wives tended to see their home as in Japan, husbands tended to call Malaysia their new home, which became a point of frequent contestations. This contestation, in some cases, led to wives' return much earlier than their husbands, or the couple's joint return much earlier than they had originally planned. Hence, this study distinguishes itself from works which see retirement migrants from Japan and from other countries as homogenous groups of 'residential tourists' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009), implying

²⁰ These popular cultural references also help displace the stereotype of old age as somewhat asexual. Sexual intimacy is an area in which there is a large gap between the subjective experience and social expectation of the elderly. The public expectation of the 'respectable elderly' typically idealises them as asexual beings. This gives rise to a negative stereotype of older people who maintain active sexual lives; Those elderly who express sexual desire are deemed to be childish, and their later-life romances are perceived to be comical, or worse, distasteful. The derogatory phrase, 'dirty old men', reflects this sentiment. However, from the 1980s, some scholars have begun to disprove the stereotype. For instance, Amanda Smith Barusch (2008), who conducted her research on intimacy among people who are above 50, finds the potentialities of love as experienced by more than 110 people she interviewed. Their love stories range from long-term relationships to one that is developed in later-life. She argues that intense infatuation is still possible in later-life. Between the love among youth and the old, she finds more commonality than the differences. Many people would live and love well into their eighties and nineties. Intimacy is an integral part of many elderly people's emotional lives.

²¹ Most works on retirement migration have been written by sociologists and geographers with a focus on Europe and North America. Few anthropologists have dealt with the topic explicitly (with the exception of Oliver 2008). Those few have dealt with the theme through scholarship on (1) return migration in which labour migrants return to their 'home' countries or regions after retirement (Baldassar 2001; Bolzman, Fibbi, and Vial 2006; Hoey 2010); (2) lifestyle migration, in which retirees seek out lower cost of living and warmer weather in the recipient countries to pursue leisure activities (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Oliver 2008); or (3) care migration in which people cross borders for medical treatments (Yeates 2011). The group of Japanese retirees on whom I focus in this thesis perhaps most closely fit the description of lifestyle migrants. As I will elaborate in the thesis, the lower cost of living in Malaysia allows them to undertake more hobby activities within the limits of their pensions. Having said that, my ethnography will depart from scholarship on lifestyle migration as it highlights the relational and the neoliberal aspects of this desire for different lifestyles.

that they are like tourists or that they are somewhere in between tourists and migrants (S. Yamashita 2007, 2009). The analysis of the gendered difference in the perception of their movement, in turn, provides a fruitful perspective on the importance of retirement migration for one's sense of value and of belonging in Japan. I will move outward from my informants' experience of retirement 'project' to examine emergent forms of personhood and relationality in increasingly volatile and unpredictable economic times.

Field Site and Methods

In total, I conducted a month of pilot fieldwork in 2013, eight consecutive months of fieldwork from December 2013 to July 2014, and another seven months from November 2015 to May 2016. I chose Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, as my long-term field site because it had the greatest concentration of Japanese retirees and it had the world's biggest Japan Club (Figure 0.1). The Japan Club was a simulated Japan, in the Baudrillardian sense. Once past the guard house, I entered the club, which was equipped with everything Japanese. It had a Japanese grocery shop, a Japanese restaurant, a Japanese café, a Japanese book shop, a Japanese library, a Japanese DVD rental shop, a dry cleaning service, a tourist agency, a massage service, a Japanese kindergarten, a souvenir shop, and even a florist. Japan was simulated not only through its visual appeal but also through its temperature and sounds. The temperature in the KL Japan Club was maintained at about 27°C, which was the common temperature setting in Japanese homes in summer. This was in striking contrast with most Malaysian buildings, where air-conditioners were set at about 18°C. Inside the Club, I could only hear Japanese women's chattering voice. Through its appeal to eye, skin, and ears, the KL Japan Club simulated Japan for the retirees.



Figure 0.1. The Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur.

Although retirees I met were from different geographical and work backgrounds, they met almost every day in the Japan Club. The Japan Club, formerly a Japanese school in central KL, boasted 4000 members. The members of the club were mostly Japanese expatriates, Japanese retirees, and Malaysians who took lessons in Japanese martial arts and language.²² For a nominal fee of MYR40 (USD10) a month, members could enjoy the activities and facilities at the Club.²³ It hosted more than 20 activity groups, most of which were comprised of 15 to 30 elderly Japanese people. Because most of the weekday activities were taken up by retirees, retirees routinely displayed a self-deprecatory humour, saying that the Japan Club had become a *Roujin Kurabu* (Oldies' Club). The metaphor of Oldies's Club allowed me to approach this distinctive fieldsite in the similar way classic anthropologists of ageing had approached their old-age institutions. Forty years after Myerhoff's seminal ethnography, I find that their methodological concerns are still relevant in my field site. I took inspiration from these ethnographies and followed the 'social drama'

²² While it is not a focus of this dissertation, it is worth mentioning the structure of the Japan Club, which differentiated the Japanese members from the Malaysian members. The Japan Club had two entrances. One (often called a backdoor) was closer to the gate and it led to the Japanese language centre. Most local students used the backdoor entrance. The other was the front entrance. The Japanese used the front entrance. Hence I seldom saw local members in the lobby. Although sharing the same building, the structure of the building separated the two types of members.

²³ This was in 2014. When I returned in 2015, the fee had been raised to MYR70 per person. This caused a number of retirees to leave the Club.

(Goffman [1956]1969) as it unfolded in the community of Japanese retirees in Malaysia. In doing so, I paid particular attention to the circulation of material objects and the multiple facets of emotions—their sense of rejuvenation, anxiety, frustration, and love—because they were critical dimensions of their subjective meaning-making (C. Freeman 2014, 3).

I started my fieldwork by joining some of the Japan Club's weekly activities: a mixed choir, rhythm and sound classes, ballroom dancing, Japanese language volunteering, Malay language, *Igo*, and painting. These weekly activities gave me a systematic entry into the otherwise less defined 'field' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) of Japanese retirees in KL. From the network that I established through these activities, I eventually connected with informants' friends and neighbours. Through the snow-balling method, I got to know a handful of people who did not participate in the activities of the Japan Club. However, the bulk of my insights were gained from those who did participate in the activities at the Japan Club. Consequently, my informants' social class positions were rather similar, in contrast to those who could not afford the activities offered by the club or those who chose not to interact with Japanese.²⁴ In total, I got to know more than one hundred Japanese retirement residents in Malaysia.

Many of my elderly informants lived in one of two areas of Kuala Lumpur: Taman Desa and Mont Kiara. Both suburbs were less than a 20-minute drive to the Japan Club. South of the city centre, the suburb of Taman Desa used to house many Japanese expatriates. After the development of a new expatriate haven, Mont Kiara, most expatriates moved to the new suburb (Figure 0.2). It boasted European-style boulevards and a trendy shopping centre. The emptied apartments in Taman Desa were taken up by Japanese retirees who were looking for inexpensive accommodation. Retirees with more means preferred to live in Mont Kiara (Figure 0.3). Although there were more than a dozen condominiums in each suburb, most retirees were concentrated in one or two condominiums. This was because of two Japanese-speaking real estate agents who monopolised the Japanese retirement market. I rented a room in one of those condominiums in Mont Kiara.

²⁴ The latter are sometimes referred to in the popular media as economic refugees. My informants called them '*chinbotsu gumi*' (the sunken class) because they often live among the locals to lower their living costs. Many of them would choose to live in other parts of Southeast Asia, such as Cambodia and Laos, where the cost of living is significantly lower than Malaysia.



Figure 0.2. A night view of Mont Kiara district.



Figure 0.3. Koreeda's condominium unit in Mont Kiara.

The residents of these condominiums frequently held gatherings and assisted the new comers to start their lives in Kuala Lumpur. I accompanied residents of the condominiums when they organised information sessions for prospective retirement

migrants, drove with them as they brought the newcomers to new Japanese grocery shops, and walked with them as they led the walking tours for the newcomers of KL's main sites. Within a month, my fieldwork schedule was filled with activities. I spent mornings painting and afternoons ballroom dancing with retirees in the Japan Club. In the evenings we went to have dinner in groups at restaurants or at someone's house. I also travelled with them on the tour of Kota Kinabalu.

I substantiated my insights gained through these participant observations with formal and informal interviews with approximately 100 Japanese retirees. Only a small number of the interviews were formal and structured. They took place in the Japan Club, restaurants and in the informants' homes. Otherwise, most interviews took place spontaneously at serendipitous occasions. Rather than asking too many questions, I went with the flow of my informants. I listened as my female informants shared their emotional experiences. For instance, Mrs Iwatani told me her life history and her feelings about her husband on the bus as we travelled together to Kota Kinabalu (see Prologue and Chapter 5). Maruko told me about his work experience as we hunted for durian in the city market (see Chapter 2). Towards the end of my fieldwork, I asked barely any questions. The informants narrated the stories they wanted to tell.

I also conducted one focus group with the members of the rhythm and sound class. This class was explicitly for the elderly who wanted to prevent the onset of senility. After a class one afternoon, I asked the participants about shifts in their bodily and emotional wellbeing since their arrival in Malaysia.

In addition to these interviews, I collected their diaries through their online blogs. A number of retirees posted a daily diary of their lives in Malaysia. I followed their postings on online social network sites and blog sites, which were made publicly available. I paid close attention to four blogs; three were written by men, one by a woman, and I met three of the four writers. In addition to fieldwork, I visited the National Library of Japan for an archival search to collect historical images that were circulated around the time my informants were growing up. This aided my analysis of public discourse in the making of the productive citizenship.

In choosing the informants, I did not consciously single out people with specific markers of identity, such as poor or rich or single or married. But people's

occupational backgrounds and gender played important roles in my analysis.²⁵ Additionally, although I focused primarily on relationships among elderly Japanese, I also wanted to understand the encounters between the local Malaysian people and the Japanese to consider how these encounters affected the sense of self of the Japanese in Malaysia. The situation of Japanese retirees in Malaysia, whose relations with the local people cannot be detached from the colonial past, provides a productive way to see what historical, cultural and economic complexities are entangled in the making of neoliberal selves in increasingly mobile Asian countries (Thang et al. 2011). The term, *rokaru* or ‘the locals’ cannot, of course, stand for the diverse inhabitants of Kuala Lumpur. Yet it was the term that elderly Japanese used to refer to Malaysian people whom they encountered. Hence I use the term ‘the locals’ in this thesis simply as an analytic category to discuss the dynamics of encounters between the Japanese retirees and Malaysian neighbours.

Each informant’s experiences were diverse and unique. I have, however, devoted a large part of this ethnography to exploring the narratives of two dozen informants who are marked as *dramatis personae* in an earlier page. Exploring their narratives in detail allowed me to capture the qualities of ‘life as lived’ (Abu-Lughod 1993, 2). Andrew Beatty (2014, 545) argues that ‘only a narrative approach can capture both the particularity and the temporal dimension of emotion, restoring verisimilitude and fidelity to experience’. The story I intend to tell—linking the anxious intimacy to changes in how people enacted and experienced transitions from work to post-work—is necessarily partial. But in adopting the narrative style of ethnographic writing, I have tried to give a fuller and richer context in which the selected narratives were told to me to elucidate the materials that were rich in emotions.

Chapter Outline

The significance of these inquiries can only be grasped in terms of an understanding of Japanese socio-economic history and the gendered context in which productivist subjects were made. Part One will sketch a broad affective framework in which retirees chose to live in Malaysia. In particular, Chapter 1 discusses how productive

²⁵ As I mentioned in the previous footnote, informants at the Japan Club generally enjoyed financial comfort with minor variations in their financial status. See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion.

citizenship was cultivated during the post-war high-growth period in Japan. I argue that affective practices—morality, intimacy, and desire—were not opposed to the rational working of the market. Instead, they went hand in hand with the rationalist drive to craft productive citizens. Chapter 2 outlines how the capitalist regime of the market displaced those who were no longer productive economically. After discussing the sense of dislocation felt by male retirees who used to belong successfully to the normative life course, I show how Malaysia emerged as a utopian landscape in which the displaced retirees could renegotiate their belonging. Many men said that they felt rejuvenated, as they became delinquent elderly (*furyo rounen*) in Malaysia. They could see other possibilities for life outside the productivist state.

Part Two articulates the anxieties arising from the remaking of intimate relationships in Malaysia. Chapter 3 describes the contradictory process of self-making in the Japan Club. Many male retirees created and enmeshed themselves in the affective communities of solidarity with fellow Japanese retirees through exchange practices—most prominently of helping each other by circulating information. These activities resembled work practices in structural, temporal, and affective aspects. I will discuss the neoliberal tendency of their activities in the Japan Club, pointing out how its meaning is shaped by the constant mediation of the tension between the reproduction and the destabilisation of productivist norms.

Importantly, the affective narrative of ‘being useful’ covered up the new hierarchy and marginality that their practice of giving created among the retirees. Among the marginalised, I especially highlight women’s experience in Chapter 4. I will show that although retirement migration liberated some women from their gender roles, many others were frustrated because they were separated from their source of value—kinship—and were made to depend on their spouses for mobility and communication in Kuala Lumpur. This chapter highlights the misrecognition of what constitutes ‘productivity’ and *ikigai* as between the genders in retirement. I will then highlight how women reproduced their own values in Malaysia through the circulation of Japanese domestic products.

Chapter 5 continues to illustrate the negotiations of gender relations between spouses within the wider structure of kin and intergenerational relationships. Many demonstrated a desire to be re-connected with their family as the time of their death became closer. I argue that women assumed a central role in the reproduction of men’s intergenerational ties. It was here that new spousal relations emerged, in the

eyes of their male counterpart, as the timeless ‘romantic partners’. I observe that men seem to reframe their spousal relationships to the more Western, romantic partnership, but women seemed to continue to frame their relationships in terms of the household obligations.

It is in highlighting these different forms of anxious intimacy throughout the thesis—between self and other retirees, self and the spouse, self and the family, and self and the state—that this ethnography finds its central thesis. The transition from work to retirement is a space of the creation of a neoliberal subject, but this transition also generates a new possibility for renewed relationships and belonging. Their constant negotiation of what makes life worth living and with whom shapes the meaning of independent and mutually supportive retirement.

Part One

The Making of Productive Citizenship

Chapter 1

The History of Gender, Work, and Family in Japan

In February 1983, an American electric rock band, Styx, released a single album, *Mr Roboto*. It is a music video that starts with a young musician, Jonathan Chance, wandering into the Rock Museum. Watching him from behind is a figure of a robot with a Japanese samurai face. Jonathan Chance, not realising that a robot is following him, stares at wax figures of famous rock stars on stage. Smoke begins to fill the room, and there appear five samurai robots on stage. Samurai robots start to dance with disjointed movements and characteristic bows (Figure 1.1). The samurai robot that followed Jonathan was in fact Kilroy, a former rock star. Having been captured by samurai robots, he wore the mask to escape the assembly line. He tries to take off his robotic mask and reveal himself to Jonathan. But all we see beneath the mask is another samurai robot. It was too late. Kilroy too has become a robot.



Figure 1.1. *Mr Roboto*, a music video by Styx.

Mr Roboto was produced at the time that ‘Japanese-style productivity’ entered the popular imagination. The miraculous Japanese post-war economic growth fascinated the business world and beyond. In less than 20 years after WWII, its GNP had grown to rival that of United Kingdom (Vogel 1979, 10). Products that were ‘made-in-Japan’, such as cars and electrical products, flooded the American market. Some Japanese manufacturers competed and quickly replaced American and European manufacturers (Vogel 1979, 10). The motor vehicle industry was a case in point. In 1975 and 1976, Japanese car makers, such as Toyota and Nissan produced twice as many cars as European car makers (Vogel 1979, 11–12). In 1987, Honda replaced Volkswagen as the top car exporter to the US car market (Vogel 1979, 11). It resulted in a plethora of books published to uncover the secrets of ‘Japanese productivity’, including Vogel’s (1979) best-seller, *Japan as Number One*.

‘The Japanese style productivity’ was characterised by the workers’ loyalty and dedication to the firm, lifelong employment, the seniority principle and high savings (Duke 1986, xvii). With its unparalleled productivity, it was celebrated as the new global benchmark, replacing the Fordist assembly line model of mass production (Tsutsui 1998, 3; Hamada 2005, 125). In 1983, the same year that American youth was humming the tune of *Mr Roboto*, the American government published a report which warned its citizens that ‘our nation is at risk’ (Duke 1986, 1). The Japanese productivity had shaken the foundation of the industrial America’s unchallenged pre-eminence in commerce (Hamada 2005, 125). At the same time, overseas musicians and popular media alike were mocking Japanese workers whose single-minded dedication to work resembled that of heartless machines.

This chapter will discuss the making of a historically specific productive figure, *Mr Roboto*, or *dankai no sedai* (baby boomers), who provided the labour for Japan’s post-war economic growth. In contrast with preceding generations, baby boomers are said to embody *sarariiman* culture; higher education, urbanisation, and consumption culture (Cabinet Office 2012b, 1). This chapter will discuss how the distinctive, ‘Japanese-style’ productivity was cultivated among the cohort of baby boomers, some of whom became retirement migrants in their later years. As baby boomers began to reach the age of 65 in 2012, this chapter will set the scene for subsequent chapters, which discuss the effects of productivist ideologies on their finding of relational belonging in their retirement. I hope to elucidate why retirement from the workforce carried such high stakes for those who had lived through the high-growth era.

I argue that contrary to the popular cultural representations of this cohort of Japanese workers as mindless machines, their affective practices—morality, intimacy, and desire—went hand in hand with the rational operations of the market to craft a productive citizen who found their *ikigai* (what makes life worth living) in work and family. An anthropologist, Ann Stoler (2002), has argued that modern states and colonial powers have attempted to govern their subjects through the management of sentiment, emotion and affect. Similarly, Sylvia Yanagisako (2002), through her study of Italian family businesses, has deconstructed the dominant binaries between rational and affective, nurturing and competitive, and economic action and family ties. In the context of Japan, the affective signifiers that are linked

to productivity arose in various sites including official state policies, religious institutions, media and home. In particular, I will elucidate how the state employed gendered sentiments to strengthen its productivist goals throughout the history of modern Japan (Rosenberger 2001).

The historical analysis is particularly apt to deconstruct the seemingly taken-for-granted categories of gendered labour (Collier, Yanagisako, and Bloch 1987, 46–47). Feminist anthropologists have long argued that femininity and masculinity are not fixed categories but, rather, they shift with particular historical and cultural circumstances (Lamphere, Bamberger, and Rosaldo 1974; Ortner 1974; Moore 2013). The Japanese state had always mobilised particular forms of gender, kinship, and emotional practices to advance its goals, from the Meiji restoration, to the introduction of capitalism in the 1920s, to World War II (WWII) and to the post-war high-growth era.²⁶ This chapter will trace these historical and cultural representations from the 1880s until the economic miracle of the 1980s. Different historical contexts inspired new rhetoric to motivate a particular form of gendered subjectivity that has a continuing effect on the subject formation of the retired baby boomers. I will elucidate how the identification with the state through the gendered practices of production and reproduction became persuasive to the group of Japanese people who lived and worked through the high growth era.

I will mainly rely on secondary sources to analyse the official models of ‘productivity’ that were propagated by the Japanese state since the 1890s (Crawcour 1978). I will also rely on archival resources, in particular, popular cultural references and advertisements that drew links between specific forms of gendered labour and national belonging. I will approach these discourses critically by contrasting and supplementing them with my informants’ reflections on their working lives.

I will show that the state’s intervention in the everyday lives of people blurred the boundaries between economic and affective practices. In particular, I will highlight how the *ie* (household) system and husband–wife relationships were an important locus of the state’s affective management because it enabled gendered labour practices (Friedman 2005, 312). What emerged as a result of this historical examination was a picture of workers who, on the one hand were guided by the

²⁶ The period before the Meiji Restoration also laid the foundations for many social and economic antecedents of contemporary practices. This thesis, however, will limit its historical analysis to the period starting from Japan’s modernisation. For periods before Meiji Restoration, an edited volume by Nakane and Oishi (1990) provides a helpful analysis of some of these foundations.

mechanical logic of production, but on the other hand, were driven by their desires for middle-class belonging. In high-growth Japan, I will show that rational and affective practices were enshrined to animate both the state and the people.

The 1890s to the 1920s: Post-Samurai and the Rationalisation Movement

The Meiji restoration in 1868 marked the beginning of what is usually referred to as Japan's 'modern period' (Hendry 1981, 14). It also marked the end of two and a half centuries of almost complete isolation from foreign contacts during the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) (Hendry 1981, 14). Western material culture, from clothes to food to furniture began to appear, and importantly, some Western ideas began to spread rapidly during the Meiji period (1868–1912). Among them, the idea of 'productivity' was popularised in Japan with the introduction in the 1920s of Taylorism and its Scientific Management principles. Originally articulated by Frederick Winslow Taylor, Scientific Management had American managerial thought and practice ever since the late 19th century (Tsutsui 1998, 7–8). Taylorism rejected the workshop methods based on the customary practices of craftsmen and, instead, emphasised the importance of a scientific approach to manufacturing. It separated labour from professional managerial élites.

Taylorism and its scientific principles were enthusiastically taken up by Japanese business leaders, who were looking for alternatives to the feudal *oyakata* system in which skilled foremen acted as intermediaries between companies and subordinate labourers in manufacturing industry (Tsutsui 1998, 15–19).²⁷ As the Japanese economy developed after the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, the *oyakata* system proved inefficient. Following the labour unrest after the Sino-Japanese War, there was a call for a radical change in managerial style (Tsutsui 1998, 15–17). It was during this period of searching for another management style that the translation of the *Principle of Scientific Management* (1911) was made available in Japan. Soon after, *Mueki no Tesu wo Habuku Hiketsu* (The Secrets of Eliminating Wasted Work) (1921), a text written by a journalist, Ikeda Toshiro, after his return from a tour of the United States, became a best seller (Tsutsui 1998, 19). Over 70,000 copies were distributed to employees at Mitsubishi Goshi and Kawasaki Shipbuilding, two of the

²⁷ For the root of Japanese management practices in Tokugawa period, see Sakudo (1990).

largest manufacturing companies in Japan at that time (Tsutsui 1998, 19). By early 1920, the Taylorite message was well established in the business community, and its effect was recognised by the state. The state formally institutionalised the Taylorite Scientific Management principles by establishing an efficiency section (*Noritsu-ka*) within the Ministry of Agriculture in 1920 (Tsutsui 1998, 21). Following the Geneva World Economic Conference in 1927, the Japanese state established the Temporary Industrial Rationalization Bureau to execute the rationalisation of industries (*sangyo goriya*) (Tsutsui 1998, 65).

Although Japanese business leaders keenly adopted Western principles of management, in the meantime, the Meiji Constitution of 1890, along with the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890, entrenched the Confucian principles that were practised especially by the Samurai class during the Tokugawa feudal period (Tokuhiko 2010, 10). Although the Samurai class comprised only 7 to 10 per cent of the population during the Meiji period, their Confucian morality came to regulate the rest of the population, 80 to 90 per cent of whom were peasants.²⁸ In particular, the laws entrenched loyalty to the Emperor and to one's elders and set the *ie* as the basic unit of society (Mackie 2003, 21–22). *Ie* refers to family and to its dwelling, and it can be translated as family, house, household, stem family and genealogy (Hendry 1981, 15).²⁹ *Ie* transcends the lives of individuals and therefore after one's death, they will join the ranks of their ancestors (*senzo*). Hence the living members of a family honour their ancestors and ensure that their descendants would follow after them (Hendry 1981, 15). The *ie* system was hierarchical, with the man as the head of a patriarchy. This Confucian ethic was promoted by the state as part of the national moral education (Tokuhiko 2010, 17). Schools were introduced from 1872, and enrolment rose to 98 per cent during the early 1900s (Hendry 1981, 15). The ethics textbooks explicitly linked the family to state, and father to Emperor (Mackie 2003,

²⁸ Following the Meiji Constitution of 1890, former peasants were given certificates of ownership of land that they had worked on and were incorporated into the state's taxation system (Mackie 2003, 22). The former feudal relations based on duty and obligations in agricultural areas were replaced by market relations whereby labour could be exchanged for wages (Mackie 2003, 23). Between the 1890s and the early 1920s, young, unmarried daughters of farming families mostly worked in textile factories (Mackie 2003, 75; Brinton 1993, 26). Their fathers or brothers typically signed the contract with their employers and the daughters sent their wages home (Brinton 1993, 26). These factory workers worked for several years before marriage and then returned to their rural homes and to get married (Brinton 1993, 26). After marriage, they typically helped in agriculture (Brinton 1993, 27).

²⁹ Joy Hendry (1981, 15) writes, 'perhaps the closest English idea is that of 'House' as in 'House of Windsor'.

22), stressing the importance of loyalty to the Emperor and filial piety (Hendry 1981, 15; Tokuhiro 2010, 95). In doing so, it facilitated in people's imagination the idea of a nation-state as a family, a '*kazoku kokka*' (family-state) (Mackie 2003, 22).

As part of the moral education, women and men were segregated at an early age in elementary schools, in cinemas and in social gatherings (Hendry 1981, 25). Relatively unrestricted sexual freedom, and marriage based on mutual attraction, which had been enjoyed by the peasant class during the Tokugawa period, were restricted under the new morality (Hendry 1981, 23; Tokuhiro 2010, 95). During this period, the prime objective of marriage became the continuation of *ie* or the family lineage (Tokuhiro 2010, 17). To ensure the continuity of *ie* and family tradition (*kafuu*), the selection of marriage partners was controlled by family members through a form of arranged marriage (*omiai*) (Tokuhiro 2010, 17). Under the *omiai kekkon* (arranged marriage), the ideology of marriage was based not on love, but on the creation of a bond between *ie* (households) (Tokuhiro 2010, 93). The love between the parties was antithetical to the ideal of filial piety and it was thus considered a disruptive, rebellious act against the family and the nation (Hendry 1981, 16, 24). Marriage was typically arranged by a matchmaker (*nakodo*) and the prospective partners were selected by parents in consultation mainly with relatives (Tokuhiro 2010, 93). They made the decisions based on family background and social status. This ideology was enforced by law, which mandated the consent of parents for legal marriage (Tokuhiro 2010, 96).

Because of the hierarchical nature of the *ie* system, women were taught from an early age to be obedient first to the father, then to their husband and husband's parents and, when widowed, to their son (Hendry 1981, 20). Girls were made to study domestic subjects, such as cooking, sewing, and *ikebana* (flower arrangement) to prepare themselves for marriage. They were not eligible for entrance to most four-year universities (Brinton 1993, 190–191).³⁰ Because the objective of marriage was the continuation of lineage, parents, especially mothers, took emotional comfort and pleasure from the arrival and raising of children (Tokuhiro 2010, 18). Men as domineering figures in pre-war Japanese families were often called *ganko-oyaji*

³⁰ Women's inferior status to men was reinforced in the founding mythology of Japan, which blamed the female Goddess, Izanami, for the failed first attempt to conceive a child because she spoke before Izanagi, the male God, which was considered a disrespectful behaviour towards men (Hendry 1981, 21).

(stern father) or *kaminari oyaji* (thunder father), who would teach their children basic social manners and their philosophies of life (Nakatani 2006, 96).

Pre-war Period to 1945: Soldiers and the Mothers of the Nation

It was during the period leading to WWII that the principles of high productivity went beyond the factory floor to become a national ideology, regulating peoples' everyday lives and moralities. Although the principles of scientific management were initially embraced for their foreign origins, as the nation prepared for the war, the influence of Taylorist Scientific Management principles was downplayed because of its association with the United States. As its foreign origin was obscured, the rhetoric of indigeneity and of the unique qualities of 'Japanese-style productivity' began to emerge (Tsutsui 1998, 96–97). Despite the increasing output, Japanese manufacturing was still inferior to that of the West. To bring victory in the war, the state employed a slogan of 'expansion of production capacity' (*Seisanryoku Kakujū*) (Tsutsui 1998, 91). Managers were encouraged to conduct 'spiritual guidance' (*seishin shido*) for their workers to 'push forward loyally, patriotically, and efficiently' (Tsutsui 1998, 92, 116–118). The idea was to overcome the country's inadequacy in manufacturing capacity by awakening the workers' will to produce (Tsutsui 1998, 117). It posited the virility of Japanese people's spirits as a measure of their ability to overcome the Western powers.

Throughout the years leading to WWII, stories of 'Japanese-style productivity' dominated the social and moral discourse. Japanese myths and traditions were retold in the new light of productivity. Particularly effective was the classic story of Ninomiya Sontoku, a mid-nineteenth century agrarian reformer who preached diligence and frugality to revive many impoverished villages (Tsutsui 1998, 97). Sakamoto Shigeharu, a management consultant, published a book titled *Noritshu Gishi Ninomiya Sontoku* (Ninomiya Sontoku, Efficiency Engineer), which labelled Ninomiya as 'the father of Japanese rationalization'. He drew parallels between Ninomiya's teachings and the principles of Scientific Management (Tsutsui 1998, 97). Born in 1787 to a prosperous peasant family, Ninomiya subsequently suffered the loss of his family fortune because of a flood and his parents' death (Garon 1997, 134). Nevertheless, he supported the rest of his family and restored the family fortune by his hard work (Garon 1997, 136). He spent every waking moment

generating income; he toiled in the fields during the day and in his spare time, he collected firewood and straw and sold them in the town. At night, he made ropes from the remaining straw to supplement the household income (Garon 1997, 136). He wasted no time. He was soon asked for practical advice on how to increase productivity by the chief minister and wealthy peasants of destitute villages (Garon 1997, 137). He eventually took part in the reformation of 23 villages, and ultimately rose to the rank of a retainer of the *shogun* (military commander) (Garon 1997, 137).

In the decades leading to WWII, Ninomiya became idealised as an embodiment of ‘diligence, thrift, and savings’ (Garon 1997, 134). Statues of young Ninomiya, earnestly reading a book as he walks home after gathering firewood (Figure 1.2), were reproduced and put in primary schools around Japan (Garon 1997, 134). In ways that were visible and accessible to the youth of Japan, Ninomiya and his associated myth were used to model the state’s rhetoric of productivity.



Figure 1.2. A typical statue of Ninomiya Sontoku found in state primary schools
Source: Garon 1997, 169.

In addition to the idealisation of Ninomiya Sontoku, others indigenised the Scientific Management principles by linking them to symbolic practices that were

inalienably linked to the national identity. For instance, the century-old practice of rice planting was used to explain why the Japanese workers were better suited than Western workers to the repetitive tasks of mass production (Tsutsui 1998, 97–98; S. Watanabe 1989). The link with rice was particularly effective; Ohnuki-Tiernery (1993) writes that rice had symbolic importance to the Japanese people as a soul, a deity and a metaphor for the collective self of the Japanese. The symbolic importance of rice was reinforced by rituals, cosmology, customary practices and, now, by its integration with the ideology of hard work.

More than simply linking the principles of Scientific Management with these traditional practices, the pre-war government also modified some traditional practices to suit its productivist principles. For instance, the Home Ministry intervened in the conduct of rituals to promote the ideology of frugality to revive the nation's economy. The number of festivals was reduced because they were believed to divert villagers from working. The district chiefs were mandated to report the details of weddings and funerals; such details as the time spent on these rituals and the meals served at the banquet (Garon 1997, 11–13). In this way, principles of scientific management were articulated in relation to the foundational myths and traditional Japanese practices that constituted Japanese national identity (Tsutsui 1998, 98). Through its association with these centuries-old practices, the concept of 'productivity' was articulated as Japan's unique quality, as something that was considered 'inherent' in the Japanese people. With this ideology, Japan headed into war.

During the war, men were conscripted while women remained at home. The family became the crucible of feminine duty as women supported the nation through thrift campaign (Dales 2009, 14). The ideology for women was to become *ryousai kenbo*, or 'good wife, wise mother'. This ideology fostered the familism through which loyalty to the Emperor was cultivated during the war (Mackie 2003, 3). Women were also called 'the mothers of the nation' (*nihon no haha*) (Mackie 2003, 110–111) and the war-time slogan, *umeyo fuyaseyo* (produce and multiply) encouraged women to produce more children while also taking part in productive activities, such as gardening, to support the household under the conditions of rationing, or as factory workers, in the mines or in the munitions industry (Mackie 2003, 113).

It is important to note that many women participated in warfare voluntarily, and with enthusiasm. They wore *kappogi*, a traditional apron, and went out to the port with a Japanese flag to send off the soldiers. They also actively participated in factory works and women's action groups for the defence of the nation. Ueno (1994, 138) cites the work of Kano Mikiyo, who argues that these war-time activities provided women with an excuse to leave the house without offending the mother in law. It was one form social participation for women during the war.

During this period, marriage was still arranged through *omiai*, and mate selection through love was considered immoral, a sign of mental weakness (Hendry 1981, 24). In the army and navy, love was considered unmanly (*memeshii*) (Hendry 1981, 24). Sex outside marriage was tolerated for men but not for women (Hendry 1981, 19–20). The male soldier's sexuality was also managed during the war. Soldiers were socialised into a particularly aggressive form of masculine sexuality directed at Korean, Chinese, and Philippine women (Mackie 2003, 110). Mackie (2003, 111) argues that this violent sexual practice reinforced the racialised hierarchy which made militarism and colonialism possible.

Baby Boomers: Corporate Warriors and the Good Wife, Good Mother

The war ended with the defeat of Japan in 1945. Mr Kawarabayashi, one of my informants who had lived through the war as a child told me that he had painted his school black during the war so that the Americans couldn't see them from the sky; after the war, he had repainted the school back to white, using American funding. The Allied Occupation enacted the new Constitution which came to effect on 3 May 1947. Unlike the Meiji Constitution which placed the Emperor as granting limited rights to people, the new Constitution granted citizens inalienable rights (Mackie 2003, 128). The Emperor renounced his own divinity in 1946 and the teaching of Shinto religion was banned in schools (Hendry 1981, 27). The Imperial Rescript, which taught the virtues of loyalty to the Emperor and filial piety, was withdrawn and replaced with moral education in the basic principles of democracy (Hendry 1981, 27). The mandatory separation of boys' and girls' education was also abolished (Brinton 1993, 192). Baby boomers are typically distinguished from

earlier generations by their high educational attainment.³¹ Since 1965, almost equal numbers of men and women—around 95 per cent—have graduated from high school.

Duke (1986) argues that the Japanese-style of education during this period laid a foundation for the post-war economic growth (Hendry 1986; Dore and Sako 1998). On the first day of elementary school, every child is allocated his or her *kumi* (class) with an assigned teacher (*tannin no sensei*). The teacher will teach different subjects to the same group of students for a year, but neither the class nor the teacher changes room for different subjects. Each class has 30 to 40 students and each student is assigned a desk and sits at that same desk for all subjects for months at a time. Even lunch is had at the same desk in a smaller group of *han*, that is, a group of five or six students who sit near each other. The learning is often based on teamwork, and each team member is held responsible for others' learning. By sharing the space and time together, the child develops great familiarity and affinity with the members of the same *kumi* and with the teacher (Duke 1986, 25–49). Besides providing a space of belonging, the elementary school education also inculcates the values of endurance and perseverance in the children (Duke 1986, 121–147). Children are encouraged by their peers and teachers to *ganbaru*, which is to persevere and to overcome the difficulties that they face in their young lives. Duke (1986, 25) argues that values inculcated in classrooms became the basis of future employer–employee relations. Some companies set an entrance examination for their recruitment that tested, not the candidates' specialised skills, but their motivation and attitudes to work (Brinton 1993, 194). The company could expect the new employees to do their utmost for the company (Duke 1986, 145). Schooling was an important training ground for these productive behaviours.

Nevertheless, men were far more likely to receive tertiary education, and then to work in companies, than were women (Brinton 1993, 190). In the 1970s, when most of my informants were in their late teens to early 20s, around 35 per cent of men attended universities but only 8 per cent of women did so (Brinton 1993, 200). Around 13 per cent of women attended a Junior College, which offered courses shorter than four years. Higher education was considered a liability in the *omiai*

³¹ In 1935, only 3 per cent of elementary school graduates went to university (Brinton 1993, 191).

market (Brinton 1993, 211).³² The new Constitution assured the freedom to choose one's spouse, and it became possible for men and women to marry without the consent of their parents (Tokuhiro 2010, 18). However, arranged marriages continued to be a predominant norm among the baby boomers.³³ The idea of falling in love with one's spouse continued to be considered unmanly (*memeshii*) (Mathews 1996, 86).

Many women lived at home and commuted to work or school because women who had lived at home under the protection of the patriarch were considered more desirable than those who had lived independently, away from their parents (Brinton 1993, 199). To recall, in the Prologue, I introduced Mrs Iwatani, who wanted to study abroad, but her parents didn't let her. When she had her own daughter, her daughter wanted to study abroad too. But this time, her husband didn't let her go. For Mrs Iwatani, her marriage replaced the patriarchal father with the husband. Despite the egalitarian emphasis of the new Constitution and the revised Civil Code, laws relating to the family continues to have patriarchal characteristics (Mackie 2003, 130). For instance, all members of a family must be registered under the *koseki* (household registration) and nominate a family head who is most often male (Mackie 2003, 130). After marriage, both partners must bear the same family name, which is again, usually the man's name (Mackie 2003, 130).

It is important to note, however, the meaning of *omiai* evolved over the years. Before the war, *omiai* meant an arrangement by parents but among the baby boomers, it came to mean an arrangement by matchmakers on behalf of participating families (Tokuhiro 2010, 99). It typically involved the matchmaker asking for a photograph and a brief personal history (*rirekisho*) from the young person of their acquaintance to show to interested families (Hendry 1981, 122). If both parties were interested, the matchmaker would formally introduce potential marriage partners and their families to each other. The potential couple would then be given a short time to speak to each other alone. If there was a mutual attraction, the matchmaker would carry follow-up messages between the parties (Tokuhiro 2010, 99). After a few

³² Furthermore, because the labour market was skewed to the disadvantage of women, as I will explore later in this chapter, there were few incentives for most women to gain entrance to prestigious universities. The main incentive for women to gain higher qualifications in Junior College was to better their chances for a match with a highly educated man and for a better life (Brinton 1993, 199).

³³ It was only in the late 1960s that the number of love marriages exceeded the number of arranged marriages (Tokuhiro 2010, 18).

‘dates’, a decision is made. Matchmakers could be anyone from relatives to colleagues to neighbours to friends (Tokuhiko 2010, 99). Most of my informants met their spouses through this form of ‘arranged marriage’, as will be shown by the case of Mr Shimizu in Chapter 5.³⁴

After marriage, baby boomers continued to practice gendered division of labour, albeit in different forms to pre-war period. An ideology of *kigyou senshi* (corporate warriors), who sacrificed himself to the economic advancement of the nation exemplified men’s masculinity during this period. During the post-war period, Japanese people’s most significant economic activity shifted from agricultural labour to salaried labour. Before then, salaried labour was associated with a low socio-economic status: ‘the sons of the unpropertied classes who laboured in drab urban buildings and received salaries that were determined by their companies’ (Hamada 2005, 131). By 2005, however, 80 per cent of the Japanese labour force consisted of waged and salaried workers, or *sarariiman*, a term that denotes white-collar office workers (Hamada 2005, 131; Brinton 1993, 56).

As more people entered the salaried workforce, it increased the status of *sarariiman*. Having said that, being a *sarariiman* raised new types of anxiety among men. The competitive job market, for instance, was one of many practices that raised the level of anxiety among men. Larger corporations preferred graduates from public universities and top private universities such as Waseda University and Keio University. The civil service hired more than half of its employees from the University of Tokyo (Brinton 1993, 194). Keita-san, a retired teacher whom I met at the Japanese language teaching club in Malaysia, told me that he could not become a diplomat in Japan because he was not from one of the top universities (see Chapter 3 for further elaboration). Because the number of places at top public and private universities was limited, there was an intense competition for places (Brinton 1993, 190). Those who got into these top universities were accorded the promise of life-time success because many large corporations enforced the system of life-long employment (*shushin koyou*). Loyalty to the company was further ensured because the promotion was based on years of service in the company. Most *sarariiman* spent, on average, more than 35 years in the same company.

³⁴ Sometimes a talented employee married the daughter of the company boss through *omiai* to become a legally recognised son-in-law and subsequently succeed to the company (Nakane 1970, 110). In doing so, they blurred the boundaries between the company and *ie*.

Because most *sarariiman* stayed in the same job and the company for the entire duration of their working lives, an anxiety of keeping the job was immense. *Sarariiman* were expected to discipline themselves and work long hours. In 1986, when most of my informants were in their 30s, Duke (1986, 48) reported that the average Japanese worker worked 50 to 60 hours a week: the average American worker worked for only 35.8 hours. Some Japanese workers literally died of overwork. The word *karoushi* (death by overwork) has begun to appear frequently in the news since the bubble economy of the 80s because there was an epidemic of sudden deaths among corporate workers. The problem of *karoushi* continues until today.³⁵ In 1993, Jun Tomizawa published a popular comic series, titled *Kigyō Senshi Yamazaki* (Company Warrior Yamazaki), which features a man who, after his death from overwork, resurrected as a company cyborg (Figure 1.3). He possessed a robotic efficiency and capacity to work and solve the company's problems. Unlike *Mr Roboto*, which mocked the Japanese workers' dedication to work, *Kigyō Senshi Yamazaki* revered the productivity of Japanese workers. Overwork was not perceived as exploitation. Rather, it was associated with a moral commitment to work (Mathews 2002).

Because men spent so much time at work and with their colleagues, there was little time left for them to spend with their family. From 'thunder fathers' of the pre-war period, they became 'absent fathers' in post-war Japan. Instead, work came to define one's belonging. In her classic, *Japanese Society* (1970), Nakane claims that the *ie* system (kinship) offers the basis of the structure of Japanese institutions, including the schools and the companies (cf. Fruin 1980). *Sarariiman* often precedes a reference to their workplace with the words, *uchi-no* or *uchi-dewa* (my-) (Nakane 1970, 120). *Uchi* literally refers to home and inside. Nakane (1970, 121–22) argues that the relationships formed in these spaces have indeed very similar functions and roles to that of a *mura*, a traditional rural village community. The membership of these rural communities is acquired through the *ie* (household), in which one is identified as the son of X household, rather than as the son of X parents (Nakane 1970, 130). The same principle applied to other places of belonging. For instance, when I asked my informants what their job was before their retirement, most of them

³⁵ The suicide of a young worker from Dentsu, one of the largest advertisement companies in Japan in late 2016, sparked debates over *karoushi* and corporate exploitation.

responded with the name of the company rather than the occupation (cf. Nakane 1970, 2–3).

An identification with a company was further cultivated by an enforced socialisation after work and on weekends. This often took place at golf courses and at a nightclub and involved heavy drinking (Allison 1994). It was on these occasions that men shared with their colleagues the most private details of their lives, from their family life to love affairs, in order to form bonds akin to family ties with their colleagues. A Japanese psychoanalyst, Takeo Doi ([1971]1981), calls these emotional ties a relationship of dependency (*amae*). In the 1980s, women from other Asian nations, such as South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand serviced men in those nightclubs (Mackie 2003, 205). Some men even travelled to Asian countries for the services of sex workers (Mackie 2003, 204). Similar to what happened in wartime, women from other Asian countries have been used to cultivate the masculinity of the corporate warriors during the post-war period.

Although emotional ties to the company were cultivated at different scales of institutional and emotional practices, within these spaces, vertical ties were created through fierce competition for managerial positions. Although everyone started off as *sarariiman*, as one got older a small minority climbed the corporate ladder to become managers in their 50s. The managerial class of workers was called *bijinesuman* (businessman) as opposed to *sarariiman*. *Bijinesuman* remained in main offices to oversee the management of the corporation as a whole, but *sarariiman* were promoted to become managers of smaller branch offices in country areas and retired there. And hence, many *sarariiman* sensed an intense anxiety as they entered into the 50s and started to wonder about their future in the company. More often than not, those who made it to the rank of *bijinesuman* were graduates from élite universities, such as the University of Tokyo, University of Kyoto, Keio University and Waseda University. They guarded their élite status by establishing an *OB-kai* (an alumni network) among the graduates of the same universities within the company. They socialised with each other through informal events outside the company, such as at golf clubs. In the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur too, as I will elaborate in Chapter 4, people formed social groups based partly on these alumni networks.



Figure 1.3. *Kigyou Senshi Yamazaki* (1992): ‘Oh my, he works on four computers simultaneously!’

In the meantime, a complementary ideology emerged for women; *ryousai kenbo* or ‘good wife, wise mother’. This ideology was initially used during the war, but it was re-popularised during the high growth period (Uno 1993, 293). In 1969, the ministry of education made homemaking courses mandatory for high school girls, a policy that was only abolished in 1989 (Uno 1993, 306). The word *sengyo shufu* (housewife) appeared during the early 70s (Ueno 1994, 56) to denote women who devote themselves in domestic work. The phrase, ‘I am just a housewife’ emerged among the women who felt that their identities were threatened with an increasing number of housewives (Ueno 1994, 56). As the increasing number and the status of housewives show, it was mainly through the nurturing and the reproduction of male labour power that women were articulated into the post-war capitalist state (cf. Rubin [1975]1997, 162). Gayle Rubin ([1975]1997) has argued that housework is a key element in the reproduction of the labourer from whom surplus value is taken. Although Japanese women’s domestic labour enabled their spouses’ labour, the work of men was accorded more public value than the work of women.

Before marriage, women like Mrs Iwatani (see Prologue) typically worked in department stores or in large corporations as members of the clerical staff. Women typically resigned from work on marriage or childbirth to become housewives (*kekkon taisha* or marriage retirement). As housewives (*sengyo shufu*), they looked after the children and their parents-in-law (Hamada 2005, 131–132).

Specifically, as ‘wise mothers’, they assisted in children’s education and socialisation so that they would become productive, contributing members of society (Uno 1993, 297). This was particularly important because their husbands were often sent to other cities or even overseas to work in branch offices for a year or more. To avoid disruption to their children’s education, and also because of the stigma attached to children who had grown up overseas (*kikokushijo*) (R. Goodman 1993), most men went on these missions alone (*tanshin funin*) and women took charge of raising the family at home.

Some women did go back into the workforce after their children had grown up, but mostly as part-time workers (Hamada 2005, 132). Brinton’s statistics (1993, 6; see also, Saso 1990) from 1987 show that Japanese women were more likely than women in other industrialised nations to have blue-collar jobs, such as those on the shop floor and in a factory, or part-time in a family-run enterprise. Generally speaking, because they possessed fewer skills and lower educational qualifications, the male to female wage gap was far wider in Japan than other nations (Brinton 1993, 6). In 1987, only 8 per cent of managers were women (Brinton 1993, 7). By being employed on a casual, part-time basis, women contributed to the Japanese economy by providing inexpensive labour while nurturing a higher-priced male worker (Brinton 1993, 12; Kimoto 2005).

Furthermore, because of the high emphasis on the role of women in child rearing, those who chose to continue working after childbirth were criticised for being ‘selfish’ (Rosenberger 2001, 120; Dales 2009, 21). This sentiment is exemplified in the title of a widely read book: ‘Working Mothers and Lonely Children’ (Dales 2009, 21). The taxation system also made it financially disadvantageous for married women to have a full-time job (Mackie 2003, 9). To benefit fully from the taxation and welfare system, women had to stay in a dependent position in relation to men (Izuhara 2006, 166).

In this social climate, even a labour law that was intended to benefit women had an effect of restricting women from working to the same extent as men. The Labour Standards Law was enacted originally to protect women from exploitation (Broadbent 2003, 95). It placed limits on overtime and bans on night work. However, in doing so, it allowed employers to use these rules to exclude women from higher managerial positions (Broadbent 2003, 95). Moreover, the law was based on the assumption that it would protect women’s reproductive functions when

it was found that some women preferred to work at night so that their husbands could look after their children (Broadbent 2003, 95). The narrative of Ms Aoyama, a single woman in her early 60s, exemplified the suffering of those women who chose to work full-time despite the various measures to prevent them from doing so. After she had divorced her husband, she had to work in various companies to support herself and her child. She said that she was shocked to experience the gap between the gender equality that she was taught at school and the gender inequality that she faced at her workplaces. Sexual harassment was very common, and her work was not recognised with the same wage as men. She was indeed asked not to be as productive as men so as not to intimidate her male colleagues.

Even when women took on a part-time job, it did not reduce their share of household works (Ueno 1994, 57). In exchange for giving up her spare time, she got 'pin money' (Ueno 1994, 57). Many women hence made the conscious decision not to work.

Perhaps due to those reasons, between 1910 and 1970, more and more women aspired to be housewives (Garon 1997, 185; Tsutsui 1998, 237). In 1972, when most of my female informants were getting married, 39.7 per cent of young women reported that they viewed marriage as 'a woman's happiness' (*josei no kofuku*) and that many women began to see the housewife lifestyle as akin to an 'aristocratic class' (*kizoku kaikyū*) where women could pursue their own interests and hobbies (Dales 2009, 21).

An acclaimed feminist scholar, Chizuko Ueno (1987, 80), wrote in 1987 that 'the middle-class ideal is still the woman as mistress without a job'. Being a housewives came to equate *yutori*. According to research by Yamashita, Yagi and Furukawa in 2001, '*Yutori* covers a broad concept which is applicable to various aspects of Japanese daily life, such as finance and time' (M. Yamashita, Yagi, and Furukawa 2001, 225). It is generally regarded as a state of psychological well-being and positivity (M. Yamashita, Yagi, and Furukawa 2001, 225). In a life course in which one is expected to have married and given birth to children by the average age of 25, women in their mid thirties began to have spare time when their youngest children start school. The *yutori* was further made available due to the availability of household products, such as refrigerators and rice cookers, which drastically shorten the time required to complete the domestic tasks (Ueno 1994, 180).

In the space of *yutori*, many of them took part in social activities outside of home (Ueno 1994, 57). Indeed, women's roles as mothers were equally shaped by their participation in the community and the neighbourhood (Borovoy 2005, 5–7; Sasagawa 2006). Mothers supported each other through their involvements in children's activities, such as PTA (Parents and Teachers Association), and in neighbourhood associations, such as the Housewives' Association (*fujinkai*) (Sasagawa 2006, 136; Hendry 1981, 61). As members of the Housewives' Association, they cleaned the village hall and other public areas and in return, they received village funds to organise events, such as demonstrations of craft work or even a day's outing to some places of interest (Hendry 1981, 61). Some artistic pursuits, such as music, calligraphy and flower arranging, were also taught by women in small neighbourhood classes (Saso 1990, 9). According to Ueno's research in 1988, those women who participated in community activities had more time and financial resources, and they belonged to higher socio-economic class (Ueno 1994, 58). Many of my female informants enjoyed participating in these hobby activities with friends in the neighbourhood (cf. Rosenberger 2001, 80–82).

The women's ties created through these community activities were more horizontal in contrast to the vertical ties men created within the company. Ueno (1994) describes the network of women and men as *sentaku en* ('choice network') and *sha en* ('corporate network') respectively. As the name suggests, the former is a network based on choice. According to Ueno's research, women would readily form groups based on interest. This can vary from hobby groups to interest groups based in different neighbourhoods. For this, women utilised various transportation system to participate in these groups, such as walks, buses, bikes and cars. This way, women were not restricted to networks just based on the neighbourhood community. She observes that these women's groups often do not have a defined structure of leadership or rules (Ueno 1994, 293). Women could freely share their life stories within these groups. This is unlike men's *sha en*, which has a defined leadership and often constituted by the same group of people (Ueno 1994, 298-296).

As illustrated above, being a housewife did not mean that women stayed at home. It is misleading to portray housewives as a passive victim of gendered society. Neither is it accurate to portray them as being contented with the household tasks. Rather, it is important to note that many of them chose housewifely lifestyle in order to pursue their individual interests outside of home (Ueno 1994). This has a

resonance to a war-time practice in which women voluntarily and enthusiastically participated in war-time activities to leave the house.

Indeed, public spaces have always played the role in inculcating the state's productivist values in women. When my female informants were still growing up, the community and neighbourhoods became a site in which the state deployed women to implement its ideologies. The post-war Prime Minister Katayama started a 'People's Campaign to Build a New Japan' (*Shin Nihon Kensetsu Kokumin Undo*), whose central objective was to instil the spirit of social solidarity and mutual assistance, to minimise welfare costs for the government (Garon 1997, 164–165). Women were deployed to embody the new virtues of frugality, hygiene and time management. For instance, Figure 1.4 shows a typical newspaper article which features an exemplary activity by women in a countryside village. In this newspaper article, the women of Nishida Village in the Fukushima Prefecture were commended for their efforts to dedicate one day a month as 'Housewife's Day' (*shufu no hi*) or 'Wife's Day' (*yome no hi*) so that they could take a break from their agricultural routines to improve their clothes, food, and houses. Their village was also appointed as the 'model environmental hygiene village' (*kankyou eisei moderu buraku*) in recognition of their efforts to clean the public toilet to help eradicate flies from the community. In this way, women were never passive, contented subjects in the domestic sphere. They found opportunities to leave the house and to participate in the communities. The state has in turn utilised such desire to inculcate its ideologies among those participating in the public sphere.

[illegible]

Figure 1.4. A newspaper article with a title, ‘Making a village of hope with the power of women’, Nishida Village, Fukushima Prefecture.

As a foundation of gendered society, marriage remained the key element of the state's management of productive behaviour during the post-war period. Just as marriage in the pre-war period supported the continuation of the *ie* system and the family state (*kazoku kokka*), marriage in the post-war period supported the prosperity of companies and the high growth, modern state. Between 1960 and 1975, most women were married by the age of 25 and most men by the age of 28 (Tokuhiro 2010, 3). The event of marriage was often conflated with the sign of social maturity (Tokuhiro 2010, 19). Suzuki (2002) observes that unmarried men were categorised as *seinen* (youth) and were often put together with women, and were excluded from important decision-making in the company. Hence, the companies routinely

encouraged their male employees to get married (Suzuki 2002).³⁶ For instance, Max Korematsu, an informant who used to work for one of the largest tuition centres in Japan, told me that he was constantly pressed by the company to get married to justify promotion. Max finally got married at the age of 40 to Millie Korematsu, who had just got divorced from an anthropologist.

With a strict division of labour within the conjugal relationship, the sentiment felt by the partners in marriage was that of a sense of obligation to the relationship and to the gender roles rather than a positive feeling about the partner (Tokuhiko 2010, 19; Borovoy 2005). Tokuhiko (2010, 19) cites a survey conducted by the *Asahi Shimbun* in 1998 asking people for their image of marriage. The most popular keyword among women was *nintai* (patience), while for men, it was *sekinin* (responsibility).

The Life Course and the Temporality of Middle-Class Belonging

I have so far argued how gendered sentiments were used to create differences between female reproductive labourers and male productive labourers during the high growth era. The next section will examine other aspects of people's affective lives, including the temporality of middle-class belonging and material desire.

Part of Prime Minister Katayama's post-war campaign was to call for people to 'work harder by bearing all present hardships with the idea of sacrificing the present for a better future' (Garon 1997, 164). One of the most symbolic aspects of the campaign was the use of clocks, as symbols of rationality and efficiency (Figure 1.5) (Garon 1997, 163).³⁷

³⁶ Suzuki (2002) studies single Japanese men who search for Filipina wives to achieve 'maturity' in the eyes of their company.

³⁷ In 1947, the Minister of Education announced awards for citizens' public halls that had done most to advance culture within their communities (Garon 1997, 164). The prize was a large community clock, which was considered essential to fostering a sense of and respect for time among the residents.



Figure 1.5. A youth association's clock urging passers-by to pay attention to time (1957) Source: Garon 1997, 169.

In addition to the hourly management of people's daily lives, the linear conception of 'life course' (*jinsei sekkei*) began to shape the public imagination of middle-class life and their savings drive in the 1970s (Kelly 1993, 198). Because their employment was secure with the promise of life-long employment, it was possible to articulate one's working life with one's life course.³⁸ Figure 1.6 shows a typical life course graph prepared by the Savings and Loan Association to advise people to save their money for important life events (Kelly 1993, 201). The graph was taken from David Plath's monograph (1980), and William Kelly (1993) used the graph to examine the historical ideology of modern Japan. The graph starts with one's marriage at the age of 25, followed by the birth of a first baby by 30, the child starting school by 35, higher education by 45, and the children married by age 55. The graph ends with their retirement at the age of 60. Kelly (1993) observes that in the eyes of the state, this sequence of socio-economically 'productive' moments—for women and for men—was what it meant to have a life at all. Every waking moment was geared towards work and the accumulation of savings.

³⁸ Ronald Dore (1986) famously argues that because of the rigidity of life-long employment, it offered the security of employment which fostered more flexible cooperation, fewer clashes of vested interests and hence greater efficiency and faster innovations in the long run.

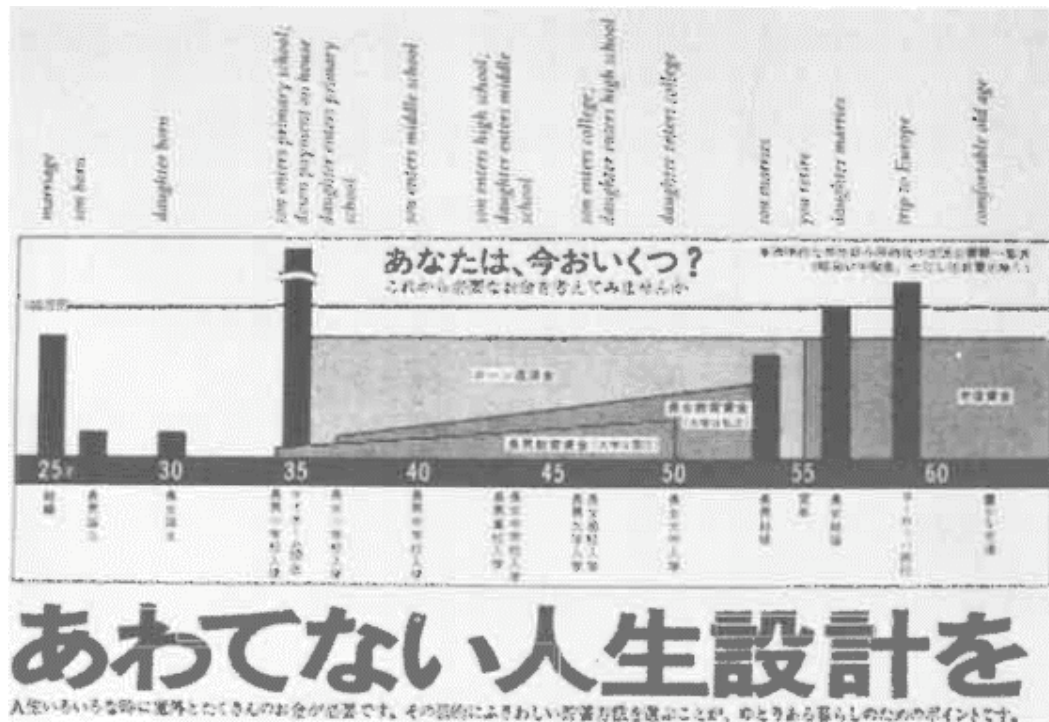


Figure 1.6. 'For an unhurried life plan'. A Savings and Loan Association advertisement (1972). Source: Kelly 1993, 201; Plath 1980, 89.

Women, in particular, were deployed to be in charge of savings. In addition to being a 'wise mother', women maintained frugal household accounts as 'good wives' (Garon 1997, 233; Nottle 1991, 167). As household account keepers and savers, these women were entrusted with household income. It became the norm for husbands to tender monthly earnings to their wives who would then determine how much they would give to the husbands for their monthly pocket money (Garon 1997, 274). In 1959, the Housewives Association and two other women's organisations arranged the National Women's Meeting for 'New Life and Savings'. The meetings fused the rhetoric of post-war saving drives with feminism (Garon 1997, 275 – 276). Those women who were in charge of household incomes were considered 'modern women'. For instance, Oku Mumeo, a feminist who led the Housewives Association (*shufuren*), encouraged women to keep an account book to be able to handle household accounts properly and confidently (Garon 1997, 275).³⁹ Throughout the 20th century, the images of women as frugal homemakers were circulated in housewives' magazines and posters (Garon 1997, 185). Social welfare publications

³⁹ In addition to enabling men to work in the company, women also supported their husband's vertical relationships by being in charge of their gift-giving practices to their company superior (Daniels 2009).

published pictures of a woman with a child, or a woman in a white apron, to encourage people to save for the family (Figure 1.7) (Garon 1997, 185). *Shufu no Tomo* (Housewife's Companion), a magazine that first appeared in 1917 and remains today one of the most popular magazines, featured household account books, called *kakeibo*, with tips on how to save and economise in the home (Garon 1997, 233). From the 1960s to the 1980s, years when my informants were setting up their families, more than half of households reported that they recorded the details of family finances in these account books (Garon 1997, 271 – 273). In the mid-1970s, the Japanese household savings rate rose to 23 per cent (Garon 1997, 268) and Japan quickly developed a reputation for high rates of personal savings (Garon 1997, 21).



Figure 1.7. A poster from 1955, 'Postal savings: I'll keep planning our household finances'. Source: Garon 2012, 272.

At the same time as women were being encouraged to save, there was an increasing desire for consumer goods. Baby boomers are also distinguished from other generations by their increased material wealth. As the country's GDP grew rapidly, the Japanese state promised a dreamworld of abundance for the masses. In

1956, the government proclaimed in its White Paper that the post-war period was over. Basic needs had been met, and high-level production and consumption became the new goal (Ivy 1993, 247). Hence, the high growth era saw rapid improvements in the people's material lives in all aspects of clothing, food and shelter (Garon 1997, 163). The three sacred imperial symbols (mirror, sword, and jewel) had been appropriated by post-war mass media to signify a variety of consumer desires (Kelly 1993, 195). For instance, in the 1950s, when most of my informants were born, it promoted the three *S*'s—*senpuki*, *sentakki* and *suihanki* (fan, washing machine and rice cooker). In the 1960s, when they were growing up, three *K*'s were promoted—*kaa*, *kura* and *kara terebi* (car, air conditioner and colour television). These electrical products became the objects of desire and the signs of middle-class inclusion (Ivy 1993, 249). Many of these products targeted female consumers. Figure 1.8 shows an advertisement by the Toshiba Electric Company from 1966. It tries to sell a grill, toaster and rice cooker with the blurb targeting women, 'We understand your wishes to provide tastier meals for your husbands, and healthier meals for your children. Enjoy the autumn flavour with just one switch'.

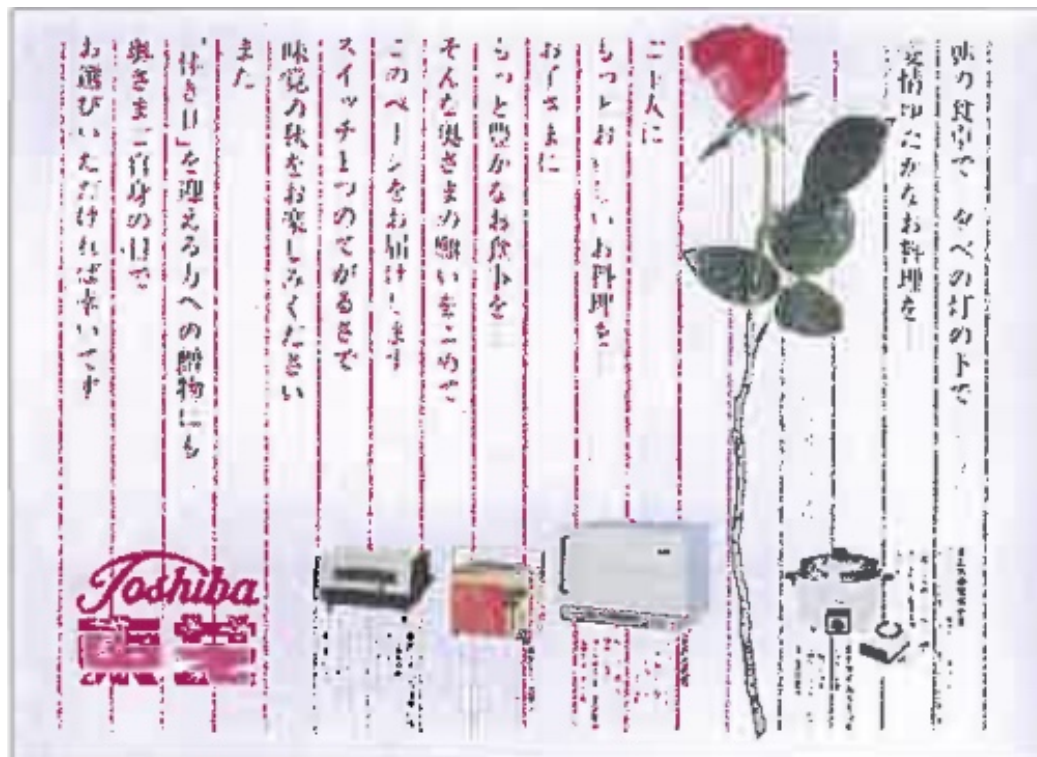


Figure 1.8. An advertisement by the Toshiba Electric Company, 1966.

Among these material objects of desire, television, in particular, had an important role to play in the creation of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson [1983]2016): it became a site for the state’s articulation of national belonging. Following its introduction in 1953, television became one of the most desired objects for consumers. Its sales spurted in 1959 when the crown prince’s wedding was broadcast (Ivy 1993, 248). The whole country watched the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and became a witness to the country’s post-war recovery and progress. Television promoted a sense of cohesion and belonging as proud citizens of high-growth Japan.

Furthermore, as the mass media industry was overwhelmingly staffed by men, the TV commercials often reinforced gender ideals. For instance, at the end of 1975, a commercial for instant noodles featured a woman cooking instant noodles for her male partner (Mackie 2003, 174). She says, ‘I am the one who cooks them’. The man responds, ‘I am the one who eats them’. The instant noodle symbolised post-war prosperity, but it also portrayed women as gaining satisfaction from providing support for male partners in the domestic sphere (Mackie 2003, 174).

In this way, the media images of material desire and the temporalised narrative of life achievement together homogenised and standardised middle-class aspirations in post-war Japan. It thereby naturalised the association between the physical ageing and the accumulation of middle-class values (Kelly 1993, 198). The linear progress in time was associated with progress in personal achievements and accumulation of material goods. In other words, the system of life-long employment and the promotion by seniority offered a secure and comfortable future on one hand but demanded a life-long commitment to productivist regimes on the other. This integration of work with belonging, material desire and class consciousness made it difficult for *sarariman*, especially those of the élite managerial class, to derail from the temporality and the morality of productive life course and its binding of productivity with daily life.

Keita-san’s narrative against the student activism of the 1960s demonstrates this sentiment. The late 1960s saw an upsurge in student activism in the University of Tokyo and other prestigious universities. In solidarity with international student protest movements at that time, students protested mainly against the security treaty with the United States and the Vietnam War (Ryang 2006, 65). But the participants in this activism remained a minority. A severe life consequence awaited those who were arrested for their activism. Despite having studied at prestigious universities,

public perception was such that most of them remained in mediocre, marginalised occupations for the rest of their lives. I asked Keita-san, one of my informants, if he had participated in student activism during his university days. He responded briefly, ‘such a thing was only for the sons of rich families’. For him, he continued, education was an avenue to ensure a normative, good life (*hutsu no yoi kurashi*). Although the life course was constraining, it also provided a clear, distinctive way for upward mobility (Nakane 1970, 104).

The Images of the West and the Quality Control

Importantly, television also broadcasted images of the West as the idealised future (Creighton 1995). For instance, American serials, such as ‘I Love Lucy’ and ‘Father Knows Best’ had major roles to play in invoking certain material desires and aspirations among the viewers. Tsutsui (1998, 134–38) notes, ‘these depictions of “typical” American families surrounded by consumer luxuries and electric appliances such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and washing machines...had a powerful impact on the aspirational Japanese middle-class households’.⁴⁰ Most of my informants grew up with these images of affluence while listening to American pop songs by such groups as the Carpenters. I have mentioned in the Prologue that Steve and guests at his party sang mainly American pop songs from the 60s and the 70s. They told me that the life in the United States was their *akogare* (dream, yearning) when they were growing up and it continued to be so. Max Korematsu had been dreaming of embarking on a journey across the USA on Route 66; a dream he had had since his youth.

By the mid-1970s, many people from Japan had become affluent enough to travel overseas (Mackie 2003, 178). In the 1970s, when most of my informants entered the workforce, they had an expectation to attain the three *J*’s: *jueru*, *jetto* and *jutaku* (jewels, overseas vacation and a house) (Kelly 1993, 195). Figure 1.9 shows an advertisement by the Nomura Investment Bank with the catchy line, ‘Lady, you can make a trip to Hawaii out of your 25,000 yen salary’. The advertisement encourages people to save so that they could embark on a holiday to Hawaii. Hawaii, in particular, caught people’s imagination as the dream island. Overseas travel was still

⁴⁰ See also Rosenberger’s (Rosenberger 2001, 148–153) vivid ethnographic description of how her female informants aspired to buy Western style furniture.

very expensive for most people, so they went to Fukushima Prefecture to experience Hawaiian culture at an artificial tourist facility named ‘Joban Hawaiian Centre’.⁴¹ Tourists could swim at artificial indoor beaches and watch a hula dance. In this way, the middle-class ‘American way of life’ became the utopian goal for many Japanese people who were born in the 1950s and it continues to be their dream today (Ivy 1993, 249). The dreamworld of Western modernity motivated them to work hard and to acquire these goods and lifestyles.



Figure 1.9. Nomura Investment Bank’s advertisement: ‘Lady, you can make a trip to Hawaii out of your 25,000 yen salary’ (1969).

By promoting a desire for products simultaneously with the virtue of frugality and savings, the high growth Japan made its citizen extremely quality conscious. It had an effect of homogenising the middle-class Japanese domestic space into one that is highly conscious of quality. Muehlebach and Shoshan (2012, 327) argue that home articulates middle-class values and behaviours which are inculcated alongside economic activities. They cite an example of Ford, which set up a Sociological Department to send investigators to workers’ homes to enforce moral order, including hygiene standards (Muehlebach and Shoshan 2012, 321). Similarly, the

⁴¹ A popular movie, *Hula Girls*, was produced in 2006 to tell the stories of how this resort came about in 1966.

Japanese state has set up a moral imperative for Japanese workers to spend their wages rationally within the domestic arenas.

This management of home, in turn, helped develop the Japanese management system which was highly conscious of the quality. Famously, Toyota executives developed their own production method known as the lean model of production or, more popularly, as 'Toyotism' in contrast to its counterpart, Fordism (Tsutsui 1998, 185). While Ford placed the primacy of machine technology in determining the pace of factory work, Toyota engineers sought to optimise the productivity of individual workers themselves (Tsutsui 1998, 186), hence, the aptness of the name, *Mr Roboto*. Compared with the rigidity of the assembly line, this lean model of production promised superior quality (Tsutsui 1998, 3). Corporate employees underwent quality control training programs to build a consensus on quality in Japanese industry. This employee involvement in the continuous process of quality improvement marked one of the distinct features of total quality control in the Japanese industry (Hamada 2005, 137). The Japanese style of productivity of the pre-war period was now replaced by the distinct rhetoric of Toyotism. Ronald Dore (2000) writes that Japanese regularly emphasised that they made 'things', not 'money' (*mono dukuri*). He argues that the Japanese vocabularies on 'productivism' were motivated by Confucian legacies in which people viewed the making of things, of high quality products, as a moral duty to one's fellow citizens (Dore 2000). Women as consumers, in turn, enjoyed distinguishing themselves by their consumption of carefully chosen, high quality, domestic products (Rosenberger 2001, 150).

It was in the production of high quality Japanese products that other Asian countries were portrayed in the temporal past from which Japan could measure its advancement. Media and newspaper reports portrayed other Asian people as materially deprived; they featured Asian migrant workers in Japan buying electric products in bulk to send back to their home countries (Mackie 2003, 210). While the West was placed in a temporal future, the rest of Asia was placed in a temporal past.

Japanese-Style Welfare System

The self-orientalising rhetoric (Said [1978]2003) of Japan's distinct character and its exceptionalism were also deployed by the state in the welfare system for the elderly. In the 1980s, when my informants were in their early 30s, the rhetoric of a

‘Japanese-style’ welfare system emerged to move away from the previous welfare expansionist policies of the 1970s (R. Goodman 1996). In the 1970s, the state introduced a range of policies including an increase in the benefits of pensions. In 1973, it also introduced free medical care for people aged above 70 years.⁴² The welfare era was short-lived—a year later, in 1974, the Oil Crisis hit Japan. Between 1975 and 1985, the unemployment rate rose threefold, resulting in increased welfare expenditure (R. Goodman 1996). Social security expenditure rose about sevenfold between 1970 and 1980, from JPY3.524 billion to JPY24,763 billion (Peng 2002). Social security expenditure as a portion of GNP rose from 3.5 per cent in 1960 to 11 per cent in 1984 (Ferries 1996, 236).

The government responded to the crisis by proposing a new political language, *Fukushi Minaoshi* (Reconsideration of Welfare) and introduced a range of new policies that included the abolition of free medical care for the elderly over 70 years of age. It stressed that continuing welfare expansion would be dangerous for investment in a competitive economy, and made the criticism that the welfare expansion of the 1970s was a ‘Western-style’ welfare system. Instead, it employed the rhetoric of a ‘Japanese-style’ welfare system that would restore the pre-war Confucian and Buddhist values of *oya koko* (filial piety) (R. Goodman 1996, 111; Traphagan 2003). Earlier, I showed how the rhetoric of filial piety during the pre-war period was used to instil the sense of loyalty to the Emperor and a sense of the nation as a family state (*kazoku kokka*). This time, filial piety came to espouse a practice in which children, particularly the eldest son and his wife, co-resided with his parents and cared for them in their old age (Lock 2002, 202).⁴³ In effect, it curtailed welfare expansion and shifted a greater part of the burden of social welfare back to the individual and to family members, neighbours and local communities (R. Goodman 1996, 112; Peng 2002). By evoking the rhetoric of filial piety, the state narrated family care responsibilities in moral terms and thereby neutralised its welfare cuts. Most of my female informants had stayed with their parents in law and looked after them in their old age. For many, the experience was emotionally

⁴² In 1973, however, life expectancy for men was 70.70 years and for women 76.02 years (Ministry of Labour and Welfare of Japan 2010). Although the policy seemed to have privileged the elderly, in reality, few elderly benefited from the system. By 1982, the average life expectancy had reached 74.22 years for men and 79.66 for women, well beyond that of 1973.

⁴³ Be aware, however, of an equally ‘traditional’ folk tale of *obasuteyama* (the abandoning-grandmother mountain). The tale talks of an old practice where aged parents were brought to the mountain and left there to die (Jenike 2003; Campbell 1992, 7).

constraining as their ability to control the household was limited by the authority of the in-laws (cf. Rosenberger 2001, 55–58).

The influence of religious moral values on a family-oriented welfare system is hardly unique to Japan. In fact, Rebick and Takenaka (2006, 13) observe that Catholicism and Confucianism influence the state's reliance on the family in similar ways. The Confucianism of the Japanese state and the Catholicism of the Italian state, both of which are frequently represented as 'familist' welfare states (Trifiletti 2006, 177), make them apt for a comparison.⁴⁴ Italy recorded the lowest rate of female employment in the EU in 2003 (Bettio 2006, 54) while also recording the lowest rate of divorce and single-parent households (Bettio 2006, 57). It also recorded the highest rate of young people living with their parents for all age groups (Bettio 2006, 61). Bettio (2006, 65) notes that the welfare safety nets for those who are unable to earn an independent living hardly exist in Italy; the family provide for them instead. Muehlebach (2012, 2009, 504) argues that the Italian state has used the rhetoric of *gratuità* and *solidarietà*, which resonates with the country's deeply held Catholic traditions, to encourage unremunerated voluntary labour as the country's welfare schemes are dismantled. Likewise in Japan, the Confucian narrative of filial piety publicly cultivated compassionate, moral citizens for services to the state throughout history.

Max Weber ([1905]1992) argued that the vitality of capitalism was derived from the hard-working Protestant entrepreneurs who believed that being productive was good in the sight of God (Duke 1986, 146). In post-war Confucius Japan, the promotion of productivity endowed society with the moral principles of sacrifice, frugality and hard work. Under this regime, the fulfilment of one's *ikigai* (what makes life worth living) became naturalised as one's fulfilment of productivity—

⁴⁴ At one point in the history of Japan, public welfare policies and socialist campaigns were indeed influenced by Christian virtues. Many Christian socialists were active in pre-war and post-war saving drives. For instance, Uchimura Kanzo, an influential author and a Protestant Christian in the late 19th century, called Ninomiya Sontoku, a peasant saint (Garon 1997, 136). Another author, Nitobe Inazo, best known for his book, *Bushido* (Nitobe 1904), was also a practising Christian. Prime Minister Katayama, who started the New Life Campaign and the post-war savings drive, was raised in the Christian faith. In promoting a sense of responsibility for one's own welfare and the spirit of mutual assistance, he declared, 'God help those who help themselves' (Garon 1997, 164–166). At least six members of his cabinet were also practising Christians or had been influenced by Christian teachings (Garon 1997, 166). The New Life Campaign was enthusiastically taken up by a subsequent prime minister, Hatoyama, who was also a practising Protestant Christian.⁴⁴

men mostly associated it with work , while women mostly associated it with home, children, and their involvement outside of home.

Conclusion

I have outlined the historical precedence for the state to shape people's affective practices to create a particular form of citizenship. The ideology based on the *ie* system (household system) inculcated a particular form of gendered subjectivity throughout its history. To claim a place in the nation recovering from the war, the post-war baby boomers, or the *dankai no sedai*, had to align themselves, discursively and emotionally, with an enduring association of morality, gender practices and consumer desire with productive and reproductive labour. The subjects of high-growth Japan manifested themselves not only through hard work for the company and home, but also in everyday, mundane activities, such as in choosing a high-quality product, keeping up with the times, and tidying their neighbourhood. These baby boomers, in turn, constituted the basis of industrial growth and national power (Garon 1997, 9).

Foucault has observed that the exercise of disciplinary power includes the making of moral citizens whose virtue aligns with the interests of the state. I would like to add that the exercise of disciplinary power also includes the making of intimate relationships. Unlike the image of heartless robots painted by Styx, what this historical study revealed were stories of those who were motivated by various forms of intimacy and at various scales—with the schoolmates, colleagues, neighbours, parents and children—to pursue their productivist life course. On one hand, they were called to foster the progress of something greater than themselves, such as their family, company and their nation. On the other hand, they were motivated by the desire for self-actualisation, including the attainment of particular material comforts and gender ideals. The becoming of productive and reproductive labour fed these dreams and ambitions, and hence they became a source of *ikigai*. Both the affective and rational operations of the state went hand in hand to produce a productive citizen. The objectives of the state and the personal goals of individuals came together in a mass utopia of high-growth Japan.

Although the *ie* (household) system laid a foundation for gendered labour practices, these practices of *uchi* (home, state) were as much defined by the practices

of the outside (*soto*). The imageries of the West had been deployed to provide the future towards which Japan progressed throughout its history. When the productivity discourse began in industry and in the state bureaucracy in the 1920s, the principles of Scientific Management were eagerly adopted to maximise productivity. During the post-war period, images of Western affluence were spread across the media to inculcate middle-class desires and dreams among the Japanese people. On the other hand, other Asian nations provided a counterpoint by which Japan measured its success. People from Asia, particularly women from these other Asian countries, had historically served to craft the masculinity of Japanese men, from the forced sexual services during WWII to their employment at hostess clubs during the post-war period. In Chapter 2, I discuss the emergence of Malaysia as a ‘compromised’ utopia for the retired male Japanese baby boomers who were displaced from the sites of *uchi*—company, family and the state—after retirement.

Chapter 2

Baby Boomers in their Retirement

When an immigration officer stamped a research pass on my passport in 2014, I became one of the growing statistics of Japanese residents in Malaysia. In 2014, there were 19,713 Japanese living in Malaysia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014, 22). The number of Japanese residents in Malaysia had doubled from 2012 to 2013. In Kuala Lumpur, the figure increased by 120 per cent in the same year. Although most of those Japanese residents in Malaysia are expatriates working for Japanese corporations, the growing proportion of the residents is retirees.⁴⁵ The phenomenal rise in migration from 2012 coincided with the retirement of the baby-boomer generation. Around the same time, books on migration to Malaysia began to fill the travel sections of bookstores (e.g., Ishihara 2011; Yamada 2012; Nagata 2013; Fujimura 2014). Some of them were explicitly for the retired population. For instance, *Gohoubi Jinsei Mareishia* (Reward yourself by Living in Malaysia) (2011) was published by Yasuhiko Sakamoto, who was himself a retirement migrant in Malaysia. He describes in his book that living in Malaysia is like receiving a reward for his hard work.

Retired people like Mr Sakamoto typically obtained a Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) program visa. An MM2H visa allows foreigners who fulfil certain financial conditions to stay in Malaysia for ten years or more.⁴⁶ When the visa was first made available in 2002, only 49 Japanese obtained one. Since then, the number of applicants has grown steadily, peaking in the year 2012 with 816 visas granted to Japanese applicants in that year (Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia 2015). Today, the Japanese constitute the second largest group in this visa category after the Chinese. By 2016, more than 4127 MM2H visas have been granted to Japanese applicants to stay in Malaysia.

Most retirement migrants whom I met during my fieldwork from 2014 to 2016 arrived in KL within five years of their retirement and lived in KL for up to ten

⁴⁵ In 2014, there were 1390 Japanese companies in Malaysia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2014, 44). Malaysia is the 7th in the world in terms of the number of Japanese corporations it has, after China, the USA, India, Thailand, Germany and Indonesia.

⁴⁶ At the point of application, an applicant above the age of 50 must show assets over MYR350,000 (approximately AUD105,000) and must have a monthly income of MYR10,000 (approximately AUD3000) or more. Once they are in Malaysia, they must open a bank account with a fixed term deposit of MYR150,000 (approximately AUD45,000) or more.

years. The relatively comfortable financial position of these retirement migrants quickly became apparent during my fieldwork. They were mostly middle to upper-class Japanese men and their spouses. Their average monthly expenditure in Kuala Lumpur, including their travel costs, ranged between MYR7000 to MYR10,000 which converted to about JPY200,000 to JPY28,000 (around AUD2300 to AUD3300) (Nagata 2013). This figure was more than the average monthly Japanese government retirement pension, which was at most JPY200,000 (around AUD 2300) per couple. I found out that many silver backpackers had held managerial positions in various large corporations and public institutions before their retirement. Some continued to earn extra income from their shares and investment properties. In other words, they were exemplary models of middle-class belonging in post-war Japan (see Chapter 1).

‘Rich, successful people from Japan Inc.’: however accurate this description of retirement migrants might have been from the etic perspective, from the emic perspective it was quite different. Many male Japanese retirees often referred to themselves as *furyou rounen* (delinquent elderly). The word *furyou* (wicked, delinquent) is often used to refer to youths (*furyou shounen*) who have derailed from a normative life course. In Kuala Lumpur, retirees seemed to have given themselves, and proudly owned up to, the label of morally questionable retirees. They said that they were morally questionable because, compared to retirees in Japan, they were not engaging in any productive activities.

It was the beginning of my fieldwork in early 2014 when I met one such retiree, Mr Minami, a 72-year-old retiree who lived in downtown Kuala Lumpur. He liked people to call him Maruko. He was almost 180cm tall and had pale skin, and his skinny body moved about gently. He was dressed in a yellow Hawaiian shirt with light grey flower prints. Even to my unacculturated eyes, it was obvious that it was made of expensive silk. He reminded me of a classic painting of an aristocrat from the *Heian* period. ‘I like it here. Time passes slowly here’. Maruko said softly as he stretched deeper into a yellow sofa.

After a while in Malaysia, I feel strange the moment I get off my plane at the Kansai airport. In Japan, I am constantly reminded of time. People follow timetables too strictly. Once, my train was delayed for three minutes. At every station after that, the train master announced his apology. For just delaying three minutes! At the expense of following

timetables, we sacrifice our emotional experiences. There is no need for fixed rules on time. I have stopped wearing watches here. But when I go back to Japan, they say I am weird.

I looked at him curiously. In Chapter 1, I have shown that the consciousness of time was one of the major ways in which the post-war Japanese state cultivated the ideology of productivity in their citizens. Maruko's indifference to time seemed to have set him apart from his peers.

But he was not always a *furyou*. In his youth, he was on what he called 'an élite path'. Being the second son of a wealthy family in Ashiya, one of the most exclusive neighbourhoods in the Kansai region, he was educated at an all-boys private school in Kobe. After graduating from a prestigious university in Osaka, he began working for a large electric company. He was ambitious: for three consecutive years, he woke up at dawn, jogged for an hour, and went to work until midnight. He cut his sleep to produce more than his co-workers and was promoted rapidly. 'I was like a horse on a race course, blinkered so that I could see just one path laid out in front of me', he said. He was indeed set on a capitalist life course, numbing his senses and running rapidly into the future.

But the race came to an abrupt end for Maruko. At the age of 35, he fell seriously ill. The machine that didn't rest finally broke. He stayed in the hospital for three years. 'I was, at first, restless. I was thinking about work from the hospital bed'. But he eventually came to a cruel realisation. 'The company would run normally without me'. He was quickly replaced by a younger worker. Maruko felt extremely lonely. Without a sense of progress, he felt as if time had stopped. Maruko then analogised his period of sickness with the period of retirement. In the same room in the hospital were all retirees. Maruko saw them die one by one. 'There was no difference between them and me. I effectively experienced an early retirement'.

The dislocation experienced by Maruko was significant because it suggested a stark difference between the life for the company élite and a life of unproductive labour in contemporary Japanese society. As discussed in Chapter 1, an education at a good school and employment with a large corporation promised a good life. The concept of productivity that originated on the factory floor came to define a large part of people's lives, including morality, values, gender roles and material desire. In other words, being a productive citizen came to define 'who they were'. Of course,

multiplicities of self are inherent in human life (Humphrey 2008, 359). It had never been the case that work was the only defining feature of self. But under the capitalist timeframe to which they successfully belonged, the idea of productivity brought singularities to the multiple strands of personhood (Humphrey 2008).

Yet Maruko's narrative of loneliness highlighted the fragility of this association between productivity and belonging. Although capitalist life course provided people like him with a clear pathway for upward mobility, their lives were 'being made and unmade according to the dictates and whims of the market' (Berlant 2011, 192). His sickness made apparent for him what the dreamworld of progress covered up: life after productivity was an empty vacuum in the productivist temporality (Lynch 2013, 191).

Maruko analogised his sickness to early retirement. Indeed, many male informants expressed a feeling of dislocation from society after their retirement. The good education and good work didn't seem to promise a good retirement. When their affective lives were so intertwined with work, how did they feel in retirement? How did it affect their gender relations which were based on the strict division of labour? How did Malaysia figure in their attempt to fill the empty vacuum? It is these questions that this chapter will address by tracking the representations of male retirees in the state's discourse, popular culture, and the lived experiences of my informants themselves.

I argue that retirement migration to Malaysia emerged as an ideal outlet for post-retirement belonging and good citizenship. Abilities to care for oneself and to support other elderly people have become the defining features of normative ageing in the society facing demographic crisis. It gave rise to a figure of an independent retiree as a moral subject, governed by a motivation to work towards self-actualisation (Muehlebach 2012). The effect of this socio-cultural representation was the emergence of a utopian landscape in which the lives that had once appeared to be the state's burden could be rejuvenated. My informants planned their move ahead of their retirement and came to Malaysia ever hopeful that they would have a fulfilling retirement there. Their rejuvenation came, however, through their own commitments to the neoliberal ageing ideals propagated by the state. In that respect, retirement migrants have hardly retired from the productivist life course. In setting new goals and aspirations to guide them through retirement in Malaysia, *furyou rounen* appeared more the normative 'age-less seniors' of the 21st century.

Shifting Ideologies of Elderly Welfare

I will begin by addressing the shifting of the state's representations and treatment of retirees over a period of my informants' lives. The state's legal and institutional treatment of retirees has varied over the years, reflecting changing historical and demographic conditions. To recall Chapter 1, the life course graph prepared by the Savings and Loan Association (Figure 1.12) ended with retirement at the age of 60, with a mere note to 'a comfortable retirement'. In 1972, the life expectancy for men was 70.50 years and for women 75.94 years (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan 2010). The retirement period, hence, lasted around ten years, and the period in which one could lead a 'comfortable retirement' without a disability was limited.

In 2014, the situation was quite different. The life expectancy had risen to 80.50 years for men and 86.83 years for women (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan 2015). As life expectancy had increased by almost ten years since 1972, the length of one's retirement also increased. According to statistics from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan 2015), men who retired at the age of 60 in 2014 were on average expected to live for 23.36 years more. Women were expected to live for another 28.68 more years. During this post-retirement period, the average age to which one could expect to live without disabilities was 70 years for men and 73 for women (Vox Populi 2014). That is, retirees today have around extra 10 to 15 years of temporal extension in which they are neither part of the productivist life course nor physically incapacitated.

The liminality of a 'comfortable retirement' period has provided an apt environment for the state's management of people's affective values; Because the retirement period, by definition, lay outside the realm of productivity, the state had mobilised people's private virtues to foster a sense of citizenship during this period. This section will trace these virtues over the years to elucidate how 'independence' and 'mutual support' became the most persuasive forms of virtue over other values for retirees in contemporary Japan.

Family Care Crisis and Socialisation of Care of the 1990s

In Chapter 1, I discussed how the morality of filial piety was emphasised to neutralise the welfare cuts and placed the responsibility for elderly care within the family. Women of the baby boomers' generation had typically looked after their parents-in-law. However, when they became the elderly themselves, being looked after by their children proved to be a tricky business for a few reasons.⁴⁷

First, as more Japanese people worked in urban areas, it became more difficult to accommodate ageing parents in their children's limited living space (Ferries 1996).⁴⁸ In 1980, when my informants were in their 20s, almost 70 per cent of those aged over 65 lived in their children's households. However, the rate of co-residence had reduced dramatically in recent years (Thang et al. 2011; Traphagan 2008; Saito and Yasuda 2009). By 2014, when my informants had retired, this figure dropped to 40.6 per cent (Cabinet Office 2015, 10).

Secondly, even where they co-resided, the increasing longevity of the baby-boomer generation meant that caring became a long and strenuous activity for their daughters-in-law (Jenike 2003). Even in the 1980s, when some of my female informants started to care for their parents-in-law, it had become not uncommon for them to look after their in-laws for more than a decade.

Third, and most significant, from the 1980s more young women went into the workforce to supplement the family income (Peng 2002). This reflects a swell in feminist activism in the 1970s (Mackie 2003; Dales 2009, 18).⁴⁹ An increasing

⁴⁷ Cross-culturally, this idea that 'the early sacrifices of motherhood are later rewarded with meaningful care in elderhood' (Livingston 2007, 166) is becoming increasingly uncertain in the post-Fordist restructuring of capital. In an edited monograph titled, *Generations and Globalization* (Cole and Durham 2007), anthropologists explore the changing intergenerational relations in various countries within the new economic context that saw a growth of flexible labour, transnational labour migration, and sharp class divisions. For instance, Julie Livingston (2007) observes how the shifts in global capital in relation to the practice of disability increased the demands on grandmothers to be basic care providers in Southeastern Botswana. Instead of being cared for themselves, the elderly grandmothers had to become primary care givers in old age (cf. C. Goodman and Silverstein 2002; Rodriquez-Galan 2013).

⁴⁸ Ferries (1996) looks at the correlation between the rate of co-residence and the income of the children's generation. He finds that middle-income families have the highest rate of extended families while lower-income groups have adopted the nuclear family structure. He speculates that the lower-income families are constrained by the lack of living space and high rents. In such a family, typically husband and wife both had to work and could not afford to support a chronically sick parent.

⁴⁹ A history of feminism in Japan stretches back at least to the 1870s where several prominent feminist activists were nurtured in the movement for democratisation (*jiyu minken undo*) of the 1870s and 1880s (Mackie 2003, 1).

number of feminist voices have raised concerns about absent fathers and called for a greater involvement of men in household tasks (Nakatani 2006, 96). Following the declaration of the United Nations' International Decade for Women in 1975, public money in Japan was poured into conferences and centres for women (Mackie 2003, 179). Some municipal governments sponsored women's study trips to visit overseas women's organisations. One of my informants in KL had been to Germany on one of these trips organised by the Fukuoka City Council. She spent two weeks visiting different feminist organisations in Germany. In the Japan Club, she repeatedly caught others using the word, *shujin*, to refer to their male partner. Although the term is commonly used, on closer scrutiny, it literally means a master (Carroll 2006, 115). Instead, she urged others to use the term, *hanryo*, which was a more gender-neutral term for a partner.⁵⁰

Women's participation in the workforce was accelerated by the passing of the *Equal Employment Opportunity Act* in 1985 after the government signed the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (Uno 1993, 295). The *Equal Employment Opportunity Act* 1985 prohibits discrimination in recruitment, hiring, promotion, training and retirement (Mackie 2003, 184). By 1988, the employment rate for female university graduates climbed to 75.2 per cent, approaching the figure for males (78.8 per cent) in the same year (Upham 1993, 336–7). Of course, the statistics must be qualified. Most women continued to work part-time and in much less prestigious positions than men (Kimoto 2005; Izuhara 2006, 166). Ueno (1994, 60) argues that in providing opportunities for women to work outside of home, it simultaneously marginalised women's labour force into the periphery.

Even from a marginalised position, the mid-1980s witnessed an upsurge in media reporting about the 'new career women' (*kyaria uuman*) (Upham 1993, 337). By 1990, only 13.8 per cent of young women saw marriage as 'a woman's happiness' (*josei no kofuku*) (Tokuhiro 2010, 20). These women became less willing to take care of their in-laws (Traphagan 2003). As those who needed care increased, those who could provide unpaid private care shrank. And because there was no market to cater for the aged, Japan went into a family care crisis.

⁵⁰ Chapter 4 and 5 discuss in detail the increasing 'feminist' consciousness among retired men.

This led the state, in 1990, to introduce another reform in welfare policy. This time, the policy was called *Kea no Shakaika* (the Socialisation of Care). It introduced a *Gold Plan*, which was a ten-year strategy for a health and welfare system for the elderly. It specifically increased the provision of home help, daycare and nursing homes (Toyota 2006; R. Goodman 2002, 14).⁵¹ Some provisions of the *Gold Plan* were delegated to local governments. It aimed at redistributing responsibilities for personal care between the state, market, family and the local community. This was in striking contrast to the previous ‘Japanese-style welfare system’, which relied solely on the family to take care of the aged (see Chapter 1).⁵²

However, less than ten years after *Mr Roboto* debuted on the music scene (see Chapter 1), an economic bubble burst in 1991. Between 1989 and 1992, the Nikkei stock index dropped by more than 40 per cent (Hamada 2005, 138). Today, the attributes of ‘Japanese-style productivity’ which once made it the archetype of nation’s economic superiority—lifelong employment, seniority principle and high savings (Duke 1986, xvii)—are criticised as its greatest liability. After the bubble burst in 1991, it became increasingly difficult to incorporate retirees within the public schemes (Peng 2002; Allison 2013; Morioka and Nakabayashi 1994). The government expenditure on social welfare increased from JPY4.799 billion (around AUD 55 million) to JPY8.323 billion (around AUD 95 million) between 1990 and 1998. Rural local governments especially suffered, because they had larger elderly populations (Peng 2002).

Conditions worsened after the humanitarian, economic and political fallout from the 2011 tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster, and the retirement of the baby-boomer generation in 2012. The social welfare cost increased to JPY9925 billion

⁵¹ By 1996, the public message had changed to one that privileged the merits of professional, institutionalised care over those of informal home care. It is important to note, however, that the state has also introduced a new long-term care insurance system in which individuals over age 40 were made to make contributions for their future professional care services. In this way, the costs of long-term care were shared between individuals and the state (Izuhara 2006, 168). A further *New Gold Plan* and *Gold Plan 21* were introduced, in 1994 and 2000 respectively, to respond to the growing demand for professional care services.

⁵² *Shingikai* (discussion committee) to consider long-term insurance policy in 1994 invited the Women’s Committee for the Betterment of Ageing Society (WCBAS). WCBAS was constituted of housewives in their 50s, who had pressures to work and to care for others as a result of welfare cutbacks (Peng 2002). WCBAS had been mobilising since 1983 around the issue of the ageing society and the family’s care burden. They highlighted the contradiction between the state’s family policy and the reality of the family (Peng 2002).

(around AUD 115 million) in 2011, and is expected to grow to JPY13,876 billion (around AUD 160 million) in 2025 (Cabinet Office 2012a, 3).

It was during this period that old people, more than other vulnerable groups in society, suddenly became *the* problem: ‘the ageing society problem’ (*koreika shakai mondai*) (Garon 1997, 222). In 2012, Kiyohiko Nishimura, as deputy governor of the Bank of Japan, commented that national productivity would further decrease with an ageing population. On New Year’s Day in 2015, the BBC News kick-started the year with the grim headline: Concern as Japan’s 2014 birth rate falls to record low. The birth rate had declined to a rate of 1.43 children per woman. The support ratio of workers to pensioners was five to one in 1995 (Toyota 2006), but it is projected to drop to two to one in 2020 and 1.2 to one by 2050 (Cabinet Office 2012a, 2). The media warned that a dwindling band of workers would have to support rising social security payments as the number of retired people continued to grow. In 2013, the government announced an increase in consumption tax from 5 to 10 per cent to cover the cost of welfare for the elderly. Following the announcement, Aso Taro, an ex-prime minister, who then served as the finance minister, publicly denounced those having life-prolonging medical treatment. ‘Heaven forbid, if you are forced to live on when you want to die. I would wake up feeling increasingly bad knowing that [treatment] was all being paid for by the government’. He continued, saying that the elderly should be allowed to ‘hurry up and die’ to relieve the costs of state welfare (McCurry 2013). Once upon a time, the state cheered the baby boomers as the nation’s ‘heroes’ behind the miraculous growth. Today, the state labels the retiring members of the baby-boomer generation as a ‘burden’ on the nation’s weakening economy.

Independence and Mutual Support as a 21st century Retirement Ideal

It was in this context that the Cabinet Office published a discussion report on the measures for the ageing society, titled, ‘Towards dignified independence and mutual support’ (*Songen aru jiritsu to sasaeai wo mezashite*) (Cabinet Office 2012a). In the 1950s, ‘the elderly’ (*koureisha*) were defined as those above 65; those aged between 15 and 64 were defined as ‘productive population (*seisan nenrei jinkou*)’ (Cabinet Office 2012a, 14). The report points out that the label, ‘the elderly’, does not reflect the increasing health of the ageing population. In fact, an increasing longevity has

meant that many of my informants, whose ages ranged between the late 50s and late 70s, still had living parents. Hence, the report argues, we should review the definition of the elderly and value those who have the ability to support themselves and others. The report notes, 'it is important to instil the understanding among the citizens that one is as much a giver as a recipient of a social welfare system' (Cabinet Office 2012a, 9). The report continues to say that it will ensure 'a fair balance' between the young and the old in society (Cabinet Office 2012a, 9).

As the phrase, 'a fair balance' suggests, this shift in perception is intended to lighten the anxiety of the younger generation whose burden of care (*futan*) is seen to be much larger than the earlier generations (Cabinet Office 2012a, 9). The youth today faces precarious working conditions. Anne Allison (2013) documents the shifting work conditions in contemporary Japan where life-time, permanent employment is no longer available for many youths. In 2001, more than 40% of working men and women aged 15 to 24 years were working either part-time or in short-term contracts with much lower income than full-time employees (Rebick and Takenaka 2006, 9).

In such socio-economic condition, the report encourages the baby boomers to draw upon their experience of being the forerunners in diverse areas of society to take leadership roles in intergenerational communications (Cabinet Office 2012a, 8). Interestingly, the report includes a picture of Shima Kousaku, a retired ex-CEO of a company, sharing his knowledge of corporate social responsibility with the younger generation (Figure 2.1). Shima Kousaku is the main character in a popular comic series which have been widely read by male baby boomers. The series started in 1983 and it tracked a life of Shima Kousaku as he moved up a corporate ladder from the ordinary *sarariiman* to the Chairperson of a major electric company. Shima's life course mirrored that of the readers, as he went through the period of high growth to the decline and the tsunami disaster in 2011. He retired from the CEO position of a company called TECOT. In the latest episode released in 2016, Shima continued to serve the company as Chairperson.

The cover page of the cabinet report goes further than the latest episode and predicts Shima's future. On that page, Shima is 75 years old and is giving a lecture to the younger generation about corporate social responsibility. Since Shima is a character whose life many male baby boomers have aspired to emulate, the use of his image on the cover of the report is an effective way to motivate the retired baby boomers to follow suit.



Figure 2.1. 'Corporate Social Responsibility in Japan, a Country which Makes Things'. A lecture by Shima Kousaku, an ex-CEO of TECOT, at 75 years.

Illustration used on the cover of the Report on the Measures for the Ageing Society 2012. Source: Cabinet Office 2012.

The report then suggests two specific ways the elderly can play an active role in an ageing society. Firstly, the report specifies the need to ensure a 'lifetime employment society' (*shougai geneki shakai*) in which those who wish to keep working can do so. The report writes that this will not only provide retirees with

income and *ikigai* but also alleviate the problem of a decreasing labour force (Cabinet Office 2012a, 15–16). In 2004, the *Act on Stabilization of Employment of Elderly Persons* was promulgated to raise the retirement age to 65 by 2025.⁵³ In 2016, 31 per cent of men above the age 65 were employed (Statistics Japan 2016).

Second, the report points out the need to create a space in which the elderly who choose not to work can nevertheless participate in society to pursue self-actualisation (*jiko jitsugen*). Specifically, it encourages the elderly to undertake voluntary services for the community. For example, for elderly women, many of whom were housewives, the report encourages them to support the younger generation of women who are having problems with their family (Cabinet Office 2012a, 16). This is to support the government policies from the 1990s to increase community support for young mothers (Sasagawa 2006). Volunteer services, in turn, will create the elderly's space of belonging (*ibasho*) and allow them to play a role (*deban*) in society (Cabinet Office 2012a, 16). In making this claim, the report makes a link between public recognition and the self-actualising narrative of *ikigai* (Cabinet Office 2012a, 18).

For the elderly to take a larger role in an ageing society in the above ways, the report mentions that they need to possess three skills (*ryoku*): skills to look after self (*jiko ryoku*), skills to have friends (*nakama ryoku*) and skills to be part of the local community (*chiiki ryoku*). According to the report, the 'self-skill' is premised on the principle of self-responsibility in which one is to realise one's full potential until the very end, by oneself (Cabinet Office 2012a, 10). Someone with the self-skills will be independent and contribute to society with dignity. To do so, the report continues, the elderly should draw not only on one's family but also from one's friends (friendship-skill) (Cabinet Office 2012a, 10). The 'community-skill' refers to the ability of the local community to support the elderly's self-actualisation (Cabinet Office 2012a, 10). The ideal community will be one in which members, both young and old, support each other through intergenerational interactions (Cabinet Office 2012a, 24). The community is particularly important, the report notes, given the increasing difficulty of supporting the elderly within the family. The report also expects that participation by the elderly will, in turn, improve the local communities, which have been in decline since the post-war economic growth.

⁵³ The retirement age has been raised gradually, from 55 to 60 years in 1998, to 61 in 2013, and to 62 in 2016.

To facilitate these ideals, the report encourages those who are currently in the workforce to start acquiring these three skills to prepare for a successful retirement (Cabinet Office 2012a, 12). In particular, the report emphasises the importance of ‘work-life balance’ (*waaku raifu barannsu*) which will enable them to actively participate in family, care, and volunteer activities in preparation for their retirement (Cabinet Office 2012a, 24–25).

The report also refers to this new model of retirement in relation to the life course (*jinkei sekkei*) (Cabinet Office 2012a, 13). Given the much longer life expectancy today, the report reframes the period of retirement from a mere period of ‘comfortable retirement’ (see Chapter 1) to one in which people can use their savings accumulated throughout the life course to realise their independent lives (Cabinet Office 2012a, 13). In this way, the report notes, there will be a cycle of investment (Cabinet Office 2012a, 13).

The use of the term, ‘skill’, and the English concept, ‘work-life balance’, coupled with the idea of investing for one’s retirement, point to the neoliberal nature of the new ageing ideologies. The ideologies of independent and mutually supportive retirement make self-responsibility a central mandate in retirement. In particular, the use of the term ‘skill’ makes each component—self, friends, and community—a standard against which one is evaluated.

This gave rise to a new ‘class’ structure (*kaikyū*) among retired men. In Jan Bardsley’s (2011, 118) research on trends and fashions among older Japanese men, she quotes Makoto Obuse, a famous writer of self-help books for retired men, who divides older men into ‘upper class’ and ‘lower class’. His classification is not based on the usual financial or academic backgrounds but rather on one’s attitude to life (Bardsley 2011, 118). He states that the ‘upper class’ men are those who ‘make an effort to live youthfully by having a positive attitude, are willing to try new things, exhibit kindness and empathy toward others, maintain their curiosity, and can look at themselves objectively’ (Bardsley 2011, 118). In contrast, the ‘lower’ class men ‘have lost interest in everything, become crabby, and give in to a wretched old age’ (Bardsley 2011, 118). By integrating the attainment of social distinction with one’s attitudes, these narratives encourage male retirees to become neoliberal subjects working towards self-improvement along the new ageing ideals.

On an institutional level, these ageing ideals have been entrenched in the *Basic Law on Measures for the Aging Society* (Law No. 129, 1995). The word

‘independence’ appears four times in this short Act of only 15 articles. For instance, Article 12 states, ‘to enable the elderly to maintain independence in their daily lives, the government shall adopt measures necessary for promoting the construction of appropriate housing etc. for the elderly, ... and for promoting the construction of public facilities designed to permit utilisation by the elderly’. Article 11 further outlines measures to ensure the elderly’s life-long learning and social involvement in the local community through volunteer services:

11.1 To enable people to lead prosperous, purposeful lives, the government shall adopt measures to guarantee opportunities for lifelong learning.

11.2 To create vital regional societies, the government shall adopt measures necessary to encourage participation by the elderly in social activities and to establish a foundation for volunteer activities.

In addition to law, the Cabinet Office established two new awards in 2006. The first award is given to ‘age-less life cases’ (*eiji resu raifu jissen jirei*) which feature independent individuals who are leading a free and fulfilled life using their ‘skills’ mentioned above. The second award is given to ‘community participation cases’ (*shakai sanku katsudou jirei*), which feature groups of elderly who are volunteering to encourage others to participate in their local communities. The awardees serve as role models for those who have already entered the ageing period or those who will soon. In 2016, 55 individuals and 55 groups were awarded. Some of the recipients of ‘the age-less life awards’ were:

Tomie Ishikawa (94): ‘As a volunteer with a nursing license, she goes to the day care centre once a week to assist the elderly, to entertain them, and to support new residents to settle into the place ... Even though she is old, she is very active. Being healthy and cheerful, she serves in the community as a role model for the elderly.

Toshio Endo (83): ‘... he researches history, folklore and cultural practices of the Date City of Fukushima Prefecture. He has volunteered to give 13 public lectures in 2015. His *shimenawa* (sacred robe) making class in a local primary school has become an annual event, and he has become an irreplaceable part of the local community.

Koichi Suwa (92): He has volunteered to teach dancing at a local citizen's centre since 1982. Since his retirement, he has organised dance parties to create a socialising space for those who like dancing. By promoting dancing to the elderly, he has contributed to their sense of *ikigai* and good health.

A closer look at some of the recipients and their activities reveals what are considered worthy activities in the eyes of the state. As for the first recipient, the award celebrated her support of fellow elderly members of the community who needed care. The second man was recognised for his dissemination of traditional knowledge to the younger generation. The third one was awarded for his making of space of belonging for the elderly. The dancing not only provided *ikigai* but also ensured better health for the participants. All three activities are based in a local community and are seen to strengthen ties in that community.

Similar themes of community contribution, intergenerational ties, the promotion of health, and the provision of the space of belonging appeared in the 'community participation award':

Capable Men's Cooking Club (*dekiru otokono kukkingu*): students of the men's cooking class at the local community centre started the monthly meetings to cook together. They also contribute to the local community in various ways. For instance, at the annual local festival, they cook the famous *suiton* (a traditional soup) and donate the proceeds to the regional social welfare committee. They also help organise the local children's cooking classes.

Brain Training Club (*iki iki noutore kurabu*): members give mental exercise training at day care centres and at nursing homes in the local community to prevent the onset of senility among the participants.

Male Choir Golden Age Fukui (*dansei gasshoudan gouruden eiji Fukui*): this male choir group started ten years before to provide a hobby for retirees. They not only participate in competitions but also volunteer to sing at the local welfare facilities. They further promote intergenerational activities in primary and secondary schools. The club has provided the retired men with the space for social participation and *ikigai*.

Here, each recipient's activity emphasises self-responsibility (in the forms of self-actualisation through hobbies, life-long learning, finding *ikigai* and a space of belonging) and social contribution (in the form of volunteer services). In the first case, members gathered to pursue their hobbies while also contributing to the local festivals. In the second case, the members learnt brain exercises and distributed this knowledge to others in need. In the third case, the choir provided the retirees with the space of belonging and they, in turn, volunteered to sing at local community events. By emphasising both elements—self-responsibility and mutual support—these two performative cultural productions became the mutually constitutive regulatory forms for the elderly citizens.

What lies at the heart of these complementary ideologies is the fundamental assumption that links individual fulfilment, happiness, self-actualisation to public recognition. Andrea Muehlebach (2012) offers a powerful critique of such sentiment and calls a retiree who seeks self-fulfilment in community activities, 'a moral neoliberal'. According to her research in Italy, the neoliberal Italian state has relocated responsibilities for welfare and security to flexible and retrainable private individuals, such as retirees, who are considered a privileged locus of publicly valuable affect and action (Muehlebach 2012, 138). She reports that the elderly in Italy are feeling increased pressure to define their social resources—solidarity and time—and contribute them to society through unremunerated labour to maintain their social citizenship. Muehlebach (2012, 140) argues that by volunteering their resources, retirees re-enforce the neoliberal framework of the state by providing support in domains that should be the responsibility of the state. This exploitation is masked by a seemingly positive moral imperative of social engagement by the elderly and wide public recognition. She makes a point bleakly that an intimate concept, such as 'solidarity' among the affective communities of elderly volunteers actually reproduces the neoliberal structure (Muehlebach 2009).

Similarly here, from a previous welfare system that had the family and the state as the main providers of the welfare for the elderly, the new ideologies of self-responsibility and mutual support shift the responsibility for the care of the elderly to the elderly themselves, their friends and the local community. The research done by Thang et al. (2011) reveals contemporary figures of elderly parents who do not wish to live with their children's families because they do not wish to burden them (*meiwaku wo kaketakunai*). The virtue of independence began to be associated with

altruism. Unlike previous virtues, such as filial piety, which appealed to the morality of their children's generation, the virtue of independence appealed directly to the conscience of individual retirees. The elderly are encouraged to extend their years of work and to support themselves and other elderly people who need care. Their activities are publicly recognised through prestigious awards. The cabinet report further notes that this new ageing society, characterised by independence and mutual support, will offer a model for other Asian nations that will soon have their own increasingly aged population (Cabinet Office 2012a, 1). In fact, I mentioned in the Introduction that the Cabinet Office calls the spirit of mutual-support (*gojo*), 'the pride of Japan'. Just as the welfare cut of the 1980s was naturalised through the rhetoric of restoring 'the Japanese-style welfare' (see Chapter 1), here, the new ageing ideologies have been naturalised as an inherent quality of Japanese people.

In Chapter 1, I concluded that the men from the baby boomers' generation lived in a society in which the normative *ikigai* was found mostly in work. Women, on the other hand, mostly found their *ikigai* in home, children and community. Those retired baby boomers who in their youth had found their *ikigai* in the fulfilment of 'Japanese-style productivity' and 'Japanese-style welfare system' are now encouraged to find their *ikigai* in the fulfilment of 'the pride of Japan'. Rather than draw on social welfare to fund their retirement, the elderly are encouraged to depend on their savings accumulated over their working years. As they do so, their life course graph, which was to end at one's retirement, resumes moving forward. By shifting from being the recipient of support to being the provider of support, the elderly becomes 'age-less'.

From *Mr Roboto* to Fallen Wet Leaves

But there was a gap between the ideology and the lived experience of many retired men. Most retired *sarariiman* were not equipped with three skills, that of self, friends and community. Only 60 per cent of those above the age of 60 had participated in some group activities (Cabinet Office 2015, 25). Non-participation was particularly so for ex-*sarariiman* who spent long hours away from home and community during their working lives (see Chapter 1). Popular culture abounds with images of retirement lives that are marked, not by independence, but rather, by isolation. Many Japanese ex-*sarariiman* whom I interviewed experienced, or have

heard of their senior colleagues having experienced, an abrupt dislocation from their temporal and social belonging at home, work, and society after retirement. This section will examine a series of popular representations and the retirees' own experiences of dislocation from the most intimate to the most public spheres of their lives.

Eisaku Saraki, or Eddie, as he was commonly known to his friends in Malaysia, retired at the age of 60 from a large trading company in Japan. He was a successful *bijinesuman*; he had held various managerial positions around the world. He recalled with fondness his time as an expatriate in Colombia and in Sydney, Australia. He was mostly alone during his expatriate missions: his wife stayed in Japan to raise their children. He made many friends at work, but he couldn't meet them regularly after retirement because they all lived in different places. He had no hobbies except golf because he was too busy with work to develop interests in anything else. He had no ties to any community because he moved around and spent most of his time at work.

To be fair, research shows that Japanese people, in general, are comparatively less likely to form friendships with their neighbours. The Cabinet Office conducted a comparative study among the elderly in Germany, Sweden, the United States and Japan. In response to the question whether neighbours assisted each other in times of sickness, only 5.9 per cent of Japanese answered yes, whereas it was an affirmative answer for 31.9 per cent of people in Germany, 27 per cent in the US, and 16.9 per cent in Sweden. Only 25 per cent of the Japanese population had participated in activities offered at their neighbourhood associations (Cabinet Office 2015, 26). The same survey also found that Japanese people had fewer friends who would support them than did people in those other countries (Cabinet Office 2015, 39–40).⁵⁴

So when Eddie retired, he intended to spend the rest of his life with his family. Eddie, like many other ex-*sarariiman* of his age, imagined their 'independent', post-retirement lives would be with their wives. The survey conducted by the Cabinet Office in 2012 asked retired people when they felt *ikigai* in retirement. Most men continued to identify their work as their *ikigai*, but the second highest cohort of men

⁵⁴ The report notes an alarming increase in the incidences of *kodokushi*, the lonely death of elderly persons whose bodies have been discovered weeks after their death because they had no ties to the community and no friends (Cabinet Office 2012a, 10).

(44 per cent) answered that they drew *ikigai* from socialising with their family members (Cabinet Office 2012b, 23).

Indeed, this sentiment is not unique to Japan. Lynch (2013, 193) documents that retirement in American society is also imagined as a time to spend with family. However, the fulfilment of Japanese men's desire was not as straightforward because of the history of the strict gendered division of labour. During their working lives, the family was considered mostly the domain of women. After retirement, although Eddie desired to spend more time with the family, neither Eddie's wife nor his children shared this view. His wife had established her own network of support and friends during his 30 years of absence from home. Unlike him, she had 'friendship-skill' and 'community-skill', as women's domestic activities were centred on the community and neighbourhood (see Chapter 1). His retirement coincided with the passing of his parents and the marriage of their children. His wife was finally liberated from these duties and she preferred to spend her retirement life with her friends.

Eddie, on the other hand, had no ties to the family or a community. The dislocation was felt in mundane ways, such as not having any topics of conversation with his family members. Many *ex-sarariiman* like Eddie had bought a house in a suburb so that their children could attend a good school. Home ownership was a middle-class aspiration for the baby boomers (Kelly 1993, 195). They spent long hours on commuting and worked long hours for the company. He made a 'sacrificial contract' (Sennett and Cobb 1977), but it did not yield the promised result. Once retired, he only had his home to go to, but there was no place for him at home.

Many, like Eddy, typically sought re-employment. As discussed earlier, the Cabinet Office's policies on the new ageing society encouraged them to continue working. From 2005 to 2010, the employment of people aged from 60 to 64 years increased from 52 per cent to 57.1 per cent, and in 2010, 36.4 per cent of people aged from 65 to 69 years had a job (Cabinet Office 2012a, 5).⁵⁵ This is the highest rate among the industrialised nations, with the United States in second place, Canada third and the United Kingdom fourth (Williamson and Higo 2007, 1). In a survey conducted in 2015, 28.9 per cent of elderly Japanese people above the age 60 years

⁵⁵ However, there is a gender difference in the rate of employment into old age. In the same year, only 16 per cent of women over the age of 65 were employed (Statistics Japan 2016). Of course, this statistic does not account for the unremunerated labour many women perform at home.

answered that they wanted to keep working until they are physically unable to do so (Cabinet Office 2015, 21). This was partly to supplement their pension. Baby boomers were one of the first generations to receive a pension after their retirement.⁵⁶ In 2015, the average monthly public pension for a couple aged over 60 years was JPY177,970 (around AUD2200). In the same year, the average monthly spending of a couple over 60 years was JPY247,815 (around AUD 3070). The public pension scheme covered at most only 70 per cent of the average living costs for a couple. Except for those with additional income from investment properties, which was the case for most of my informants, ordinary retirees who decided not to work lived off their savings. Others derived *ikigai* from work.⁵⁷

But in seeking re-employment after retirement, they were confronted by the difference between how they perceived themselves and how society perceived them. Mr Yabe, for instance, managed to be re-employed in the same position after turning 60 years of age. But he felt an increased pressure to resign from work so that the company could employ cheaper, more energetic, younger employees. Others were re-employed in jobs for which they were vastly overqualified. Many of my informants retired at the managerial level or higher. When they wanted to re-enter the employment market after their retirement, however, only menial jobs were available. Ryu Muarakami (2012), an acclaimed novelist in Japan, published a collection of short stories, each highlighting the ambivalent feelings of retirees in contemporary Japanese society. One story talks about a man who tries to get re-employed after his retirement as a sales manager for a renowned company. During his working life, he made many friends and built a good reputation. Re-employment should have been a piece of cake. But when he called up his friends and asked them to arrange a job for him, he was rejected by all of them. His former colleagues had gained re-employment as office cleaners and cashiers at supermarkets. The reality dawned on him. ‘After retirement, I am nothing but “an old man”’.

But none of my informants saw themselves as ‘an old man’. Some local governments have established a *Roujin Daigaku* (University for the Aged) or *Shougai Gakushuu Daigaku* (Life-long Learning Universities) since the 1990s to

⁵⁶ The national pension scheme started in 1961.

⁵⁷ Davies (2011, 66) quotes research by Gordon Waddell, an orthopaedic surgeon, who found that ‘being at work has the psychological effect of making people believe themselves to be well’.

encourage life-long learning.⁵⁸ It is an equivalent of the University of Third Age established by Peter Laslett in the UK in the 1980s. It is a community centre in which retirees can take part in classes ranging from history to computers to arts. In the focus group interview at the KL Japan Club, I asked my informants if they had considered attending *Roujin Daigaku* in Japan. ‘No way!’ they all responded at once. ‘We are not *roujin* (elderly) yet, please!’ Indeed, in a survey conducted by the Cabinet Office regarding participation by the elderly in their community, most of those in their 60s responded that ‘the elderly’ referred to people over 70 years (Cabinet Office 2013, 7).⁵⁹ Those who just retired might well have another 30 years to live. In such a temporal framework, it is understandable that they might not have felt ‘old’ as yet.

Neither working nor participating in community or family life, retirement brought with it a great deal of boredom for many of those freed from work. Life for retired men in Japan was typically experienced as one of immobility or being stuck in space and time; *doko he mo ikutokoro ga nai* (having nowhere to go to) and *nani mo suru koto ga nai* (having nothing to do). These sentiments affected both their gender and their moral positioning (cf. Chu 2010, 258). Eddie’s presence in the household increasingly became a nuisance. ‘I became a *nureochiba*’, Eddie lamented. *Nureochiba* refers literally to the wet fallen leaves that stick around and are hard to get rid of (Mathews 1996, 15). The term is used to describe retired husbands with no friends or hobbies who stick with their wives wherever they go while wives continue to enjoy their social networks or engage in new hobbies. From heroes to burdens, then to sticky wet leaves, a series of metaphors were used to mark the transition from work to retirement.

Beyond metaphor, this sense of decay was painfully internalised by some of my informants. Old bodies were perceived to exude an ‘ageing body odour’ (*kareishuu*) (Bardsley 2011, 116). None of my informants could explain to me what an ‘ageing body odour’ actually was.⁶⁰ But it was certainly felt, especially by the elderly themselves. Steve (see Prologue and the Introduction), a flamboyant retiree, confided to me that he took a 30-minute shower before going out of his house. He was worried that his scruffy old-man smell would offend the public. Decaying bodies

⁵⁸ Based on the *Life-long Learning Promotion Act* (1990).

⁵⁹ Indeed, the Japanese Gerontological Society and the Japan Geriatrics Society made a proposal to redefine ‘the elderly’ as 75 or older (Japan Times 2017).

⁶⁰ Bardsley (2011, 116) mentions the liberal use of pomade.

were also guilty bodies. Some of my male informants told me that they felt guilty in Japan. They felt guilty sitting at home doing nothing all day. They felt increasingly judged by their wives and neighbours for doing nothing productive or useful. Reading books or browsing the Internet all day was not good enough. Many felt *katami ga semai*, which literally means, ‘constricted shoulders’. It is an idiom referring to a state in which one finds no place of belonging. One constricts one’s shoulders in an effort to occupy as little space as possible.

Julie Chu (2010, 258), who studies labour migration in Fuzhou, China, argues that the sense of ‘nothing to do’ reflects the politics of differentiation between labour and leisure time, affecting the experience of temporal flow, rhythm and directionality. In a post-Mao world boasting of forward momentum and global openings, Chu (2010, 259) argues that immobility had become the ultimate form of displacement for Chinese youths. Likewise, Elizabeth Freeman (2010) theorises what she calls a ‘chrononormativity’ in which bodies are bound into socially meaningful embodiment through the temporal regulation of individual human bodies toward maximum productivity. For many Japanese ex-corporate *sarariiman* who lived on the linear life course of the high growth era, the sense of not being able to move forward on the productive timeline was experienced as an ultimate form of dislocation from where they comfortably belonged. The Japanese state has re-instilled the sense of momentum among the elderly by making self-responsible, mutually supportive retirement a model of good citizenship. But for those who could not meet these requirements, they may have felt that there was no future.

In contemporary Japanese society, retirees who used to lead élite, international lives seem to be ‘less melancholic than ontologically at odds’ (Allison 2013, 114). Going to *Roujin Daigaku*? Work as an office cleaner? None of these registered, ‘existentially, affectively, subjectively’ (Allison 2013, 114). In *Precarious Japan*, Anne Allison (2013:47) argues that the sense of being out of place (*ibasho ga nai*) is the symptom of a widespread precarity in post-industrial Japan. Many lived without a place or space where they could feel comfortable. The sense of dislocation was certainly felt by the upper end of the ageing and class spectrum, too. Most silver backpackers typically led élite, successful lives under the capitalist temporality. Because of their very success under this framework, the contradiction seemed to have affected them severely. Mr Kosaka repeated to me throughout my fieldwork, as if to remind himself of who he really was: ‘I am an on-stage person, not an off-stage

person' (see Prologue). He needed a *deban*, a role, which the new ageing policy propagates. But after retirement, they felt that they were taken off stage to be hidden away from public view (Jessica Robbins 2013, 187). According to Susan Buck-Morss (2000, 188), 'capitalism harms human beings through neglect rather than through terror'. They felt the ontological and temporal disconnect between the world they knew as élite *sarariiman* and the world that they now live in as retirees. They were dislocated from their home, work and their own perception of who they were. Nightmares awaited those who were banished from the dreamworld of productivity.

These conditions of retirement, and the representations of retirement in the media and popular culture, made some of these retired ex-*sarariiman* seriously rethink life. They could no longer assume that only one way of life—that which is governed by productivity and its associated moral and gendered practices—was possible. Yet the new ageing ideologies required skills that they did not have. Who am I after retirement? Although retirement arrived in an instant in the capitalist life course, its consequence unfolded slowly as retired people began to ponder and transform the meaning of who they were. The next section will examine how Malaysia emerged as an unexpected, yet an ideal, outlet to realise an independent, and mutually supportive, retirement for those displaced élite ex-*sarariiman*.

An Emergence of a Japanese Community in Malaysia

Around the same time as the policy on ageing was shifting from family-based care to public welfare, in a government department seemingly unrelated to the welfare department, another movement was about to start. The former Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), which was concerned with leisure and industrial restructuring, developed a proposal to build a 'multifunctionpolis' (MFP) in Australia (McCormack 1998). MFP was a name given to the proposed 'future city' which was to incorporate the latest technology and resort facilities to accommodate groups of Japanese retirees abroad. The plan was developed under the *Comprehensive Resort Region Provision Law* of 1987, which was supposedly enacted to address the social need for rest, recuperation and return to nature.⁶¹ By the

⁶¹ Allison (1994) notes that corporations in capitalist society often provide their workers with spaces for leisure activities, or *ikigai* planning, and thereby repress alternative strategies for organising time (see also, Mathews 1996, 16). Shimizu Kensetsu, one of the largest construction firms in

end of the 1980s, many five-star hotels, golf courses and luxury apartments on the Gold Coast and in Hawaii were in Japanese hands. The next step was to build a retirement resort for Japanese retirees. The proposal to construct one in Australia was named ‘Silver Columbia Plan 92: A Project to Support Overseas Residency for the Fulfilling Second Life’ (*Shiruba Coronbia Keikaku 92: Yutakana Daini no Jinsei wo Kaigai de Sugosutame no Kaigai Kyojuu Shien Jigyou*). It was to be launched in 1992, but the plan was abandoned when it was opposed by Australian protesters who feared that it would increase land prices (Toyota 2006).

Although the Silver Columbia Plan 92 was abandoned, MITI instead established a public corporation, called the Long Stay Foundation, to continue promoting retirement migration, or what they called ‘long stay’, abroad. The foundation defines ‘long stay’ as ‘a long-term holiday abroad, where the travellers interact with the local people, and thereby contribute to the friendly relations between Japan and the recipient countries’. The definition has inherited the initial ideologies of the bilateral project between Australia and Japan. The Long Stay Foundation also maintains ties with the MITI (now called the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) by having two ex-public servants from the ministry as its executive committee members. Since its inception in 1992, it has promoted retirement migration to Southeast Asia, Europe, Australia and North America.

Most retirees I met in Malaysia had read the promotional pamphlets by the Long Stay Foundation, attended some of their experimental tours in Malaysia,⁶² and decided to move there in their retirement. Retirement migration was often initiated by the husbands. For example, Mr Watanabe started thinking about moving to Malaysia at the age of 50, when he watched a TV program about retirement migrants in Malaysia. At that time, he was just transferred from the main office to a smaller branch office in a country. In ways that resonate with the experience of many *sarariiman* in their late 40s to mid 50s (see Chapter 1), Mr Watanabe related to me what happened to him in the company when he reached the age 45. ‘When you reach

Japan, was heavily involved in the planning of the MFP policy (personal communication with McCormack 2013). In McCormack’s view, the emphasis on leisure during the late 1980s was in part because of the lobbying by Shimizu Kensetsu and other large construction companies, which benefited from the construction of the resort facilities.

⁶² The Long Stay Foundation often organises a promotional session in a host country. Travellers from Japan typically participate in these seminars and experimental migration tours organised by private companies. The tour usually takes from three days to two weeks. During the tour, potential migrants inspect condominium units, supermarkets, restaurants and the local Japan Club.

around 45, you can more or less foresee your future in the company. You would know how you will end your company life'. He explained to me, 'Around the age of 50, 90 per cent of workers will be transferred to smaller branch offices. Only 10 per cent can stay and climb up a corporate ladder in the main office. I was among the 90 per cent. Most people would continue to *ganbaru* (persevere) in branch offices. But I was too *iikagen* (lazy) for that. We [Mr and Mrs Watanabe] do not have any children. I could have stayed in the company and worked until 65, but I could only be healthy for so long. I didn't want to waste my life on a dead cause any longer. My interests in the company diminished, and I began to think about the next project in life'. The transfer to the smaller branch office had caused Mr Watanabe to feel anxious about his future in the company. Instead of living with this anxiety, he decided to take an early retirement and leave for Malaysia.

However, if they were richer, many retirees in Malaysia confided to me, somewhat embarrassed, that they would have gone to live in Hawaii or Australia. I have argued in Chapter 1 that the West has always been a standard against which Japanese people measured themselves. Baby boomers, in particular, had *akogare* (yearning) for the Western lifestyles projected on TV. The baby boomers grew up listening to American pop songs and seeing images of American affluence on their TV screens. Many had dreamed of living in the West. The survey by the Long Stay Foundation reveals that the general public ranked the countries that they would like to live in the following order: Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, Canada and mainland United States. Malaysia was ranked 16th. But among those who had participated in the retirement seminars, Malaysia emerged as number one (Yamada 2013). Mr Kosaka (see Prologue) told me that he chose Malaysia by an elimination method. 'I explored Australia, then Hawaii, then France. I even went to Hawaii a few times to look at its condominiums. But I eventually gave up the idea of living in the West because the cost of living and the fee for a retirement visa was too high. Only the superrich can afford to live in the West'. To apply for an Australian retirement visa, for example, one needs to have assets of at least AUD750,000, and be willing to invest at least AUD750,000 in Australia. In addition to this, one must have an annual income of at least AUD65,000 in retirement. Given that the average annual pension

for an *ex-sarariiman* today is around JPY2,500,000 (about AUD30,600), these were difficult conditions to satisfy.⁶³

In contrast, a Malaysian 10-year retirement visa was more easily affordable. For an MM2H visa, an applicant must have a monthly income of at least MYR10,000 (about AUD3000) *at the time of application*.⁶⁴ That is, applying for the visa could be done during an applicant's working life, and, indeed, most applied for it when they were between 50 and 60 years of age. According to the National Tax Agency of Japan (2015), in 2014, the average monthly income of a Japanese worker was JPY360,000 (about MYR12,809). The average income among those who worked in a large company with more than 5000 employees was even higher at JPY423,000 per month (about MYR16,560). Furthermore, male employees aged between 50 and 60 years enjoyed the highest average income of JPY540,000 per month (about MYR20,000).⁶⁵ Hence, an average Japanese person in their 50s could apply for a retirement visa for Malaysia. Malaysia also enjoyed relative safety and political stability. The use of English language in public institutions further lowered the barrier to entry. Malaysia thereby emerged as 'a compromised' retirement destination.

However, this 'compromise' has caused some disagreements between some spouses. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Mrs Wakase in Penang told me how she reluctantly came with her husband to Malaysia. Mrs Wakase continued, 'My husband said that we could live overseas after retirement. I was enchanted! I imagined myself in a café in Paris or on the beach in Hawaii. It had been my *akogare* (dream) to live overseas since I was young. Then he said we were going to Malaysia. You know, going to Southeast Asia at that time was likened to *shimanagashi*. It was so embarrassing to tell my friends and neighbours that I was going to live in Malaysia!' *Shimanagashi* is a term referring to a feudal practice where a political

⁶³ Costs, benefits, pensionable ages, and other provisions of pension scheme differ substantially across various population groups (Campbell 1992, 11). The largest program is the Employee Pension System (*Kosei Nenkin*), which covers most private and public employees (Campbell 1992, 11). Others, such as farmers, shopkeepers and other self-employed workers, are on the National Pension System (*Kokumin Nenkin*), and only receive nominal amounts (Campbell 1992, 11–12). From 2014, benefits are payable from age 65.

⁶⁴ In addition to this requirement, one must open a bank account with a fixed term deposit of at least MYR150,000 (approximately AUD45,000) upon arrival in Malaysia. Also, at the point of application, an applicant above the age of 50 must show assets over MYR350,000 (approximately AUD105,000).

⁶⁵ The average income of female employees didn't vary across the age group (National Tax Agency 2015, 18). It is possibly because many of them were employed part-time.

offender was sent to a small isolated island as punishment. To recall Chapter 1, Southeast Asia and other Asian nation states have been portrayed by Japanese media and the state as inferior throughout history. Hence, this metaphor of *shimanagashi* was not surprising. Mrs Wakase reluctantly followed Mr Wakase to Penang but some wives indeed refused to come with their husbands to Malaysia (see Chapter 5). For instance, Eddie, who lamented that he became a *nureochiba* at home, came to Malaysia on his own. Of course, there were many other women who came willingly and enjoyed their time in Malaysia. I will fully explore the gendered dimensions of retirement migration in Chapter 4 and 5.

What made some retirees come to Malaysia while the majority stayed in Japan, depended in a large part on their affective conditions. Studies of retirement migration elsewhere, such as North American seasonal migration to Mexico and British retirement migration to the south of Spain, typically argue that the warmer weather and the lower cost of living attracts retirees from the global North to the global South (cf. Benson and O'Reilly 2009; King, Warnes and Williams 2000; Gustafson 2001; Oliver 2008; Huber and O'Reilly 2004). Research on Japanese retirement migration in Malaysia also shows that pensioners can lead a financially comfortable life on their limited pension (Ono 2008). Although Japanese retirees in Malaysia did tend to live in a gated community in a city centre and spend a significant amount of their money on their hobby activities, the comparative 'affordability' of KL for Japanese retirees needs to be qualified. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the average cost of living in Malaysia for a retired Japanese couple, including their expenditure on hobby activities, ranged between MYR7000 to MYR10,000 (around AUD2300 to AUD3300) a month.⁶⁶ This was not too different to the average spending of a household of a retired couple of over 60 years of age in Japan in 2015, an amount of JPY247,815 (around AUD3070) (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan 2016).⁶⁷ Therefore, the cheaper cost of living was only one of many factors that influenced their decision to move to Malaysia. Some of them, for example, especially the earlier generations of retirement migrants (typically aged between 65 and 70 years), had been members of an élite expatriate group that

⁶⁶ Japanese retirees' average expenditure was significantly higher than the average expenditure of Malaysian citizens, which was MYR5559 in 2014 (around AUD1840) (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2015b). The average monthly household income for Malaysian citizens living in Kuala Lumpur was MYR7620 in 2014 (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2015a).

⁶⁷ Both exceeded the average monthly pension which was around 177,970 yen (around AUD2200) in the same year (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan 2016).

managed Japanese-owned factories in Malaysia in the 1980s and they were already familiar with the country.⁶⁸ Mr Sakamoto, the author of the *Gohoubi Jinsei Mareishia* (2011), was one of them.

Others told me that they came to Malaysia because they did not have grandchildren to look after. Some silver backpackers had experienced divorce or later-life marriage. Although marriage had become the main enabler of productive citizenry throughout the history of Japan (see Chapter 1), they were also, by nature, beyond the control of the state. Mr Sakamoto himself arrived in Malaysia with his second wife who was almost 15 years younger than him. Steve arrived in Malaysia with Yoshie, the singer of *The Failures* (see Prologue), who was his third wife. Some, like Maruko, did not get married, or others like Max and Millie Korematsu (see Chapter 1) married in their forties. Some couples, like Mr and Mrs Watanabe, did not have any children.

Whether by choice or force, many silver backpackers had not had straightforward engagements with the values of the state. Their unconventional engagements with the norms of the productivist state made them *furyou rounen*, or delinquent elderly. As I have mentioned throughout this chapter, many male silver backpackers nonetheless had had successful careers. The affective and financial aspects of their productive lives were not necessarily contradictory. Every affective struggle they overcame confirmed and strengthened the discourse of productive citizenship. For instance, Mr Watanabe, although condemning his lack of commitment to his firm as moral laziness, searched for the next ‘project’ in his later life. This constant search for a new project fitted precisely with the linear narrative of normative life course (*jinsei sekkei*). In the next section, I will argue that male silver backpackers mostly emerged out of this productivist transformation; to become age-less seniors of the new ageing society. The male silver backpackers could alter their existing state of feeling as ‘old men’ by transforming themselves into ‘upper-class’ seniors who were ‘willing to try new things’ (Bardsley 2011, 118).

⁶⁸ Aihwa Ong’s (2010) classic, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline* is an ethnography about rural Malay women working in one of these Japanese-owned factories in Malaysia.

Delinquent Elderly or Age-less Seniors of the 21st Century

Many Japanese elderly crossed the border with homogeneous images of a utopian landscape at the end. I was often surprised by the apparent spontaneity with which most silver backpackers had moved to Malaysia. Few had had any experience of living in Malaysia or in any other foreign countries before. Even fewer could speak English or Malay. But they were devout believers that a better life awaited them in Malaysia. These images were typically formulated from promotional materials, travel literature and guidebooks (Ono 2015b). For instance, the 2013 summer issue featured an article by an elderly couple, Mr and Mrs Fujimura, who lived in Ipoh (see Figure 2.2):

We live in the city of Ipoh in the state of Perak, Malaysia. We moved here three years before. We play golf every day. The golf course is close to where we stay, and its membership fee is cheaper than Japan. For those who play golf, it is a heaven ... We have dinner parties once or twice a month. Sometimes we go for meals with friends after playing golf ... Once, the Ipoh State Minister for Tourism invited us to his Hari Raya party. He invited us on stage and introduced us to his guests.

In the 2015 autumn issue, another retirement migrant, Mr Otani, wrote about his life in Ipoh:

I've always dreamed of living overseas. After some research about retirement migration around the world, I decided to apply for one in Malaysia ... After an accident seven years before, I thought I had given up playing golf. But here in Ipoh, I took up golf again. I have lost weight and feel healthy ... Malaysian weather has healed my soul and the body. I would say that Ipoh is our heaven.



Figure 2.2. 'I live in Ipoh, a golf heaven: Dinner parties with friends are also great'. A brochure published by Long Stay Foundation, Summer 2013.

As can be seen from their narratives, frequent dinner parties and hobby activities are defining representations of the utopian Malaysian life for the retirees. These representations have a quality of a dreamworld, expressing a desire for social arrangements that transcend existing forms (Buck-Morss 2000). As Eddie and Maruko lamented earlier, after being derailed from the capitalist life course, many *ex-sarariiman* faced dislocations from society. On the other hand, in the small community of Japanese retirees in Kuala Lumpur, people could build a new network of friends and community. Many organised parties and drank beer in pubs until dawn. Some regularly gathered in their friends' houses and watched football until four in the morning. From fallen wet leaves, Japanese men in Malaysia became *furyou rounen* with an element of bad-boy charm exemplified by people like Steve (see Prologue) (Bardsley 2011, 117).⁶⁹

It is important to note here how Japanese retirees in Malaysia distinguished themselves from Japanese retirees in other Southeast Asian countries. For example,

⁶⁹ Some also referred to themselves as *choiwaru ji-san* ('the elderly man with a bit of bad-boy charm') borrowing from the term, *choiwaru oyaji* ('the middle-aged man with a bit of bad-boy charm') (Bardsley 2011, 117). The latter term was popularised by the men's fashion magazine *Leon* in 2001 (Bardsley 2011, 117).

although the Long Stay Foundation also promotes Chiang Mai (in Thailand) as a retirement destination, retirees in Malaysia regarded Chiang Mai as the destination for Japanese men seeking sex workers. Although they called themselves the delinquent elderly, they were looking for something else, something more ‘moral’ like normative *ikigai*. To illustrate this point, silver backpackers in Malaysia did many things that young backpackers probably wouldn’t do. They sang in a choir and practised ballroom dancing three times a week at the Japan Club. The Glee Club, a Japanese male *a cappella* group, was frequently invited to sing at local churches (Figure 2.3). The Japanese Hula Dance group was also invited to perform at local charity events. They pursued these activities with a strong desire to improve. For instance, during the ballroom dancing lessons in the Japan Club, dancers were divided into beginners, intermediates and advanced. Beginners were asked to step aside while the coach taught the advanced and intermediate dancers. Beginners zealously made video recordings of the advanced dancers’ performances to use in practising their moves afterwards at home. Those beginners who made rapid progress were allowed to join intermediate and advanced dancers while the rest watched them in awe (Figure 2.4).

These activities in the Japan Club had surprising resemblances to activities undertaken by those who were given ‘age-less life award’ and ‘community participation award’ by the Cabinet Office. Some of the activities in the Japan Club also promoted intergenerational ties, such as the children’s book-reading club where the retirees read books to the children of Japanese expatriates. In *Taketonbo* (a bamboo toy) Club, retirees taught the children how to make traditional toys.



Figure 2.3. Male Glee Club.



Figure 2.4. Ballroom Dancing.

In addition to taking part in activities at the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur, living in Malaysia gave silver backpackers an opportunity to travel around the world. Max

and Millie Korematsu (see Chapter 1), for instance, took advantage of cheap fares offered by AirAsia. As soon as AirAsia released its promotional fares, they snapped up tickets to different destinations around the world. Mr Itoh, who was affectionately called ‘Mr 10’ for he tried to live on MYR10 (around AUD3.00) a day, nonetheless used his money liberally to travel around Europe. Furthermore, they could go back to Japan frequently on budget airlines. A return air fare from Kuala Lumpur to Tokyo or to Osaka at a special discounted rate might cost as little as JPY30,000 (about AUD365). The low cost of flights made transnational boundaries almost obsolete.⁷⁰ In contrast to the feeling of immobility that they felt in Japan, their lives in Malaysia were characterised by hypermobility.⁷¹

Mr Otani from the 2015 autumn issue also reported corresponding improvements in his health. In Japan, he had given up golf, but in Malaysia, he could play it again. In fact, in recent years, the Long Stay Foundation began emphasising the ‘health benefits’ of retirement migration. According to Ono’s research (2012), the word, ‘health’, appeared on the Long Stay Foundation’s website for the first time in 2006. It said ‘you may get healthier through long stay’. In 2009, the wording became more affirmative: ‘you *will* become healthier’. As the changing narrative shows, retirement migration has begun to be represented as a ‘healthier choice’. When I attended a promotional session organised by a Long Stay Foundation in Malacca in 2013, Mr Takeuchi, an employee of the foundation, made a speech to the Japanese audience. ‘Welcome to Malaysia, everyone. If you haven’t noticed, Malaysian air is tastier than Japanese air. Please breathe in as much air as possible before going back to Japan!’ He swung his hands as if to collect air into his mouth. At the time he made this speech, Malaysia was suffering from a record high level of haze. Local people perceived the environment to be polluted. But when I asked Japanese retirees about their experience in Malaysia, men in particular replied that they felt younger and healthier (*wakagaeru*).

Hisashi Toyotomi, a retirement migrant in the Cameron Highlands, writes in one of the promotional books (Nagata 2013, 84): ‘When I was young, I was improving my life every day. Things I couldn’t do one day, I could learn to do the next day. But now, as I became older, things I could do the day before, I can’t do today. The

⁷⁰ Toyota’s (2006) research shows that in some cases where the grandparents used to live in a remote area of Japan, it was cheaper for the children to fly from Tokyo to Kuala Lumpur to meet them than for them to travel to remote areas of Japan.

⁷¹ There is a gender difference in the experience of mobility. I will address this in Chapter 4.

physical decay is beyond my control, but coming to Malaysia, I realised that with a will to improve, I can, at least, maintain my *kokoro no seishun* (emotional youth)'. He had started learning English to improve his communication with the locals. 'The secret to maintaining our youth is to challenge ourselves constantly no matter how old one becomes!' he concludes in his article.

Similarly, Mr and Mrs Ando told me that life in Kuala Lumpur was full of challenges. They arrived in Malaysia a year after her husband retired from Nissan, the Japanese car company. In earlier days, his work had brought them to live in the USA for four years. Since then, Mr Ando had always wanted to live overseas again. When he retired, he read Mr Sakamoto's book about retirement migration and, just six months after that, they left their home in Gunma Prefecture for Malaysia. 'Here, every day is a challenge'. Mrs Ando said to me. 'Every night, my husband and I propose a toast for getting through a day. We set one challenge a day, from buying a train ticket to discovering a new grocery store. It gives us a sense of achievement every day'. These men's narratives show how their physical relocation to Malaysia is narrated within the Japanese state's capitalist rhetoric of progress and the neoliberal discourse of self-evaluation. Albeit from overseas, their alignment with Japanese national discourse gave them the feeling of rejuvenation.

Men's transformation into age-less seniors is also symbolised by the temporal relations retirees formed with the host country, Malaysia. Once in Malaysia, many male retirees perceived Malaysia as a country governed by two contradictory modes of time, that of a nostalgic past and that of progressive future in relation to Japan. The utopian project of post-war miraculous growth had created a nightmare not only for retirees but also for the Japanese state itself. Japan had not recovered from the recession since the 1980s, and its trade deficit reached a record high in 2014. Japan itself seemed to have stopped progressing in capitalist temporality. With the international media reporting the rise of China and the decline of Japan, many retirees mourned the death of Japan Inc. (Ivy 1995). Some indeed had anticipated an apocalypse: Mr Iizuka retired as an electrical engineer and moved to Kuala Lumpur with his wife. Unlike many other retirees, he had no intention to return to Japan. He predicted that Japan would default in a few years' time and he had shifted all his assets to Malaysia. He had recently managed to convince his only daughter to quit her job in Japan and move to Malaysia with them.

People like Mr Iizuka saw a future in Malaysia. Many retirees expressed their admiration for the speed with which Malaysia was progressing before their eyes. They called Malaysia ‘a promising younger brother’ to the deceased brother that was Japan. The image of Malaysia as a younger brother no doubt reflected the negative historical portrayal of other Asian countries as being somewhat backward (see Chapter 1). This paternalistic view was reinforced by the availability of Japanese supermarkets (e.g., Aeon, Isetan and Daiso) and restaurants in major shopping malls in Malaysia and the enthusiastic uptake of Japanese popular culture (e.g., anime, comic books and TV drama series) by the locals (Iwabuchi 2002). ‘I feel comfortable in Malaysia because the locals are friendly towards Japanese people’, my informants often told me.⁷² At the same time, Malaysia, which was placed in the inferior position of the younger brother, was nonetheless perceived to have full future ahead unlike Japan. Retirees regularly compared Japanese youths with Malaysian youths: ‘Malaysian children’s eyes are beaming with hope (*me ga kirakira shiteru*) whereas Japanese children’s eyes are dead (*me ga shinderu*)’. They described the latter as living in a country with neither hope nor future. Anthropologists have long documented a projection of a romantic vision of the ‘Other’ as society copes with the negative effect of social and economic changes (Moeran 1998; Ball and Nozawa 2016). Similarly, here, Malaysia seemed to offer a nostalgic site in which they could see what they had lost; the temporality of progress. Japanese silver backpackers were thrilled to be part of it. Mrs Ando said to me as we were finishing up the interview. ‘In Malaysia, I can be hopeful about the next day’.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated the affective conditions of retirement that formed the backdrop to an emergence of retirement migration to Malaysia. An independent and mutually supportive retirement is a highly moralised form of citizenship which emerged in Japan at the very moment old people were made a social, economic and

⁷² Malaysia accepted a variety of migrants into the country, ranging from retirees to students to expatriates to labourers. The Malaysian national discourse divided them into ‘good migrants’ and ‘bad migrants’. People from the Western countries, Japan and Korea were mostly retirees and expatriates, and they were typically perceived to be the ‘good migrants’. On the other hand, students and labour migrants from Nigeria, Burma, and Bangladesh were demonised as ‘bad migrants’. They were frequently blamed for the country’s deteriorating safety standards.

political problem. In the aftermath of his *sarariiman* life, Mr Kosaka cried out, ‘I still want to be on stage!’ (see Prologue) The new role (*deban*) given to the ex-*sarariiman* was to look after their own welfare and to offer mutual support in the community. Those men who could not perform this new role had become fallen wet leaves. Their move to Malaysia rejuvenated these bodies.

At the heart of their bodily rejuvenation was their contradictory engagement with the morality of the new ageing society. Many men embraced the title of *furyou rounen*, for they appeared to remake themselves into ‘delinquent elderly’ because they did not engage in any productive activities. I observed, however, that men’s movement to Malaysia enabled them to experience friendship and community which were key elements of the normative ageing society. Malaysia, as a rapidly developing foreign country, in turn, provided a new dreamworld in which they could continue to challenge themselves. These challenges were incorporated into the narrative of progress. Work and leisure were two practices that appeared oppositional, yet these oppositional practices were folded into a single order through the values of the capitalist state. The *furyou rounen* broke out of a capitalist life course, only to reassemble its values and temporality elsewhere. Retirement migrants were back on the linear life course guided by a new target. In this sense, retirees in Malaysia were far from morally delinquent. They were indeed, age-less seniors of the 21st century.

Part 2 will begin to unpack retirement as a relational practice, one involving fellow retirees, spouse and family. In post-work life, not only the perception of self but also the benchmarks for one’s intimate relationships are subject to change and reordering. The next three chapters will examine the sense of anxiety arising from retirees’ attempts to remake intimate ties in retirement. Chapter 3, in particular, explores the relational practice of age-less male seniors in the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur. It will tell a story of how their interactions with fellow Japanese retirees embodied the structural, temporal and affective practices of work in the zone of leisure, supposedly removed from the logic of work.

Part Two

Anxious Intimacy

Chapter 3

The Politics of Belonging in the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur

When I first approached the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur for permission to conduct my research there, the head of the Club introduced me to Mr and Mrs Sakamoto. In 2002, Yasuhiko and Yoko Sakamoto travelled from Tokyo to Kuala Lumpur to start their retirement. The Malaysian government had just started the retirement visa program then, and fewer than a hundred Japanese people had applied for a visa that year. After he graduated from the University of Tokyo and worked as a managing director of the Sumitomo Corporation, one of the largest trading companies in Japan, Mr Sakamoto retired at the age of 63 and moved with his wife to Malaysia.

Mr Sakamoto was a very articulate and confident man. When I met him in 2014, he had just turned 75 years of age. Before my fieldwork, he had been interviewed by a few researchers, partly because of his successful book, *Gohoubi Jinsei Mareishia* (see Chapter 2) (Sakamoto 2011). He had made a number of TV appearances for documentaries on Japanese retirement migration. Many retirees whom I met in Kuala Lumpur mentioned that reading Mr Sakamoto's book or watching him on TV had inspired them to come to Malaysia. Mr Sakamoto was also well known among Malaysian government officials and was frequently invited by the Malaysian Tourism Office to give public speeches about his positive experience in Malaysia. Many Japanese retirees referred to him as the face of the Japanese retirement community and accorded him enormous respect.

One afternoon in 2014, he and his wife Yoko sat on a couch at the Japan Club and explained to me their trajectories in Malaysia. Soon after arriving in Kuala Lumpur, Mr Sakamoto decided to promote retirement migration as his 'retirement project'. He believed that a retirement in Malaysia would provide *ex-sarariiman* with a reward at the end of a long, hard working life. He took it upon himself to spread the idea to fellow retirees from Japan. He asked for his wife's help in this project. As a first step, the couple started the *Sekando Homu Kurabu* (the Second-Home Club). The Second-Home Club formalised a network of Japanese retirees who were already helping each other in Malaysia. It was intended to provide information and services at no cost to existing and prospective Japanese residents in Malaysia. It was free for anyone to join the Club—with Mr Sakamoto's approval. In 2014, it boasted 3000 members, 20

per cent of whom lived in Malaysia and the rest were mainly *sarariiman* nearing retirement and their spouses.

All members of the Second-Home Club were automatically made members of an online platform called, *Gohobi Jinsei no Izumi (Spring of Reward): Malaysia My Second Home SNS* (abbreviated hereafter as Izumi SNS) (Figure 3.1). Mr Sakamoto analogised this social network with the spring of life and wished for many people to gather and exchange information there. Members could connect to other members on Izumi SNS, ask questions about Malaysia, and share useful information about daily life, such as tips on restaurants and supermarkets in KL. It was on this platform that many retirees offered to lend a hand to help newcomers. Mr Kosaka, for instance, received many inquiries from prospective migrants about his condominium (see Chapter 4) and the Mont Kiara district more generally (see the Introduction). When some prospective migrants came to Kuala Lumpur to explore the area, Mr Kosaka volunteered to pick them up from the airport, taught them how to open a bank account, showed them how to drive from Mont Kiara to the Japan Club, and brought them to Japanese grocery stores. He met these different prospective migrants almost every week. Others advertised their apartment as ‘model housing’ on the Izumi SNS so that prospective migrants could drop in at anytime to have a sense of the living conditions in Kuala Lumpur. Some retirees, like Mr and Mrs Yamamoto, organised private dinner parties on their visits back to Japan to meet and answer questions from prospective migrants. I myself was a beneficiary of the Second-Home Club. As soon as I became a member of the community, many people contacted me on the Izumi SNS to volunteer themselves for an interview.

The activities of the Second-Home Club were wide-ranging. In addition to the online Izumi SNS platform, Mr Sakamoto organised a weekly dinner at the Royal Selangor Club, one of the KL’s oldest and most prestigious clubs.⁷³ Current migrants volunteered to mingle with prospective migrants and those who had recently moved to Malaysia.⁷⁴ Another regular event was *Gorufu Mokuyou-kai* (Thursday Golf Club) in which prospective migrants could come and play golf with current migrants. During the breaks, they exchanged information about their lives and activities in Malaysia. The Second-Home Club also hosted a weekly *Sekando Homu Setsumeikai*

⁷³ The venue changed to Himawari restaurant inside the Japan Club in 2015.

⁷⁴ They did so purely voluntarily. Indeed, they had to pay MYR50 (around AUD18) to cover the cost of the buffet dinner.

(Second Home Briefing Sessions) at which Mr and Mrs Sakamoto and their fellow officers screened a brief promotional video and answered questions from prospective migrants. I attended one of these information sessions during my pilot fieldwork in mid-2013 at which Mr Sakamoto announced his retirement due to his ill health. He said that it was the last time he would lead the briefing session although he would continue to attend the dinners and the golf meetings.



Figure 3.1. A snapshot of my personal page on the Izumi SNS.

It is important to mention that not all Japanese retirees in Malaysia were part of the Second-Home Club.⁷⁵ Others shared similar information through their personal

⁷⁵ Some retirees did not join the Second-Home Club because, in Mr Iida's words, 'it worshiped some people as if they were gods.' Mr Iida mocked the ways in which other retirees, especially the more recent migrants, admired Mr Sakamoto. Once, after a concert by the KL Glee Club, Mr Sakamoto and I happened to walk out of the Japan Club together. I was about to call a taxi home, and Mr Sakamoto was on the way to his dinner at the Royal Selangor Club. After exchanging small talk, he whispered to himself, 'Now, how should I get there. I don't have a car today'. I was about to suggest he take a taxi, when Mrs Yamane, the wife of one of the singers in the concert, called out from behind. 'Hiko-san! we can give you a lift to the Royal Selangor Club!' The next moment, Mr Yamane, who just finished singing at the concert, drove up to the Club's lobby so that Mr Sakamoto didn't have to walk. Mr Sakamoto smiled and thanked Mrs Yamane, and disappeared

blogs. In 2016, there were 440 blogs on the lives of Japanese in Malaysia, a significant proportion of which were written by retirees.⁷⁶ For instance, among the top ten most-read Japanese blogs on Malaysia, six were written by retirees. Mr Iida, for one, regularly updated his blog, titled *Hinekure Dankai Sedai no MM2H Charenji Nikki* (Diary of a Wicked Baby Boomer's Life and Challenges in Malaysia). In his blog posts, he documented in detail the processes of applying for the MM2H visa, finding accommodation, buying a car, setting up an Internet account, using public transport, and other aspects of daily life in Malaysia. He told me that he often received emails from prospective migrants requesting for more information. He spent half a day every day replying to those inquiries.

Others were less involved with the Japanese community and instead volunteered to teach the Japanese language at local schools. Members of the Japanese Language Volunteers Club, one of the registered clubs at the Japan Club, met twice a week to teach the Japanese language at a school for visually impaired children and at a Chinese high school. Every so often, they were invited to various state-led cultural functions to teach calligraphy and kimono dressing to participants (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2. Calligraphy Lessons.

into the car. It all happened in the space of a second. All that was left was me waiting for a taxi on my own.

⁷⁶ The blogs were typically hosted at the umbrella website called Burogu Mura (Blog Village): overseas.blogmura.com/malaysia/

From the giving of information to the giving of Japanese lessons, many retirees were actively contributing to others' lives in Malaysia. The ways in which people willingly gave their time, skills and information exemplified the working of 'give and give' relationships as articulated by Mr Sasaki in the Introduction. Most of these activities were not remunerated.⁷⁷ It was time-consuming and physically exhausting. I was also surprised to see how the prospective migrants relied on the current migrants for assistance with little hesitation. This seemed odd in a cultural context in which people typically hesitated to trouble others or ask for assistance (*meiwaku wo kaketakunai*) (Long 2005, 60; Kavedžija 2015, 143) (see the Introduction). I began to ponder why current migrants committed themselves to these activities, and what social processes made the prospective migrants' reliance on them appear reasonable (cf. Collier, Yanagisako, and Bloch 1987, 45).

At first, I thought that the 'give and give' economy resembled that of the gift economy. In his seminal text, *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss ([1925]2011) explores in detail what compels people to give and to receive gifts. Mauss ([1925]2011) and other economic anthropologists that followed (e.g., Lévi-Strauss [1949]1969; Sahlins 1972) widely agree that the norms of reciprocity enable the creation and the maintenance of social relations. However, the sense of reciprocity was limited in the case of the Japanese 'give and give' economy. In comparison to a Japanese context where giving is immediately reciprocated (Daniels 2009), it was very rare for me to witness an exchange of gifts in Malaysia. Furthermore, the situation that they were in as transient migrants limited the possibility and the extent of social relations which could be formed. Most silver backpackers returned to Japan after one to three years in Malaysia. An experienced migrant like Mr Kosaka might give information to the newcomers, but by the time those newcomers had settled in KL, the chances were that Mr Kosaka would have returned to Japan.

Instead, I observed that sentiment played a prominent role in the exchange of information. These activities often accompanied the narrative of *yakuni tachitai*, 'being useful to others'. Mrs Kosaka said to me, for example, 'being useful to others gives me *ikigai*' (*hito no yakuni tatsu koto ga watashi no ikigai desu*). The ethnography demanded that I move away from the interpretation that focused on reciprocity, and especially immediate reciprocity, to another interpretation that

⁷⁷ Mr Sasaki ran a consultancy company, but he separated his business activities from his activities with the Second-Home Club.

focused on the value of *ikigai* that was generated by the practice of giving in Malaysia.

I, therefore, turned to feminist economic anthropologists (Weiner 1980; Munn 1986; Chu 2010; Schuster 2015) who situated the classic ‘norms of reciprocity’ within the broader dynamics of value production. Annette Weiner (1977, 220) critiqued Mauss for reducing exchange to ‘an act seen within the limitations of the present’. Instead, she calls for an analysis of exchange events as ‘comprising a system of regeneration in which the temporal context of generational continuity carried as much weight as economic and political factors’ (Weiner 1977, 220). Instead of treating ‘reciprocity’ as a central analytical feature in exchange systems, she shifted her focus to a larger ‘reproductive system’ in which ‘the reproduction and regeneration of persons, objects, and relationships are integrated and encapsulated’ (Weiner 1980, 71).

Following Weiner (1980), I will highlight the values and norms that were created and maintained by the practices of information exchange in Malaysia. Although it might appear counter-intuitive, I will argue in this chapter that the affective conditions relating to that of work were central to the subjective experience of their transition from work-oriented life to a supposedly play-oriented life. In what follows, I will first discuss how sociality in the Japan Club replicated the sociality of work in its hierarchical, temporal and affective practices. I will then show how the retirees nevertheless tried to distinguish their activities from those of capitalist labour. At the same time, the moral narratives of wanting to be useful served to disguise the new hierarchy created among the retirees. The anxious negotiations of work and non-work gave rise to an unexpected conflict for some, indicating the fragility of a post-work community. Against the imagery of selfless elderly volunteers, this chapter highlights the conflation of troubling boundaries between productivity, morality and power in retirement.

Structural, Temporal and Affective Practices in the Japan Club

The platforms mentioned in the preceding section were generally aimed at encouraging information exchange between current and new migrants and the local students. In contrast, information exchange between current migrants occurred mostly during activities at the Japan Club. Mrs Sakamoto was heavily involved in

organising one such activity, *Mura no Ongakkai*, which translates as the Village Concert. The members of the Village Concert, which comprised from 20 to 50 retirees, met every Saturday evening to sing Japanese and American pop songs from the 1960s to the 1980s. At every gathering, participants were given a file of song titles. Each person or a couple could choose one song from the list. Once a song was chosen, the concert master played that song on the karaoke machine and all members sang together. The concert master was Kamei-sensei, who used to coach a famous a capella group at Kwansei Gakuin University. He was working in Malaysia but collaborated closely with Mr and Mrs Sakamoto to start various activities in the Japan Club, including the Village Concert, the Male Glee Club (see Chapter 2), and private voice lessons.



Figure 3.3. The Village Concert.

After the 90-minute singing session,⁷⁸ most participants went to dinner at a nearby Chinese restaurant (Figure 3.4). For some, the socialising during the dinner was more important than the singing. At the Chinese restaurant, the participants sat at round tables which could each seat ten people. They told me that Chinese cuisine was the best for socialising because they could share the food placed in a large bowl. Over dinner, they shared information as they did the food. The topics ranged from where to find delicious Japanese food, where to pay parking tickets and where to visit for the next holiday.

⁷⁸ After 45 minutes of singing together, the group took an intermission of 15 minutes.



Figure 3.4. Dinner after the Village Concert.

Allison (2013, 97–98) notes the decline of homeliness or family dining (*shokutaku*) in contemporary Japan. Instead of eating meals with their families, retirees in Malaysia ate meals with their friends, whom they called *nakama*. *Nakama* refers to a close community of people. Steve compared his friends in Malaysia to his family in Japan: ‘*touku no shinseki yorimo chikaku no nihonjin* (Japanese people nearby are more valuable than relatives far away)’. The Japan Club offered *ibasho supesu* (space for belonging) for the elderly who lacked belonging at home (Allison 2013, 177–178). The naming of the ‘Village Concert’ speaks to this sentiment. The name draws from the solidarity witnessed in the *mura*, a traditional rural village community (see Chapter 1) (Nakane 1970, 121–122).

In the space of belonging (*ibasho*), each member was assigned a role (*yakuwari*). An ethnographic vignette from the Malay Language Club was particularly telling about this link. Mr Iwatani, who used to work for Toyota as an accountant, had been in charge of accounts since the club’s inception three years before. Having little command of English or Malay, he could not take any other roles such as the leader or the note-taker. One day, when Mr Iwatani was absent from the class, a new member suggested she took over the account’s role to lighten his burden. Mr Iida, the leader of the club, immediately objected. ‘You can’t take that away from Mr Iwatani! He can’t perform any other roles. He would lose a sense of belonging (*ibasho*) in this group’. As Mr Iida’s narrative demonstrates, there was a complex

melding of belonging and a role in the new community of retirees. It shows that the sense of being useful has become the principal idiom through which they talked about their claims to *ibasho* in retirement.⁷⁹

This melding between one's sense of belonging and one's role caused the structure of some retirees' organisations to resemble the hierarchical corporate structure that they had just retired from. For example, the Second-Home Club was hierarchically organised, with each position given the label used for a company executive: Mr Sakamoto sat at the top as *kaicho* (chairman), followed by his wife Yoko as *kyaputen* (captain), seven *yakuin* (officers), numerous *sapotaa* (supporters) and ordinary members. Officers supervised a website, kept accounts, and organised events. Officers and supporters were appointed from the ordinary members by Mr Sakamoto. Mr Sakamoto informally told me that the selection was based on the members' demonstrated commitment to the cause of promoting retirement migration. Those people who demonstrated their 'usefulness' through volunteering at the Second-Home Club's events and activities were chosen. Millie and Max Korematsu (see Chapter 1), who often provided me with sharp observations about personal relations in the Japan Club, aptly mentioned that if one wanted to be an officer of the Second-Home Club, the fastest route would be to participate in the Village Concert or the Male Glee Club. Among them, Mr Sasaki (see the Introduction) was publicly recognised as Mr Sakamoto's right-hand man. From the middle of 2014, when Mr Sakamoto started to attend fewer public functions because of his ill health, either his wife Yoko or Mr Sasaki stepped in to fill his role.

The names of the Second-Home Committee members were published on the Japan Club's official website. Once selected, officers attended monthly committee meetings in the board room of KL's Japan Club. These public displays of hierarchy reinforced the idea of upward social mobility among the retirees.⁸⁰ The officers turned up to these meetings in business suits. To recall, Mr Sasaki also came to meet me, whom he thought to be another retiree, in a business suit (see the Introduction).

⁷⁹ Schulz (1980) also notes the desire among American men for community participation as these seniors turn their attention to themselves in retirement. She observes that performing a 'useful' function in these communities was one way to feel needed and desired by someone in retirement (Schulz 1980, 251).

⁸⁰ Another example of this evaluative rendering was the ranking system employed for online blogs. Among 440 blogs on Malaysia, Steve's blog was always ranked in the top five most read. Steve took a great pride in producing widely read blogs, and he updated his posts every day.

Their voluntary activities were endowed with the gravitas of waged labour (cf. Muehlebach 2011, 74).

The temporality of this Japanese community also resembled that of another regulatory structure: school. Newcomers often referred to themselves as *KL 1 nensei*, which roughly translates to ‘KL freshman’. They moved up the ladder the longer they stayed in KL, from 1 *nensei* (freshman) to 2 *nensei* (sophomore) to 3 *nensei* (junior) and so on. Later year retirees were expected to pass on to new arrivals the information and service they themselves received during their first years (Figure 3.5). When one resigned from the club for various reasons, from ill health to a permanent return to Japan, they referred to this departure as *sotsugyo*, which literally translates as ‘graduation’. For example, Mrs Aizawa, when she quit batik making club, said she ‘graduated’ from this activity because it became too taxing for her eyes.



Figure 3.5. One of the current migrants leading a tour of KL.

Beyond the metaphor, male retirees themselves routinely joked that their hobbies in Malaysia had the temporal qualities of work. A typical informant had enrolled in at least two or more activities at the Japan Club. Ekerdt (1986) argues that in the United States, retirement is morally managed by a ‘busy ethic’ that esteems leisure

that is filled with activity. Similarly, in Malaysia, Mr Kosaka's weekly schedule looked like this:

Monday:	Ballroom dancing
Tuesday:	Golf
Wednesday:	Ballroom dancing
Thursday:	Rest
Friday:	Mah-jong and ballroom dancing
Saturday:	The Village Concert
Sunday:	Rest

On Tuesday, his day of golf, he woke as early as five in the morning and came home around five in the evening. He joked that golf had replaced work.

The vertical structure of the Second-Home Club, and the explicit reference to the temporality of school and work, said a great deal about the reproduction of regulatory structures that have shaped the affective practices in the Japan Club. I argue that in the process of offering themselves for the service of others, they refashioned themselves to perform 'affective labour' distinct from capitalist labour. Gabriella Lukacs (2013, 48), an anthropologist of contemporary Japanese society, uses the concept of 'affective labour' to capture the trend in which workers invest their subjectivity as the raw material of valorisation. Affective labour blurs the line between paid and unpaid work by integrating the process of capital accumulation with practices of self-making (Lukacs 2013, 48). After retirement migration, the process of capital accumulation was integrated with the moral practices of 'being useful to others' (*yakuni tatsu*).

The men's affective labour, in turn, provided them with the sense of *ibasho*, which used to be derived from capitalist labour. Keita-san's story is a case in point. I met Keita-san at the Japanese Language Volunteers Club (see Figure 3.2). He was a man in his mid-60s with a pair of glasses that had large oval lenses.

'Six years after I reached Malaysia, I finally understood why I came here', he told me over a bowl of wanton noodles in a hawker centre. 'In my youth, I wanted to be a diplomat. But I couldn't get into a top university. I was from a poor family, and my parents couldn't afford the fees for a good private university. So I went to a lower-ranking national university. In Japan, if you are not from University of Tokyo,

Waseda or Keio University, you will not get prestigious government jobs'.⁸¹ He gave up his dream of becoming a diplomat. He decided to become an English teacher at a secondary school instead. 'If I learnt English, I thought, I would one day be able to travel overseas'. He retired at the age of 58 and took up a re-employment offer to teach the Japanese language to Japanese war orphans left behind in China at the end of WWII (*Chuugoku zanryuu koji*). He learned to speak Chinese through this job. 'After completing that job, I decided to come to Malaysia. I had a vague idea that I might want to continue learning Chinese here. But mostly, I had no idea what I wanted to do in my retirement. After arriving in Malaysia, for a long time, I wondered why I was here. I wanted to go back to Japan so many times. But things got better when I began teaching at the local Chinese high school. Then I realised one day'. He paused and looked at me. 'It took me six years, but now I finally found out why I am here. I came to Malaysia to realise my dream to be a diplomat. I am a Japanese diplomat teaching the Japanese language to Chinese school children in Malaysia'.

Keita-san came to Malaysia with few ideas of what he wanted to do there. He retrospectively found the purpose, and he found it in what he always had done—teaching. After six years, teaching Japanese to local students provided him with a space of belonging (*ibasho*) to enact his role (*deban*) as a 'diplomat'. He and others who engaged in public acts of service for others emphasised the sense of purpose or *ikigai* drawn from a practice that resembled that of work.

What the ethnographic studies of retirees in the Japan Club revealed so far was the picture of those who were guided by two contrasting affective conditions. On one hand, they were motivated to be useful to others, including the promotion of retirement migration to Malaysia, helping newcomers to settle, and assisting the local students to learn Japanese. On the other hand, they were motivated by the desire for a recognition and *ibasho* in Malaysia. As an account keeper, or the Second-Home Club committee officers, or as the Japanese 'diplomat', their practice of affective labour fed the dreams of *ibasho* in retirement. The practice of service and an individual goal of *ikigai* came together in the Malaysian utopia.

⁸¹ I have mentioned in Chapter 1 that the university one went to had a large bearing on success in one's working career.

Negotiating the Post-work Relationship with Fellow Retirees

I have so far argued how capitalist labour was replaced with affective labour which embodied the structural, temporal and affective practices of work. Their affective labour allowed the retirees to accumulate public recognition and the sense of *ikigai* in their retirement life. However, it is important to note that Japanese people in Malaysia carefully distinguished their activities from work. An incident at the Painting Club (Figure 3.6) exemplifies this point.



Figure 3.6. Mrs Endo in front of her paintings.

One day, as I walked into the painting class, I noticed Steve smoking outside the classroom with Mr Isoroku. Mr Isoroku was wearing a T-shirt that Steve designed for the Painting Club the year before. Mr Isoroku and Steve were good friends; they both had worked in foreign investment banks and were each wearing a colourful pair of shorts. But this was a little unusual. Steve usually sat disengaged at the back of the classroom (see the Introduction), but never was completely outside. They seemed to be discussing something seriously.

After they finished talking and came into the classroom, Mr Hayashi, who was the leader of the Painting Club, stood in front to announce an election for a new leader.

Mr Hayashi	The leader should be a man, the vice-leader should be a woman, and the accountant should be a new member. So I have asked Mrs Higuchi, who has just joined the club, to be the accountant, and Mrs Sakata to be the vice-leader. Mrs Sakata responded that
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it was her fate (*unmei*), and that she would do her best. I then asked Steve to be the leader, but he declined. So what shall we do now? Some people are saying that I should continue.

Mr Baba, one of the oldest members of the Club, spoke up.

Mr Baba Well, let's have a look at what the Club's constitution says. It says, 'A leader shall change every year, although the continuation of the leader shall not be prevented'. It is clearly stated that the leader should change every year.

Mr Hayashi But last year, we amended the constitution to add a phrase, 'although the continuation of the leader shall not be prevented'.

Mrs Endo, who was the founding member of the Painting Club, raised her hand to ask a question.

Mrs Endo Why can't we just follow the seniority principle?

Mr Baba responded swiftly.

Mr Baba This discussion should be held at the AGM, which, according to the constitution, shall be held at the end of March.

Mr Hayashi looked away. Mr Baba caught him.

Mr Baba Wait, don't tell me you are not planning to hold an AGM? You have to, according to the constitution, you know that, right?

Mr Hayashi Alright I know. I will hold an AGM in March, but we need to have this discussion before the AGM.

Mr Baba looked puzzled. But before he could continue, someone else spoke up.

Mr Kimura It's really difficult to select a group of leaders when we are a group of nomads! Hayashi-san himself is leaving at the end of March [later, Mr Hayashi sent an email notifying that he would not be able to attend the AGM in March because he would be going to Japan for a medical check-up]. How to hold an AGM without a leader? Half a year we are travelling. I suggest that the three executives share the loads.

Mr Isoroku responded.

Mr Isoroku I have been in this club for more than eight years now. Initially, we used to rotate every year according to the order in which one joined the club, no matter how good or bad he or she was regarding their painting ability and their leadership skills. But since about three years ago, we have changed to demand a more charismatic style of leadership. That's why no one wants to take over the leadership now. They don't want to shoulder so much responsibility and be compared to the previous leadership. I suggest abolishing the hierarchy among the three executives. Three of them are co-leaders. That way there will be less pressure on each of them. It's easier for people to take up the job. The most important thing is to emphasise that it is by seniority! Then one would feel that there is no choice but to take it. People will support whoever is the leader.

Mr Baba Wait, wait. That's completely against the constitution. You mean to say that we should change the constitution?

People ignored Mr Baba. Steve supported Mr Isoroku.

Steve Indeed, in the past when the leadership was chosen by charisma, and not by seniority, there were a lot of disputes.

Mrs Sakata looked anxious, and she raised a question.

Mrs Sakata But if we go by seniority, there will be years with only women in the executive!

Mr Hayashi nodded in agreement. But Mr Isoroku responded quickly.

Mr Isoroku So? What's wrong with that? I am sure women can handle it.

Mrs Sakata Oh, but women are not very good with computers!

Someone shouted from the crowd. 'Ask your husbands!' The crowd burst into laughter. The consensus was reached. Mr Hayashi said decisively.

Mr Hayashi Ok, we will follow a seniority order!

People applauded. But Mr Baba objected again.

Mr Baba Wait, what is the point of a constitution if you don't follow it? Last year, we had a similar leadership dispute and that was why we amended the constitution. If you continue to ignore the constitution, next year, we will face the same problem. I can already tell. I have worked as an executive before. So I can tell you that what you are doing [ignoring the constitution] is wrong.

Someone from the crowd teased him. ‘You are saying that because you don’t want to be the Leader!’ People giggled. Another shouted, ‘What’s the big deal? We can just change the constitution again to explicitly state, ‘seniority’’.

Mr Hayashi in the meantime scribbled down the names of members in order of seniority. He separated men from women.

Mr Hayashi Alright, I have a list now. Since the leader must be a man, it would mean that the next leader is ...

Steve and Mr Isoroku intervened simultaneously.

Steve Forget the gender! The constitution doesn’t say it has to be gender balanced!

Mr Isoroku What’s wrong with all three women? Let them do it! Women are stronger anyway!

A crowd laughed again. Mr Hayashi had no choice but to appoint three women.

Hayashi Fine, so the oldest members were Mrs Sakata, Mrs Negishi and Mrs Morishita. I will inform them, and they can divide the roles among themselves.

The discussion was over. Mr Baba spoke up for one last time as people started to pack their bags.

Mr Baba I am saying this for the one last time. This is not a deliberation process according to the constitution. The discussion should have been held only at the AGM. What we are doing right now is *nemawashi* (an informal process of deciding before the actual meeting). It is not a procedure according to the constitution.

When I finished packing my bags, Mr Baba was already gone. He never returned to the Painting Club. I heard that he had resigned shortly after the dispute.

After Mr Baba’s departure from the Club, people continued to gossip about what happened. They largely ascribed his insistence on the constitution to his being too uptight. But they did not blame his personality. Instead, they, with almost a sense of

pity, blamed his previous occupation—that of a civil servant. As a civil servant, they said, Mr Baba had been moulded into strictly following the law. He could not get rid of the habit even in his retirement. This comment came to me as a surprise. As I have shown in the preceding section, many aspects of their practices in Malaysia resembled those of work. Indeed, the rest of the group agreed with applying the seniority principle, which could also be seen as a practice widely used in corporations. But the justification for using the seniority principle at the Painting Club was different to the justification for its use in the world of work. At the club, it was to ensure that those who became leaders would not feel the pressure to prove themselves worthy of the position.

Indeed, retirees employed various mechanisms to define their *daini no jinsei* (second life) away from the practices of work. For instance, any explicit mention of one's previous occupation was taboo; talking about previous jobs was considered distasteful. Furthermore, in the Japan Club, many people referred to each other by their nicknames. In joining the Second-Home Club, people were encouraged to adopt nicknames for use on the Izumi SNS. Most adopted English nicknames, such as Kenny, Marie, Eddie, Steve and, to my amusement, Thatcher. In adopting English nicknames, they drew from the practices of the West, the place of their *akogare*. Others took part of their names as their nicknames; Mr Yasuhiko Sakamoto, for instance, asked to be called Hiko. This was the nickname that he used to use in his expatriate missions. Even those who did not sign up for Mr Sakamoto's Second-Home Club adopted some form of nickname in Malaysia. The use of nicknames enabled them to engage with each other as equals, no matter what occupation they had had in their working lives. Some also redrew gender boundaries as well, as witnessed by opinions about letting women take leadership positions in the Painting Club. As can be seen from Mr Hayashi's hesitation, there were more disagreements on this point. I will explore in detail the gendered aspects of affective labour in Chapter 4.

Beyond the practices of work, many silver backpackers also got rid of what they called *shigarami* or constraints from their past. They were largely familial and neighbourly ties, as exemplified by the narrative of Mrs Itoh.

I used to live in a town in Yamaguchi Prefecture which felt like a small *mura* (village). It was a close-knit community with both good and bad qualities. Neighbours cared for each

other, but there was also a sense that I was constantly watched. I couldn't play all day, otherwise the neighbours would think that I was lazy. For example, if I didn't cut the grass, they would make a comment about it. If I had left home too often, they would ask me where I was going to have a good time. Compared to that, here in Malaysia, I can play all day and no one would say anything because that's precisely the social norm here! I have so much time for myself here.

Mrs Itoh kept a blog in Malaysia. She named her blog after a tea house she used to frequent in her hometown in Yamaguchi. The tea house was built to commemorate Michizane Sugawara, an aristocrat from the *Heian* period (794-1192) who was sent to Kyushu as *shimanagashi* (punishment). On the way to Kyushu, he visited Mrs Itoh's town and found it beautiful. Her town had since built a tea house in his honour. Perhaps, like Michizane Sugawara, she found Malaysia a hidden gem in what initially looked to be *shimanagashi* (see Chapter 2).

Others disposed of their possessions before coming to Malaysia. When Mr and Mrs Ando decided to come to Malaysia (see Chapter 2), their daughter objected to their move. The daughter complained that it was unnatural for parents to leave their children. But Mrs Ando told me: 'I used to live 100 per cent for my family. I looked after my parents and parents-in-law, daughters, and grandchildren. It's time to live 100 per cent for myself'. They sold their house in Gunma Prefecture and got rid of all winter clothes. She also donated all her valuable kimonos to a recycling shop. They arrived in KL six months later with two suitcases. Mrs Ando told me that she felt lighter. She felt *shigarami ga nai* (no ties) with family, material desires, and gender role.

I interpret their sense of being light and without ties (*shigarami ga nai*) as indicating liberation from the larger sociological context. The 'destruction of *matter* matters profoundly' (Tusinski 2016, 15) in the erasure of familial obligations because the removal of objects, such as kimonos, which are usually passed down through the generations, symbolised their departure from the reproductive duties. As I argued in Chapter 2, women were not entirely contented with the domestic role. The 'happy housewife' with *yutori* still felt the anxiety of raising a family, and especially the next generation of productive workers. Mothers in nuclear families especially shouldered the responsibility of children's education. Ueno (1994, 236) cites the rising case of baby killings among younger mothers who felt the pressure

from society in the 1970s. Just as how men felt the anxiety from their working practice, home as women's workplace also raised much anxiety.

Under such pressure and anxiety that characterised their working lives, by getting rid of social obligations and material accumulations, they may have sought to unbind themselves from various values that had made them productive and reproductive labourers in Japan. In making these explicit departures from their past, the Japanese retirees in Malaysia attempted to make themselves into people who live in the present in the space of their 'adventure' (Simmel 1911). I will discuss in more detail the negotiation of kinship ties in Chapter 5.

It is important, however, to note the truism that one cannot unbind oneself entirely from the web of social relations or cultural orderings (Joel Robbins 2010, 648). As discussed earlier, male silver backpackers were defining themselves and their new situation in relation to what had come before. Although asking about another person's previous occupation was considered taboo, people always looked for material and social signs of the previous occupation. For instance, public servants were said to wear a pair of trousers the same colour as the floor. Bright and colourful clothes worn by people like Steve and Mr Isoroku were exclusive to the *ji-ei* (self-employed) and the *gaishi-kei* (employees of foreign companies), and who were often wealthier than the rest. For the most part, I found that people socialised with others of the same gender and of similar occupational and class background. In a way that evokes Bourdieu's ([1979]1984) *habitus*, they said that these embodied dispositions were ingrained in people no matter how hard they tried to get rid of them.

In the lifeworld in which previous occupations and structures had loomed large in the imaginations of the retirees, the deliberate adoption of casual nicknames and other practices of rupture demonstrated the coexistence of the continuities and discontinuities that defined retirees' lives in Malaysia. Productive selves were reproduced through affective labour but, because it was distinguished from 'work', they were free to depart from the associated practices of capitalist labour. The retirees oscillated between proximity to and distance from capitalist work practices to define their social belonging in retirement. In this context of fluid and indeterminate sociality after work, 'flexibility' (*juunannsei*) became the valued attribute. Chie Nakane (1970, 122), who studied the social structure of *mura*, notes that in return for emotional security in the *mura*-like social organisations, there is a need for a person to 'adjust himself to group demands and accept the group

consensus, even though it might seem unreasonable both in content and the method of presentation'. In the case of the dispute at the Painting Club, Mr Baba's insistence on constitution seemed reasonable, but his insistence on opposing the group consensus to go with the seniority principle cost him his membership of the group. The resignation of Mr Baba was brought about by his inflexibility to adjust to the post-work indeterminate sociality that had blurred the boundaries between work and play.

The Fragility of Affective Labour and the Space of Belonging

During my fieldwork in 2014, one of my older female informants, who liked to be called Claire, reminded me of a Japanese proverb: *deru kui ha utareru* (the stake that sticks up gets hammered down). It means that if one stands out, he or she will be subject to criticism. She had been in Malaysia for over 10 years. She told me that when she was a leader of the Painting Club, she faced much criticism. I asked if Mr and Mrs Sakamoto, too, faced criticism. She shook her head, 'No. If you are leading by that far, no one will dare to criticise you'. Indeed, unlike the leadership of the Painting Club which was based on the seniority, Mr Sakamoto's leadership in the Second-Home Club was based on his charisma.

But as my fieldwork progressed, Mr Sakamoto's leadership did come under challenge. When I returned for my second period of fieldwork in November 2015, the Second-Home Club no longer existed. Instead, the Second-Home Club had been replaced by two new clubs: *Sinia Gohoubi Mareishia Kai* (the Senior's Malaysian Reward Club) and *Otasuke Club* (the Helpers' Club), which appeared to do all the activities previously done by the Second-Home Club. The former club (thereafter called the Senior's Club) was headed by Mr and Mrs Sakamoto, while the latter was headed by Mr Sasaki, who used to be Mr Sakamoto's right-hand man. They were no longer on speaking terms.

Through the case study of the demise of the Second-Home Club, this final section of the chapter addresses the fragility of relationships built through affective labour. Just as retirees distinguished their activities from those of work, relationships formed through their affective labour—*nakama*—was carefully distinguished from ones formed through capitalist labour. It was precisely in the negotiation of forms of relationship that disputes occurred frequently. The sequence of events was

reconstructed from stories that I heard from retirees who were not directly involved in the conflict and also from the accounts of events closely documented by Mr and Mrs Sakamoto themselves on the Izumi SNS network. I did not directly interview the people involved in the incident. I was more interested in how the information circulated among the retirees and the types of affective discourse this dispute produced among them. It pointed to the anxiety around the post-work space of belonging.

The tension first erupted on the Izumi SNS platform when a few people raised concerns about the credibility of information disseminated at various events organised by the Second-Home Club. One of the major concerns was to do with the cost of living in Malaysia. Mr Sakamoto's book, *Gohoubi Jinsei Mareishia* (2011), mentions that the cost of living in Malaysia was a third of Japan's. Indeed, at various information sessions, I witnessed officers of the Second-Home Club saying to the visitors that their pensions would stretch three times further in Malaysia. However, I also heard many retirees in Malaysia complaining that this was misleading. A third of the living cost in Japan, perhaps, if they lived in a suburb, shopped at a local market and ate at local restaurants. But most retirement migrants I met lived in expatriate enclaves, shopped at European or Japanese grocers, and ate at Japanese restaurants (see the Introduction and Chapter 2). For most Japanese retirees who frequented the Japan Club, their cost of living was about the same as Japan (see Chapter 2). I lived in the same area they lived, followed their activities almost every day, and I spent at least AUD2500 a month. This was more than my living costs in Australia!

When a few people raised these concerns on the Izumi Network, Mr Sakamoto revoked their membership of the Second-Home Club. This meant that they could no longer log-in or contribute comments to the online forum. This controversial move raised concerns about Mr Sakamoto's leadership, not only among the general members but also among the officers of the Second-Home Club, a set that included Mr Sasaki, Mr and Mrs Yamamoto, and Mr and Mrs Kawashima. They began to ask questions about his undemocratic decision-making. It is important to note the age difference between Mr Sakamoto and these officers. Mr Sakamoto was aged in his 70s; those who challenged his leadership style were in their 60s. People from Mr Sakamoto's generation are said to have lived through *kurai tanima* (literally, the dark valley) of an economic depression and the war (Kelly 1993, 197). The others were

from the baby-boomer generation who had experienced not just the material comforts of post-war recovery but also the intensity of the student movement of the late 1960s (see Chapter 1).

The internal dispute turned nasty when the group of younger officers called for Mr Sakamoto's resignation. They published a nine-page document on the Izumi SNS outlining their reasons for this call. The gist of their claim was that Mr Sakamoto suffered from senility and that he was no longer capable of making a sound decision. Mr Sakamoto indeed had suffered ill health in recent years and had been absent from many events organised by the Second-Home Club. As his health declined, Mr Sakamoto began to emphasise his previous social status as the managing director of the Sumitomo Corporation to justify his continuing leadership position on the committee. When I met Mr Sakamoto in 2014, he readily distinguished himself from younger officers. 'Ten years ago, when there were only a few of us in Malaysia, everyone had an expatriate experience. But now, well, thanks in a large part to my promotional effort, retirement migration to Malaysia has become so popular that even those who had never been abroad began arriving here'. In an environment where an explicit mention of one's previous corporate positions was considered taboo, many regarded his recent behaviour as distasteful.

When I first read the nine-page document on the Izumi SNS, it reminded me of what Mr Yamamoto, one of the officers responsible, had told me previously: the principle of productivity and redundancy. I met Mr and Mrs Yamamoto first in 2013 during my brief visits to Malacca for a pilot fieldwork project. I attended an information session organised by the Long Stay Foundation (see Chapter 2). The Long Stay Foundation asked the Second-Home Club to send some people who could answer questions from the audience. Mr and Mrs Yamamoto volunteered. When I returned for a longer term of fieldwork in 2014, Mr and Mrs Yamamoto kindly invited me to their home for an interview. We covered broad topics, and our conversation shifted to Mr Yamamoto's previous work. He told me that he was a human resource manager of a major Osaka-based electric company. One of his main tasks was to cut costs by firing people. This was when he told me about the principle of productivity and redundancy. He drew a chart to explain the principle (Figure 3.7):

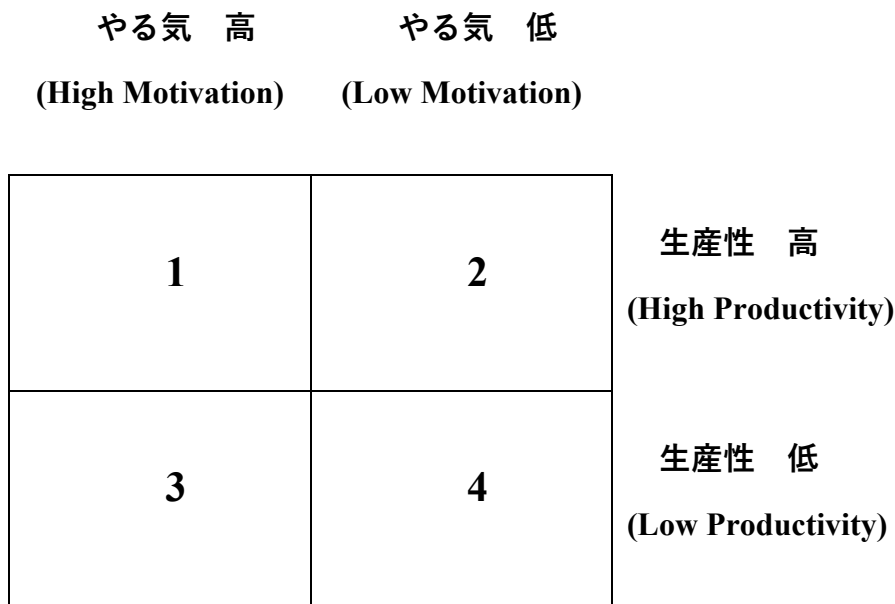


Figure 3.7. A re-construction of a diagram drawn by Mr Yamamoto.

The chart divided people into categories according to two criteria: motivation and productivity. He asked me to guess which group of people would be fired first. I guessed people in category four. They have low motivation and low productivity. But he said that people he would cut first were in category three. He explained to me, ‘The category four people still have a potential to improve their productivity if I manage to increase their motivation. But category three people are already so motivated. Yet their productivity is so low. They are the lost cause’.

As employees got older, many slowly transitioned from category one to category three. Their productivity gradually dropped because of their physical and mental decline as well as the introduction of new technologies by the company. One of the retirees told me how he felt the pressure on him to resign after he reached age 58. Even though he thought he was still useful to the company, it wanted to replace him with a younger employee. ‘As it turned out, they were just waiting for me to retire. My work was seen as too old-fashioned’. Similarly, Mr Sakamoto, in the eyes of Mr Yamamoto and other younger officers, must have transitioned from category one to category three. He was so motivated yet he could no longer make sound decisions for the Second-Home Club.

Ironically, these criticisms surfaced as reverse discourse (Foucault 1990, 101), where the younger retirees challenged the authority of the older retirees because the

latter were too senile to stay on stage. In Chapter 2, I demonstrated how retirees were judged burdensome in the national discourse after their economically productive lives were over. Such criticism continued in the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur. Expatriates criticised the retirees for ‘invading’ their space because the Club was originally built for Japanese expatriates and their family members. Although the club’s membership was still comprised overwhelmingly of younger expatriates, in recent years, retirees had become more visible in the Club’s lounge area, especially during the week. Dissatisfied expatriates began to spread negative views about the retirement migration on their online network called the Jalan Jalan SNS.⁸² One of the expatriate wives, who taught *ikebana* (Japanese-style flower arrangement) lessons in the Japan Club, told me how annoyed she was by the retirees in the club. ‘They are receiving superannuation from Japan. Then they should spend their money in Japan, for Japan!’

These criticisms by the expatriate Japanese showed how retirees in Malaysia continued to be viewed as a burden, if not, indeed, as abject. The expatriates also pointed out the retirees’ possibly redeeming feature: their contribution in some way to Japan and Japanese people. The retirees’ practice of information-sharing in Malaysia fit within this expectation, although it was rarely acknowledged by the expatriates. The crossing of boundaries by these retirees into the space of work was rather seen as an intrusion. Indeed, in 2015, when the Japan Club almost doubled its monthly membership fee, the conspiracy theory spread among the retirees that the Club was making it harder for them to remain in the Club. Ironically, however, in the community of retirees, they used the same discourse to separate those who were fit to provide affective labour from those who should leave the stage.

A month after the public altercation between the younger officers and Mr Sakamoto, Mr Sasaki left the Second-Home Club, along with a few other members, to establish their own group, the Helper’s Club. Mr Sakamoto cancelled their membership of Izumi SNS network. Mr Sakamoto then renamed the Second-Home Club by what I thought was an ironical name: the Senior’s Club. He filled the vacancies in the new committee with those who supported him during the conflict. Mr Kosaka made it to the list.

⁸² Jalan Jalan: <http://www.junmas.com/>

Strikingly, the new Senior's Club started by Mr Sakamoto had an additional mission: to set up a nursing home for those who needed care, and a share house for the widows of retirement migrants who passed away in Malaysia. When I conducted my fieldwork from 2014-2016, most retirement migrants either returned to or intended to return to Japan if one of the spouses needed care. Mr Sakamoto's vision of a nursing home would allow retirees to be cared for and, ultimately, die, in Malaysia. The widows could then enter the share house so that they would not feel lonely (Allison 2015, 136–137; Milligan, Bingley, and Gatrell 2016). This was his new moral project of mutual help; to assist frail elderly and their spouses to look after themselves until the very end without needing to rely on their children or the Japanese state. Mr Sakamoto's projects replicated the transition in his life course. After retiring from the domain of capitalist labour in Japan, he entered the domain of affective labour in the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur. Now that he was forced to resign from the domain of affective labour, he started a project to prepare for death.

Since the conflict, the retirement community in the Japan Club seemed somewhat divided. Because the Village Concert was administered by Mr and Mrs Kawashima, two of the officers responsible for the demise of the Second-Home Club, Mr and Mrs Sakamoto and their supporters stopped attending the Village Concert. The participant numbers halved. It was not an explicit ban, yet the message was clear—they were not welcome. Mr Kutani used to be one of the core members of the Village Concert. He was good at IT and photography, and he was always asked to document major events by the Village Concert and the Male Glee Club. He remained neutral and silent throughout the conflict, but Mr Sakamoto soon appointed Mr and Mrs Kutani to his new committee because there was no one else as good as Mr Kutani in IT matters. Before his appointment to the Senior's Club, Mr Kutani was well-liked by everybody. Always standing quietly by the side of his dynamic wife, who had a great sense of humour and many friends, people viewed him as a gentle, kindly person. Perhaps because of this, he and his wife continued to attend the Village Concert after their appointment to Mr Sakamoto's new committee. One day, however, they received a notice from Mr and Mrs Kawashima that they were to be suspended from the Village Concert for three months. The notice stipulated that Mr Kutani had breached the constitution of the Village Concert by using its mailing list for a private purpose. Apparently, Mr Kutani had earlier emailed members of the Village Concert about an event organised by the Senior's Club. It was related to

singing and, hence, he thought it was appropriate. He was, however, mistaken. When I met retirees later who supported Mr and Mrs Sakamoto, they gossiped angrily that Mr and Mrs Kutani's suspension was clearly to punish them for joining the Senior's Club. After the three-month suspension, Mr and Mrs Kutani did not return to the Village Concert. In the meantime, Mr and Mrs Sakamoto established an alternative singing club, *Karaoke Kurabu* (Karaoke Club) for their supporters.

Although Mr Sakamoto had been ousted, he still had control of Izumi SNS. Throughout the leadership dispute, he posted a series of commentaries on the incident. He referred to the incident as a coup d'état (*kuudetaa*). He lamented publicly on the SNS. 'I am so confused. All I did was to do good and to be useful to others. But some of my trusted *shoguns* (head *samurai*) are trying to hijack my castle. Why couldn't they wait until I was dead?'

I observed that the affective labour evoked as much anxiety as capitalist labour. I interpret the conflict within the Second-Home Club as an aspect of anxious intimacy as people negotiated post-work sociality with fellow retirees. Mr Sakamoto continued to view the institutional structure of the Second-Home Club in line with the hierarchical structure of a corporation with him at the top. He used metaphors of *samurai*, drawing from the Confucian principles that defined the feudal practices during the Tokugawa period, and the *ie* (household), school and corporate structures after the Meiji period. Had the Second-Home Club replaced the feudal structure of *ie* in their entirety, his leadership would not have been challenged until his death, as he wished. But although their affective labour embodied practices of capitalist labour, they also tried to distance one from the other as I mentioned in the preceding section. Public recognition was a scarce resource in the domain of affective labour, and committee members constantly contested who could be more useful in order to secure the limited *ibasho*. They couldn't wait for Mr Sakamoto's death because they were facing their own death, that of their productive lives. Like capitalist labour, they continually faced the threat of their substitution by younger retirees. But the narrative of wanting to be useful obscured the nature of power and the underlying values created and contested in the practice of giving. The association of giving with morality further served to disguise the inequalities in the distribution of social power and recognition among the Japanese retirees.

Conclusion

The relationships that many men formed with each other—the give and give relationship—became the central pillar that sustained the Japanese community in Kuala Lumpur. The key to value accumulation and reproduction of men's productive personhood in retirement was the discursive link between public recognition and *ikigai*. I suggest that the public recognition that they gained through the act of giving should be understood as part of a larger system of social, economic and political transformation that they went through in their retirement. In other words, what fed the flow of giving was the desire to be useful on the personal level, which was symbolic of productivity on the discourse level. Then the desire to be useful is a performative cultural production of belonging in the productivist state. Retirees subjected themselves to seemingly exploitative conditions of service because it was *ibasho* and *deban* that they were labouring to reproduce (cf. C. Freeman 2014). The practice of service and information exchange fed these ambitions, and these became prominent features of retirees' activities in Malaysia.

The conflation of being useful to others with the acquisition of *ibasho* is at once affirmative and destructive. Because intimate relations that had been formed through affective labour were uncertain, fluid and indeterminate, conflicts occurred frequently. They engaged with the practices of work selectively and creatively to define their *ibasho*. In the Painting Club, the constitution was largely ignored in order to implement a seniority principle which would ensure equality among the members. On the other hand, in the Village Concert, the constitution was actively used to remove unwanted members from the club. Members of the Second-Home Club constantly faced the threat of replacement by others who could be more useful. While profoundly confirming, Mr Sakamoto's retirement project also brought catastrophe to him. The next chapter will focus on women's experiences in navigating the regulatory work of finding *ikigai* in Malaysia.

Chapter 4

The Gender of Ikigai

Since the beginning of my fieldwork in 2014, Mr and Mrs Yamamoto from the Second-Home Club (see Chapter 3) had assisted me to set up interviews with Japanese retirees in Malaysia. They regularly asked me if I had interviewed people whom they saw as belonging to a different category of migrant, such as the relatively well-to-do and the not-so-well-to-do, single persons and couples, newly arrived and established migrants. They took it upon themselves to make sure that I met ‘different varieties’ of retirement migrants to have a holistic view of this diverse community. So when they discovered that I had not met any people who had decided to leave Malaysia, they immediately arranged for me to meet their neighbours, Mr and Mrs Otani, who were about to return to Tokyo after having spent a year only in Kuala Lumpur. Mr and Mrs Yamamoto set up an interview at their home in the Saujana Villa Condominium, a condominium known to have many Japanese expatriate and retiree residents.⁸³

A week later, Mr Otani marched into the Yamamoto’s home in the Saujana Villa Condominium with his shirt buttoned all the way up. A tall man in his mid-60s, he had worked for a large Japanese trading company for 40 years and had experience of living in the United States as an expatriate. His wife followed him into the living room: She was 20 years younger than Mr Otani. Mrs Otani wore a loose batik dress and carried a bamboo bag on her shoulder. At their arrival, Mr Yamamoto asked Mrs Yamamoto to prepare a snack for us. Mr Otani immediately scorned Mr Yamamoto for making his wife do the domestic work. After an awkward moment, Mrs Yamamoto said she didn’t mind and served us tea. Mr Otani thanked her and began speaking as soon as he sat upright. I noticed he had prepared a notepad with a list of points.

It is not good to just relax in Malaysia. The reason we decided to leave Malaysia was that I had failed to come here with a purpose, a good sense of what I wanted to do. I did not plan my life course (*jinsei sekkei*) well. From what I have observed, I see there are four

⁸³ The Saujana Villa Condominium was located in front of the Japanese School of Kuala Lumpur. This attracted many expatriate families with children. Also, this was one of a few condominiums that allowed its residents to keep dogs as pets.

types of Japanese retirees in Malaysia. The first category is those who left Japan because they saw no future there. Some of them left after the nuclear disaster to establish a safe haven for themselves and their family in Malaysia [this will be explored in Chapter 5] and some are simply disappointed at the state of current politics and economics. The second category is those who wanted to pursue their hobbies like golf. The third category is those who wanted to contribute to a Malaysian community, such as by becoming a Japanese language teacher. These three categories of people all have a clear sense of purpose in Malaysia. Now, the fourth category is people like me, who came here without any purpose. I didn't do enough planning. Perhaps I am closest to the third category. But I chose the wrong condominium. Most residents in this condominium are Japanese; I couldn't make any local friends.

He paused to get a glass of water. I turned to his wife, Mami Otani, who was playing with the Yamamotos' dog (Figure 4.1). Noticing me looking at her, Mr Otani intervened. 'My *waifu* (wife) likes it here'. I was momentarily taken aback by the term *waifu*, it was an unusual way to refer to his wife. More usual terms are *kanai* (家内) or *oku-san* (奥さん), but Japanese feminists have discouraged these terms because their Chinese characters denote women's status inside the house (家 is home, 内 is inside and 奥 is deep; these characters position wives deep inside the house) (Carroll 2006, 115) (see Chapter 2). The term *waifu*, on the other hand, was directly adapted from the English word 'wife', and hence it was supposedly free from problematic gender baggage (Carroll 2006, 115). Although I seldom heard this term in Japan, I did notice a few Japanese men in Malaysia refer to their wives as *waifu*.⁸⁴ This 'feminist' use of the term was consistent with Mr Otani's earlier scorning of Mr Yamamoto for making his wife prepare a snack for us.

Realising that we were talking about her, Mrs Otani came and joined our conversation. She said that she actually enjoyed her time in Malaysia, including the time she spent chatting with other Japanese people in the condominium. For her, she said, choosing this condominium was the best decision they had made in coming to Malaysia. But her husband had already found a re-employment opportunity in Japan, and then they left the Yamamoto's to pack their apartment.

After they left, Mrs Yamamoto, who had been listening to our conversations quietly, suddenly spoke up. 'I think what Mr Otani just said to you, Shiori-san—'we

⁸⁴ I will explore the use of the word, *waifu*, in more detail in Chapter 5.

have to have a purpose in Malaysia’—is such a male perspective’. Intrigued by her critique of a man who portrayed himself as a feminist, I asked her to elaborate.

Well, men don’t know what to do with freedom and time. It’s like our dog, Komugi. As soon as I unleash her, she gets anxious. She looks at me with a worried look. It’s the same for men. A sense of purpose is like a leash. For them, it’s less stressful to have a job than have freedom.



Figure 4.1. Komugi.

Mrs Yamamoto’s comment pointed to the gendered nature of the desire for a sense of purpose (Mathews 2009), or what is described in other chapters as *ikigai*, ‘what makes life worth living’ (Mathews 1996) in retirement. In previous chapters, I discussed how retirees regularly described their period of retirement as a reward, or a time to shift the orientation of life from work or family to themselves (cf. Miyazaki 2006). Central to their narrative was the idea of ‘finding a purpose in second life’. As Mr Otani pointed out, some people came with a good sense of a purpose, while others like Keita-san found it 6 years after his arrival in Malaysia (see Chapter 3). However, I have discussed in Chapter 3 the regulatory tendency of the discourse of *ikigai*, as its meaning is shaped by the constant mediation of the tension between the reproduction and the destabilisation of productivist norms. In producing the active and useful and, therefore, productive community of retirees, men subverted the label of fallen wet leaves but this form of solidarity at the same time produced a new hierarchy among them.

This chapter continues to examine the reproduction of an oppressive category that the retirees' move to Malaysia had supposedly disrupted: gender. Anthropological scholarship on gender in ageing remains scarce, but a growing number of scholars has begun to point out the feminist potential of ageing as women gain more power in their spousal relationship. Arber and Ginn (1995, 117), in their edited volume, *Connecting Gender and Aging*, contrast women's experiences of ageing with that of men, and suggest that ageing potentially liberates older women from the restrictions placed on them by conventional gender roles. To recall Chapter 1, the high-growth Japan operated on a strict gender division of labour. Many women who were aged over 65 in 2015 had been housewives (Garon 1997, 185). While men accumulated public recognition as capitalist labourers, women established their own sources of moral worth, such as family, neighbourhoods and social groups. As I have shown in Chapter 2 with the case study of Eddie's retirement, although Eddie had lost his place of belonging after their retirement, Eddie's wife could continue to draw on these proximate communities for her source of belonging. Arber and Ginn (1995a) suggest that, as women become more independent in old age, men tend to show more nurturing tendencies. Wilson (1995, 110–111) terms the men's emotional shift, 'an age affect'. He argues that in advanced old age, men become less concerned with the power aspects of gender relations than they have been in the past (Wilson 1995).

Indeed, some Japanese men explicitly couched their move to Malaysia as a feminist move, a decision made for their wives. Mr Sakamoto, the founder of the Second-Home Club (see Chapter 3), writes in his book, *Gohoubi Jinsei Mareishia* (2011), that male readers should 'reward' and 'liberate' their wives by living in Malaysia in retirement. He writes, 'the availability of tasty Malaysian food in hawker stalls and affordable domestic services would liberate your wife from her household tasks' (Sakamoto 2011). This rhetoric of liberating wives from home duties was accepted with enthusiasm among retired men. The decision to migrate was usually made by men (see Chapter 2). Retirement migration was then re-narrated by these men as having a feminist potential.

In fact, many men seemed to have taken on some feminist critique that began to emerge in the 1970s, which criticised men's absence from home (see Chapter 2). As a result of feminist activism, in 1989, home economics, which used to be compulsory for girls only in school, was made compulsory for boys and for girls (Mackie 2003, 191). Baby boomers were too old for school then, but men's

magazines targeting retirees have begun to promote the new type of masculinity as being considerate to the feelings of their partners (Bardsley 2011, 130; Moore 2010). Moore's (2010) research on Japanese men and women's sex and ageing also shows that some retired men redefined their sense of masculinity by being more affectionate to their wives.

Men in Malaysia, who generally saw themselves as 'upper-class' seniors who were 'willing to try new things' (Bardsley 2011, 118) (see Chapter 2), seemed to be attempting to adhere to this new gender performativity in Malaysia. For instance, in the Japan Club, many men joined the noodle-making club called the *Ikemen Club*. *Ike-* means 'good'. *Men* means 'noodle', but it can also mean 'face' and 'men'. *Ikemen* was a popular cultural term from the 90s that referred to good-looking men. Hence, *Ikemen Club* had a double meaning: tasty noodles and good-looking men. By calling the noodle-making club the *Ikemen Club*, it alluded to the possibility of men transforming to become good-looking men after learning to make noodles. It altered the gender performativity so that masculinity was accorded to an activity that traditionally belonged to the domain of the household.

This new, supposedly progressive, masculinity allowed some men to further become liberal normative citizens of Japan, open to the idea of female participation in public life. In the Painting Club dispute discussed in Chapter 3, I suggested that gender emerged as an important element in which people negotiated post-work sociality. Some men encouraged women to take up leadership roles in the club, saying, 'women are stronger'. They thereby marked a departure from the strict gendered division of roles that had characterised their working lives.

However, their temporal and affective practices, which linked one's sense of *ikigai* and public recognition (see Chapter 3), continued to be deeply gendered. Through the stories of two female retirees, Mrs Kawashima and Mrs Iida, who pursued their hobbies in Japan and Malaysia, I highlight the effects of the gendering of sociality in retirement, connecting the discussion back to the divergent gender formulation of productive women and men during the high-growth era (see Chapter 1). This illuminates the discourse of *ikigai* as a gendered discourse, one in which men transgressed the feminine domains of value production to create masculine values of what makes life worth living. Mr Iida was one such retiree. He encouraged and supported his wife to transform what was essentially her hobby—in the realm of leisure—into 'work' and thereby acquire public recognition in Malaysia. On one

hand, this transgression empowered some women like Mrs Kawashima to enjoy the recognition that was denied to them in previous years as housewives. On the other hand, even in cases where women felt empowered, they often did so as subordinates to men. Many women felt that their autonomy was thwarted from having to accompany their spouses' pursuit of *ikigai* in Malaysia. In following their spouses to Malaysia, they were removed from their own sources of *ikigai* that were at odds with their husbands', such as family and community. The survey done by the Cabinet Office in 2012 shows that 50.8 per cent of men defined their *ikigai* in pursuing their hobbies but 51.4 per cent of women defined their *ikigai* in socialising with the family members (Cabinet Office 2012a). Through the narrative of Mrs Iida, I will describe how women felt that their values had not been realised (*mottainai*) in Malaysia even when they were engaging in what their husbands perceived as useful activities and therefore representative of *ikigai*. Through their narratives, I will explore how women coped with, and at times resisted, the male notion of what made life worth living in retirement.

In doing so, I will demonstrate how elderly women's desire for the production of their own values led them to yearn for particular domestic products from Japan. I will highlight two such objects, cling wrap and yoghurt, as they circulated among the female Japanese retirees in Malaysia. By exploring how women regenerated their value through these domestic objects from home, I will rethink the contested relationship between gender, productivity and *ikigai* in retirement.

Empowering Potential of *Ikigai*: Mrs Kawashima

Some women took advantage of the blurring of gender boundaries to accumulate public recognition in ways that were not possible for them when they were younger. They willingly participated in the public domain by transforming their skills to fit its rhetoric. The story of Marie Kawashima is a case in point (Figure 4.2). Marie Kawashima came to Malaysia five years previously with her husband. Her real name was Mariko, but she preferred people to call her Marie. I got to know Marie personally through the Village Concert (see Chapter 3). When Kamei-*sensei*, the well-known conductor, returned to Japan, Marie took over his role. She was a slender woman in her early 60s. She embraced the local fabric designs and often wore tailored summer dresses made of batik cloth. She regularly invited me to have

breakfast with her at local mamak food stalls. During our meals, she often called herself, *hutsuu no shufu*, or ‘an ordinary housewife’. But she was no ordinary housewife. After graduating from a music college, she taught the piano briefly to neighbourhood children. But she felt a pressure to resign when she saw younger music graduates struggling to find jobs. After resigning from teaching, she became a volunteer at an after-school child-care centre. When she arrived in Malaysia with her husband, she noticed a call for a volunteer for a conductor’s position at the children’s music class at the Japan Club. She immediately applied and got the position. She conducted at least twice a week at the Japan Club.

‘My mother is happy in Japan because she knows that I am doing well here’, she told me over a Chinese New Year party that she organised at her home. We stood on her balcony while her husband Kenny (Kenichi Kawashima) and his friend Ricky (Ryosuke Tanaka) chatted in the living room. ‘I just wrote to my mother thanking her for teaching me music so that I can make a contribution here in Malaysia. The education that she gave me 40 years ago is finally being used for a good cause!’ She looked out at the magnificent night view of KL. ‘When I was in Japan, I was known to people as Kenny’s *oku-san* (wife) or so-and-so’s *okaa-san* (mother). When I met my husband’s colleagues, I would bow and tell them how grateful I was for their looking after the interests of my husband in the public service (*otto ga osewa ni natte orimasu*). Like this’. She turned and bowed to me. We laughed. ‘But here in KL’, she continued, ‘I am known as Kawashima-san. Here, we [Mr and Mrs Kawashima] make friends with others as a couple, as equals’.

Indeed, she was more than Kawashima-san: she was referred to by many as Kawashima-sensei, or Marie-sensei. The term, *sensei*, is used for a teacher, and it denotes respect. The title *sensei* muted her gender as opposed to the previous term used to refer to her, that is, *oku-san* (wife) or *okaa-san* (mother). As Kawashima-sensei, she played and led the Village Concert with her piano and taught music lessons to children of Japanese expatriates. By becoming a *sensei*, she took the place of men and accumulated public respect. In terms of public recognition, she accumulated equal, if not more respect, than her husband who administered the Village Concert beside her. She was no longer Mr Kawashima’s wife—she was Kawashima-san, just like her husband. ‘It’s important that I live in this condominium’, she told me. Her condominium was less than a five-minute walk from the Japan Club. ‘It’s more expensive than other condominiums, but it’s close to

the Japan Club. I have so many responsibilities there', she said, looking out the balcony. Suddenly, her face was lit by fireworks celebrating the arrival of the Chinese New Year. They coloured her eyes from pink to yellow to green. Her face glowed with confidence. Retirement migration to Malaysia provided an opportunity for women like Marie to redefine expressions of gender.



Figure 4.2. Marie at the Village Concert

***Ikigai* Contested: Mrs Iida**

I met Mrs Iida for the first time during one of the regular lunch outings among the members of the Malay class. She was married to Mr Iida, the leader of the Malay class. Unlike many other social clubs in the Japan Club, the Malay class had had three years of peace since its inception (see Chapter 3 for the nature of disputes in other clubs). This was in no small part due to Mr Iida's personality; he was a natural leader. Born and raised in a small town in Yamanashi Prefecture, he was subsequently trained in gymnastics and went on to represent Japan at many international sporting events. After graduating from university, he worked as an airport control officer at Narita Airport. When he retired, he returned with his wife to his hometown in Yamanashi and gained re-employment as an insurance salesperson.

It didn't last long. He had come to Malaysia three years previously and quickly assumed a leadership position at the Malay class in the Japan Club. Mr Iida regularly hosted *sashimi* parties for his classmates. I once went with him on an excursion to a fish market at three in the morning. The bright fluorescent lights of the industrial fish market loomed over the pitch-dark residential neighbourhood. The temporal and visual contrast served as a reminder of the dramatic inequalities that separated middle-class Malaysians and the working classes migrant fishermen and their dealers. Mr Iida was an oddity there but he didn't seem to mind. In less than half an hour, he held in his hands plastic bags full of tuna and squid. He gave me a wry smile. 'I love hosting parties, but you can see it's a lot of work! My wife has asked me not to host *sashimi* parties anymore!'

In contrast to her energetic husband, Mrs Iida was a petite, softly spoken lady in her early 60s. She curled her hair and was dressed usually in a black summer dress with a matching flower pendant. She gently touched her face with a white handkerchief to remove sweat, carefully folded her cardigan and a hat and placed them into her handbag before slipping into a seat next to Mr Iida in the restaurant. After the lunch, they invited me to their house for dinner (Figure 4.3).

They had rented a two-bedroom condominium unit in Mont Kiara, an exclusive suburb where most expatriates lived (see the Introduction). I noticed an impressive set of Japanese traditional furniture in their living room. 'We brought everything from Japan because we sold our house in Yamanashi', Mr Iida said. I asked if they had plans to return to Japan. 'Yes!' Mrs Iida replied immediately. 'When I return to Japan, I want to build a house made of wood at the foot of Mt. Fuji'. She excitedly recounted to me her recent visit to her friend's new home in Japan. But Mr Iida interrupted abruptly. 'It's just one of many options!' He then turned to answer my question. 'Well, we have contracted this place for three years; and after that, we may move. But the place we would move to could be in Penang, near Mt. Fuji or even another country'.

As Mr Iida began to explain these options, Mrs Iida seemed to have lost interest and disappeared into the kitchen to prepare dinner. I followed her into the kitchen; she asked me to help her harvest *shiso* leaves (a type of herb commonly used in Japanese dishes) from plants that she had planted on the balcony. She had brought everything, from herbs to cleaning cloths to detergent to soy sauce, from Japan. Contrary to what the male author of the retirement migration book had written, she

did not enjoy eating out or having someone to clean her house. Indeed, most female retirees I met in Malaysia cooked regularly at home and did not employ domestic help. As Lock (1993, 122) describes in her research on elderly Japanese women, many of them considered their home to be a private space and they were exceedingly uncomfortable with the idea of having a home helper enter their space.

When we stood on the balcony, she lowered her voice and confided to me. ‘Ever since coming to Malaysia, we [Mr and Mrs Iida] fight a lot. We didn’t use to fight so often in Japan’. I was not sure if Mr Iida could hear us from the living room but Mrs Iida didn’t seem to mind either way. ‘I just can’t get used to my life here. And he’s frustrated that I am not adjusting’. She gently held her *shiso* leaves. ‘In Japan, I could go everywhere on my own. Here, I can’t. I don’t drive and I don’t speak English. I must rely on my husband to drive and translate everywhere I go. It makes me feel so stressed that I begin to resent him. But I know I can’t change my husband’s mind. He is so stubborn’.



Figure 4.3. Mrs Iida prepared a marvellous Japanese dinner.

A year later, in 2015, when I met Mr Iida during the second phase of my fieldwork, I asked him how his wife was getting along. They had not moved out of Kuala Lumpur or out of their apartment. It had already been three years since they moved to Malaysia. They had just renewed the lease of their Mont Kiara condominium for another three years. But he shook his head. 'She still hasn't got used to living here. She doesn't like local food, and she stays at home all the time, making cotton books'.

Cotton books are children's books made of cloth. Mrs Iida had started going to weekly classes in Japan since four years before. In general, as women aged, the amount of free time for their own activities increased, especially after their children left home or after their elderly parents had passed away (Moore 2010; Thang et al. 2011, 244). Freed from care obligations, many Japanese women turned to self-development in old age; many embarked on new activities, such as making cotton books or performing in amateur Noh theatre (Moore 2013). Over the years, she had produced over 50 cotton books.

In their third year in Malaysia, Mr Iida organised an exhibition of his wife's cotton book collection at the Japan Club. He asked me how to make posters using Microsoft Word. Soon after, I saw Mr Iida running around the Japan Club putting up posters for his wife's exhibition. The exhibition attracted a wide audience and she was soon asked to give a demonstration at the Art Faculty of the University of Malaya. Mr Iida was very proud of his wife's achievement and happy that his wife's long-standing hobby was generating recognition in Malaysia. He told me. 'If she were in Japan, she would have never had a chance to showcase her skills to the nation's top art students!'

Later I visited their home again to see her impressive collection of cotton books. She used everyday material creatively to make what were obviously, even to my inexperienced eyes, cotton books of the highest standard. She carefully coordinated the design, characters, colours and words to fit a famous children's story into a 10-page cotton book. She told me that she originally made these books for her grandchildren. But after giving them two books, she decided to keep the rest for herself. She did not plan to continue making cotton books in KL because she and her husband intended to travel for at least half the month and she had thrown away materials she accumulated over the years. But Mr Iida had committed himself to so

many leadership positions at the Japan Club that there was no time to travel. So she decided to make cotton books again. She was also hoping to save money instead of travelling so that she could buy a new house in Japan.

When I asked her about the exhibition, Mrs Iida was neither proud nor excited about her achievements. She told me that she just appeared on the day of the events and presented her cotton books to the visitors because her husband encouraged her to do so. She recounted to me her experience of the event at the University of Malaya. 'Before my presentation, two teachers from the University of Malaya came to our apartment to see my cotton books. They looked at my books, whispered something to each other and laughed among themselves. I didn't understand Malay, so I didn't know what they were saying. But I didn't feel comfortable and felt judged'.

The inconsistency between Mr and Mrs Iida's perceptions of the cotton book exhibition illuminated a gendered nature of *ikigai* in retirement. According to Mr Iida, his wife's exhibition in Malaysia allowed her to accumulate public recognition from what was otherwise a mere hobby in Japan. And he was proud to have been able to assist this transformation of her hobby into an object of exchange that could generate productive value. But this was a logic within the largely male domain of value production. Katrina Moore (2013, 265), an anthropologist who studied amateur elderly female Noh performers in Japan, observed that her female informants did not see these activities as a locus for accumulating social distinction or respect. Rather, she argued, these activities allowed women to peel away their identity and allowed the new states of self to emerge. Mrs Iida made these cotton books for her grandchildren and, most importantly, for herself. It was meant to be kept within the affective container of her home. When her books were brought to the public for circulation, she felt judged and uncomfortable.

The Limits of the Feminist Potential of *Ikigai*

The story of Mrs Iida typified many women's experiences and their relationships with their husbands. Many men tried to incorporate their wives' hobbies into public domains that could generate recognition. Although Marie and Mrs Iida demonstrated and shared their skills with others in Malaysia, it did not affect them in the same way. Marie enjoyed teaching and accumulating respect while Mrs Iida detested bringing her private hobby into the public domain. In part, the differences between

these two women reflected their life courses. Marie had a brief career as a piano teacher, where she was known to others as *sensei*. The career was cut short because of the social expectations for her to become, in her words, ‘an ordinary housewife’. Marie’s reacquisition of social status was made possible because of the blurring of the boundaries between men and women, in that community participation in retirement was recognised as a value-generating activity. She could become a female participant in masculine value-generating activities. In contrast, Mrs Iida had always been a housewife, and her practice of cotton book making had reflected, and continued to reflect, her desire to consolidate family members and enable her eventual return to them. It was never her ‘purpose’ in life.

The extent to which women like Marie could ‘become equal to men’ has to be critically examined, however. Marie often got frustrated by what was valued by men in their pursuit of *ikigai*. For instance, when Kamei-*sensei*, the former conductor of the Male Glee Club, left Malaysia permanently in 2014, many male participants also resigned from the club. As well as the Village Concert, the Male Glee Club was one of the most popular activities for male retirees. They used to meet almost three times a week to practise under the conductorship of Kamei-*sensei*. They even went on overseas concert tours around South East Asia. They practised zealously. Mr Nakamura, for instance, memorised all songs by heart. A few weeks after Kamei-*sensei* returned to Japan, I was surprised to hear that Mr Nakamura had also quit the club. One night, I sat at dinner with some former members of the Glee Club after the Village Concert. They reminisced about the old days with Kamei-*sensei*. They said that there was no point in participating in the Glee Club anymore after their renowned coach had left the Club. Marie, who took over Kamei-*sensei*’s role in the Village Concert, was publicly agitated by those men who lamented his departure. ‘What difference would his departure make? You sing because you like singing; not because you were taught by a famous person, don’t you?’ She asked these men. But men usually shrugged their shoulders and moved onto different topics. In a related vein, Marie voiced her resentment of her husband and his friend, Ricky, who came to her house party. Ricky and her husband both went to the Keio University, one of the most prestigious universities in Japan (see Chapter 1). Kenny and Ricky met in KL through the Keio University Alumni Network in the Japan Club. Indeed, the Japan Club hosted alumni clubs of many major universities. Ricky brought Keio University’s alumni newsletter to the party and asked Kenny about others who had

gone to the same university so that he could circulate the newsletter to them. This was a relatively common practice as part of the reproduction of social class in Malaysia (see Chapter 3). But Marie interjected halfway in a dismissive manner. ‘Who cares which school you went to! Now we are all retirees in Malaysia. We are all the same!’ As long as these associations between education, fame and public recognition were made, she would never be equal to men.

Marie and Mrs Iida were encouraged to generate their own public recognition, but more commonly, women were incorporated into men’s *ikigai* by taking up their hobbies, particularly golf. Golf was very popular among former *sarariiman* because it was part of their entertainment activity when in the company (Ben-Ari 1998). Mr Toyotomi, a contributor to one of the promotional monographs on Japanese retirement in Malaysia, wrote that he taught golf to his wife when he was 50 so that they could have a shared hobby in Malaysia (Nagata 2013, 78–85). Mr Toyotomi explicitly stated that he chose golf as their mutual hobby because he could teach her. By teaching her, Mr Toyotomi could pursue his *ikigai* with his wife. He writes, ‘I say to my wife, “let’s be healthy and play golf together until at least 75 years old!” This is my new goal in life, and until I fall sick, I will live up to the goal’ (Nagata 2013, 82). Wives, by playing along, participated in the husband’s new purpose in life, but as their junior.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I showed how the rhetoric of independence and mutual support became the most persuasive form of virtue for retirees in contemporary Japanese society. Malaysia provided a time and space in which this ideology could be realised. However, in pursuing an independent retirement abroad, women were made more dependent on their husbands. Dr Egashira, a Japanese doctor in Kuala Lumpur, told me that female retirees often came to see him for depression. They complained of isolation. In Japan, women had established their daily routines independently of their husbands. They drove or walked to nearby grocery stores, volunteered their time for children’s school activities, engaged in hobbies and so on (see Chapter 1). But in Malaysia, they found it difficult to reinvent, let alone regenerate, these social lives. Many relied on their husbands to drive them,⁸⁵ and to translate for them on their daily interactions with the locals. The dependency

⁸⁵ Although the city of Kuala Lumpur has a developed public transportation system, the expatriate population tends to travel by car (Butler and Hannam 2014). Most retirees I interviewed said that they preferred to travel by car due to safety concerns over frequent robbery attempts on pedestrians near the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur.

relationship meant that women ended up resuming their gender role to enable their husband's pursuit of *ikigai*, or their new purpose in life, after work. For instance, wives of men who participated in the Glee Club tended to join fewer clubs and societies because they often had to accompany their husbands on overseas and domestic singing tours. Mrs Iida had also regularly assisted her husband in producing *sashimi* parties for the members of the Malay class. On the other hand, men who otherwise faced a reduced status at home after retirement could reinstate their heteromasculine privilege *vis-à-vis* their wives.

The Materiality of Female Values in Malaysia

If the need to have a sense of purpose in retirement is a male perspective, as Mrs Yamamoto pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, what mattered to women in retirement, and more specifically, retirement in Malaysia? This was the question that women I met frequently asked themselves. Many women I met in Malaysia constantly self-monitored and assessed their moral worth. Mrs Ando, who told me that she felt lighter by coming to Malaysia (see Chapter 3), nevertheless expressed her feelings by an apt term, 'what a waste' (*mottainai*). 'It's all very free here; I can wake up anytime I want, sleep anytime, eat anytime, it's liberating. But it's *mottainai*. What a waste of my value'.

The anxious sentiment around wasting time (cf. Musharbash 2007; Jeffrey 2010; Masquelier 2013), even when the period of retirement was supposedly characterised by the abundance of free time, was further captured by Mrs Miyakawa, a retired woman I met in Penang. 'Here in Penang', she told me, 'time doesn't chase me, but I wish it did (*jikan ga otte-kurenai*)'. By phrasing her sentiment as *otte-kurenai* as opposed to a more descriptive term, *owanai* (time doesn't chase me), it suggested her unrealized wish for a sense of achievement. She had to curve her own sense of progress in Malaysia.

Just as men found their bodies being wasted post-retirement in Japan (see Chapter 2), women found their values being wasted in Malaysia. Women's complaints that their values had not been realised in Malaysia suggested that there were distinct ways in which women and men produced their values in retirement. In the next section, I will examine the process by which they accumulated female productive values in Malaysia. This was in contrast to the accumulation of male productive

values, although the two were often conflated. Like men, women accumulated their value through exchange. The main objects of exchange for men were intangible objects, such as useful information and voluntary labour (see Chapter 3). In contrast, I observed that women mainly accumulated values through the exchange of everyday Japanese domestic objects, which I will turn to now.

Elderly Japanese women I met were articulate in general, but they were most delighted when they talked about things that they had brought from Japan. To recall, Mrs Iida's kitchen was well-equipped with Japanese domestic equipment and products. Within the limited space of their suitcases, these elderly Japanese brought to Malaysia surprisingly mundane and ordinary things, such as cling wrap and toilet paper. On one occasion, I was helping Mrs Aoyama, a retiree who had come to KL two years before, and her group of female Japanese friends to prepare lunch in her kitchen. One dish required us to wrap the rice ball with salmon and *shiso* leaves in cling wrap and Mrs Aoyama provided us with her Japanese wrap for this. The women carefully measured the wrap so as not to waste any. Mrs Aoyama encouraged us to use it liberally because she had just returned from Japan with more boxes of cling wrap. The women became animated in hearing this. One of them exclaimed, 'I must restock mine when I go back next month!'

'Why did you bring these when you could easily buy them here?' I asked Mrs Aoyama. 'Oh, no no no!' she seemed offended by my ignorance. 'Japanese wrap tears better! It's sturdier, and it doesn't cling to itself easily. The local wrap is sticky and doesn't make a sharp sound as it tears, and it frustrates me'. She took one box of wrap from the cabinet. 'It feels so good when the wrap tears in a clean slice (*patto kiretara kimochi iidesho*)'. She then demonstrated the tearing in front of me. Her motion, from rolling the layer of film out of the container to tearing it against the sharp edges, was so slow that I could see her indulging in the whole experience. As she finished her performance, she looked at me and smiled. 'See?' She could feel the tactility of tearing.

The physical material, polyvinylidene chloride (PVDC), from which the Malaysian and the Japanese wrap was made, was identical. But female retirees were very excited and comforted by their perceptions of the sight, sound, and tactility of the Japanese wrap. They started to list other products that they brought from Japan. The discussion was mostly light-hearted with humour and laughter. One of them told

the group that she even brought rolls of toilet paper from Japan. ‘Whenever I have a Japanese guest, I switch the local toilet paper to Japanese toilet paper!’

I was at first puzzled by the significance of these seemingly mundane objects for the female retirees. In the literature on migrant objects (Warin and Dennis 2005; Basu and Coleman 2008; Miller 2008; Svašek 2014), scholars have observed that migrants tend to bring ‘personal effects of little or no utilitarian or market value’ (Parkin 1999, 313), such as a landscape painting of home (Walsh 2006) or photographs of distant loved ones (Law 2001, 279). Such items tend to be displayed prominently on the walls of their new home. Cling wrap, on the other hand, was kept in the cupboard most of the time and got disposed of after use. My female informants could have easily brought decorative items from home, but they chose to bring cling wrap. In Kurotani’s (2005) ethnography of Japanese expatriate wives in the United States, she documents that many expatriates brought daily consumables in their first shipment to the foreign country. But later they restocked these items from the local supermarket. The elderly Japanese women, however, continued to bring these domestic products to Malaysia, even years after they first arrived. What could these utilitarian Japanese objects signify to the elderly women?

In *Inalienable Possessions*, Weiner (1992, x) points out that women’s production of value has often been taken for granted because the objects they exchange tend to be ‘seemingly ephemeral and valueless’. Instead, in her fieldwork in the Trobriands, she paid attention to banana-leaf bundles, human-hair strings, faded pieces of cloth and old plaited mats to theorise social and political relations between women and men. By showing that women’s banana-leaf wealth equalled men’s kula wealth, she brought women into the heart of the political process of reproduction (Weiner 1992, x–xi). Instead of segregating women and men into domestic and political spheres and viewing men’s production as the only source of cultural value, her analysis showed how women’s and men’s productive processes were mutually constitutive.

Following Weiner’s insight, I took the seemingly mundane layers of cling wrap as seriously as any form of male value-generating objects, such as information (cf. Weiner 1977, 11). Like the accumulation of men’s value, the process of accumulating female’s value was social. Occasionally, my female informants gathered in their kitchens and humorously shared the sensuous comforts of Japanese domestic products. Like Mrs Iida, the appraisals of Japanese domestic products were often coupled with their airing of frustration with their husbands in Malaysia. In

most of the cases that I have observed, men did not touch or use the cling wrap. They would stay in the living rooms while women prepared the meal. It was women who were complaining, women who were listening to each other, and women who were responding with glee to those complaints and joining in to praise Japanese domestic products. Matsumoto (2011, 202), a linguist of the Japanese language, argues that humorous self-disclosure of potentially painful or negative experiences serves as a means to display friendship and solidarity among elderly Japanese women.

I argue that this ‘sensorialised sociality’ (Chau 2008, 500; Law 2001) created through an appraisal of Japanese cling wrap became a mediated experience of reproduction of home. Recall in Chapter 1, there was a symbolic association between women’s productivity and the consumption of high quality products. Beyond being a mother and a wife, women also became financial managers for their homes. To meet their increasing material desires against the backdrop of the state’s austerity drive, they became de facto officers of quality control, ensuring that things they bought were of the highest quality (Tsutsui 1998). The quality of home came to symbolise feminine forms of value accumulation. Furthermore, at the height of economic nationalism, people in other Asian countries were portrayed in the Japanese media as materially deprived. Images were broadcast of Asian migrant workers buying Japanese goods to send to their home countries (see Chapter 1). In this affective context, their negative perception of Malaysian cling wrap probably reflected this stereotype. Coupled with their frustrations with their lack of independence in Malaysia, Japanese products’ material qualities—their apparent intrinsic goodness—were exaggerated by the Japanese women. By praising these everyday domestic products, they affirmed and confirmed the quality of home, and by extension, their own values. In this way, these domestic products objectified the social relations of productivity for Japanese women. Home that is reproduced in Malaysia became a register of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld [1997]2005) between these retired women and productivity.

The Circulation and Accumulation of Female Values in Malaysia

Beyond the reproduction of home, some women actively regenerated their distinctive *ikigai* through the exchange of objects, in particular, food items. I became part of a network that circulated yoghurt. It started with Mrs Kosaka (see Chapter 3) bringing

back a packet of yoghurt starter from Hiroshima. From the first bowl of yoghurt she made, she scooped three spoons of yoghurt and mixed it with 500 ml of milk in another bowl. Five hours later...voila! There emerged a new container of yoghurt. It was food that kept reproducing itself. Mrs Kosaka thought that she could share this magic food with others who lived in the same, infamous condominium, Bayu Condominium in Mont Kiara.⁸⁶ One Saturday evening, Mrs Kosaka gave me a container of her homemade yoghurt and thereby incorporated me into their yoghurt network. As I thanked her for this gift, she told me why she started to give out her yoghurt. In Japan, Mrs Kosaka told me, she used to volunteer at a local primary school for children with physical and mental disability. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, women's volunteering activities tended to occur in children's school networks and neighbourhood organisations.⁸⁷ However, unlike her husband who drew his *ikigai* from providing a voluntary service to other Japanese in Malaysia (see Chapter 3), she found it difficult to replicate her *ikigai* in KL. She thus turned to her neighbours. She said that giving yoghurt to people was a small way of satisfying that desire. 'It is a small contribution I can make to the neighbourhood community. Helping each other gives me *ikigai*'.

I followed and mapped the ownership of yoghurt and was amazed at how the lives of women from different geographical locations, class, and educational backgrounds got connected in Malaysia. Mrs Kosaka introduced me to Ms Machida, the first neighbour to whom she gave her yoghurt. Ms Machida had been living in Kuala Lumpur alone for the past two years. She spoke no English but she was an active resident in the condominium. During the festive seasons, she began decorating the condominium lobby with *origami*. This aroused curiosity among the condominium management's office staff, and despite the language barrier, they became good friends. She was invited to the wedding of one of the employees, and she was also invited to offer *origami* lessons to Japanese expatriate wives. It was during the

⁸⁶ Bayu Condominium was infamous among the Japanese residents in Kuala Lumpur. In September 2013, a young Japanese expatriate couple was electrocuted to death by a faulty water heater in this condominium (The Star Online 2013). Although the rest of the nation seemed to have quickly forgotten the incident, it stayed in the collective memory of the Japanese community. There was a large poster on a prominent wall of the Japan Club warning members to check their water heater regularly. Every retiree I met told me the story of the dead couple upon noticing that I too lived in Mont Kiara. After the incident, fewer expatriates moved into the Bayu Condominium, and instead, retirees began to move in to enjoy the lower rents.

⁸⁷ As an exception, for a rise of women's civic activism after the Tsunami and radiation disaster of 2011, see Morris-Suzuki (2015).

Christmas season when I visited her in her condominium. ‘I just made an *origami* Santa Claus’, she showed me a few Santa Claus she made with red and white *origami* papers. ‘I hid one of them by the Christmas tree in the condominium reception area!’ She told me with a playful smile.

Ms Machida was one of the few single women I met in Kuala Lumpur. She used to live in council housing in a suburb of Tokyo as a single mother. After retiring as a social worker, she told me, she did not know what she wanted to do. She had one daughter, who had recently got married. Most of her female friends were looking after their grandchildren but her only daughter did not have a child. Then one day, she saw an advertisement for Malaysian retirement visas on TV. She said that she *instinctively* knew that she was coming to Malaysia. ‘It was as if Malaysia was calling me from the TV screen’. She was sucked in by an image of ‘a paradise’ on the TV screen. ‘I knew it was God’s reward (*Kami-sama no gohoubi*)⁸⁸ for my hard work’. For Ms Machida, an opportunity for a transformation came unexpectedly when, as she said, *Kami-sama* came and took her to Malaysia.

Her time in Malaysia started with a search for accommodation. After a few inspections, she stumbled across a one-bedroom apartment in the Bayu Condominium. She posted a note to the online Izumi SNS network (see Chapter 3), asking who else lived in the Bayu Condominium. Mr Kosaka responded to her post. When she arrived in the Bayu Condominium, Mr Kosaka taught her everything from paying bills, setting up an Internet account to grocery shopping. ‘Life is strange, don’t you think?’ She asked me as we sat on her balcony overlooking the enormous Duke Highway. The noise of the horns was the only reminder of where we were—the heart of the Southeast Asian mega city. ‘Watching the TV program about Malaysia, finding this apartment, meeting Kosaka-san; if one of them did not happen, I wouldn’t have been sitting here chatting with you’. She continued. ‘I don’t believe in a particular deity. That is not to say I am an atheist. I believe that both Christ and Allah existed. Indeed, I believe in all *Kami-sama*. They all brought us here’.

It might well have been *Kami-sama* that brought us there. But it was also yoghurt that brought other women and us together in the women’s network in Malaysia. Ms Machida later gave some of her yoghurt to Mrs Ando (see Chapter 3) (Figure 4.4).

⁸⁸ *Kami-sama* refers to deity.

When I visited Mrs Ando in her apartment, the TV was on, and it was showing an NHK program (the Japanese equivalent of the ABC) featuring Asada Mao, the national icon for figure-skating. ‘Even if I am not watching it, the sound of a Japanese TV program makes me feel at ease’, she explained. She then served me Japanese tea and a Japanese snack that she had brought back from her recent trip back to Japan.



Figure 4.4. Mrs Ando with her spoonful of yoghurt.

Before her trip, Mrs Ando gave her yoghurt to Mrs Watanabe, who taught patchwork lessons in the Japan Club. Mr and Mrs Watanabe were relatively well-known among the Japanese in Kuala Lumpur, for they performed traditional Japanese music before distinguished guests, such as Prime Minister Najib Razak and the opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim at a function in the Japanese Chamber of Trade and Industry. But when I met Mrs Watanabe, she was less than enthusiastic about their fame. ‘I suppose,’ she shrugged her shoulder. ‘I would have never been able to do this in Japan’. Mrs Watanabe used to take *koto* lessons (a traditional Japanese stringed instrument) in Japan. ‘I led a very busy life as a housewife; I took

patchwork and *koto* lessons. With all the friends I made through these hobby activities, I was very content with my life'. When she followed her husband to Kuala Lumpur four years before, her husband set up a music band. He played the guitar, a British expatriate played the *shakuhachi* (a traditional Japanese flute), and another Japanese retiree played the drum. Her husband asked her to join the band as a *koto* player. After being incorporated into her husband's band, her hobby had turned into a medium for the production of public fame.

Mrs Watanabe, in turn, gave her yoghurt to her sister who was visiting from Japan. Her sister brought the yoghurt back to Japan and gave it to her three children in Hiroshima. The yoghurt Mrs Kosaka bought from Hiroshima circulated the Bayu Condominium and finally returned to Hiroshima.

Here, it is useful to compare the circulation of information among men and the circulation of yoghurt among women concerning their generative potential. In Malaysia, Japanese men reproduced their moral worth and vertical relationship with each other through the circulation of useful information and through their voluntary labour (see Chapter 3). The recipients of their labour and information were definable but they were not immediate others; they were largely prospective Japanese migrants and newcomers. Volunteers like Mr Kosaka might pick up someone like Ms Machida from the airport and spend a few days with them, but they might never see them again. In contrast, the participants in the women's exchange of yoghurt were definable and immediate others. Some were neighbours, like Mrs Kosaka and Ms Machida; others were classmates at the Japan Club, like Mrs Ando and Mrs Watanabe. Some even gave the yoghurt to their children. Women's exchange produced an immediate, horizontal and definable network, which in effect reproduced the network akin to home (see Chapter 1). By decorating the Christmas tree in the condominium's lobby, Ms Machida helped create an intimate, homely atmosphere (Daniels 2015). Yoghurt, in this context, signified reproduction. Because it was physically reproductive, it assisted women to reproduce some of their sources of female productive value—their home.

It is important to note that in reproducing a community of neighbours, it also reproduced *shigarami* (social obligation) that many women wanted to be liberated from by coming to Malaysia. Mrs Itoh, who told me about the neighbourly *shigarami* in Japan in Chapter 3, nevertheless told me that she joined activities in the Japan Club based precisely on these *shigarami*. She joined the female choir and

ballroom dancing classes in the Japan Club initially out of obligations to her neighbours who were teaching the course. The community of Japanese women in Malaysia had a higher tendency to produce *shigarami* than their former communities in Japan. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, women used to join multiple hobby activities during their lives as housewives. This was not restricted to neighbourhood communities, as they could freely move around on various transportation systems to access different hobby groups. And hence women could exercise their agency in what groups to join, and leave, if they so chose (Ueno 1994, 290–292). Furthermore, Ueno (1994, 294–295) observes that the membership of these multiple interest groups in Japan seldom overlapped. She introduces an example of a woman in her 50s who belonged to a cultural school. She also was a main member of a civic movement. But she never disclosed her civic identity to her friends at the cultural school. Her friends at the cultural school only got to know her other identity when she was featured in a newspaper. In this way, it was not difficult for women to manage multiple identities in Japan.

But here in Malaysia, their independent movement was restricted by the lack of transportation. They still formed networks, but they were confined to the four walls of the Japan Club and the residential condominium. Although they participated in many activities at the Japan Club, the membership was constituted by the same group of people. Everyone knew which club one had joined, and where they lived. It hence gave rise to *shigarami* more quickly than their previous networks. Just like men's *ibasho* in the Japan Club, women's *ibasho* in Malaysia was both liberating and constraining.

There was another significant similarity between women's yoghurt and men's information: both were 'unfinished commodities' (Paxson 2013). Heather Paxson (2013, 41:23) studied artisanal cheese making in the United States. She calls these commodities, whose intrinsic value and market value are yet to be settled, 'unfinished commodities'. Unfinished commodities give rise to heterogeneous forms of value. Similarly here, the intrinsic and market values of information and yoghurt were at best unsettled. Information could be gathered from a diversity of sources: the Internet, books and social networks. The materiality of information pointed to one's prowess with these resources. Information, once shared with others, did not depreciate. The giver of information could continue to accumulate new information or modify the original information. Similarly, yoghurt did not depreciate because the

giver took a few spoonfuls only of yoghurt from her bowl. The rest remained with her, and the yoghurt regenerated in the bowl. Hence information and yoghurt were equally expansive; they both extended the temporality of their productivity. The men's productive processes of information circulation and the women's productive processes of yoghurt circulation were mutually constitutive; Mr Kosaka's assistance to Ms Machida enabled his accumulation of public recognition, and Mrs Kosaka's yoghurt distribution to Ms Machida consolidated the space of relationality within the intimate community of neighbours to which Mr Kosaka could belong.

But there was an important difference between men's and women's objects of value in the way they related to the broader concept of productivity. Because information and yoghurt were 'unfinished commodities', they embodied a mix of new and old ideas about value and productivity. The giving of information and the giving of yoghurt both lent themselves to a moral self-fashioning of a productive person. But the difference lies in whether this productive personhood was 'reproduced' or 'regenerated' (Weiner 1980). Weiner (1980, 71) distinguishes the two, arguing that the former is concerned with the cultural attention given to acts of creating something new, and the latter refers to the cultural attention given to the recreation of entities previously produced. I argue that by circulating information, men mostly 'reproduced' their productive values by transforming values associated with work into moral values of being useful. Information exchange thereby mediated the reproduction of affective labour distinct from capitalist labour. On the other hand, yoghurt 'regenerated', rather than reproduced, women's labour. In exchanging yoghurt, women consolidated rather than created their sources of productivity—spaces of relationality within the proximate community. Although the state propagated a particular form of post-retirement citizenship which linked the public recognition with the sense of *ikigai*, women perceived these neoliberal tendencies of retirement life as a sign of not being able to handle the freedom accorded to them by retirement. Retirement troubled the mediation of capitalist labour power and affective labour power for men, but for women, these two had always been conflated. Women had enabled the production of capitalist labour which later turned into fallen wet leaves, but they never became fallen leaves themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the gendered aspects of *ikigai* and associated ideology of normative retirement. I argued that it is not only a neoliberal discourse (see Chapter 2 and 3) but also a masculine discourse. This is contrary to the supposedly liberating potential of retirement migration for women, in which men saw women as having been freed from their social obligations and domesticity. An ethnographic perspective revealed instead women's efforts in regenerating their own value production which was centred on spaces of relationality within the proximate community. In pursuing an independent retirement, women were dislocated from their sources of productivity, such as family and neighbourhoods, and had to rely on their husbands for their daily survival. In doing so, their move to Malaysia reproduced the pre-retirement gender roles in which women supported their husbands to accumulate public recognition. Some men encouraged their wives to transform their hobbies into value-generating activity outside their home. Although some women enjoyed accumulating public recognition with their male counterparts, they were never equal to men as long as they accumulated recognition within the masculine structure of value production. Most women did not derive the same level of pleasure as did men from these value-generating activities. Many women openly protested that their values were being wasted in Malaysia.

This chapter then took seriously women's fascination with everyday Japanese domestic products to show that this emotional culture pointed to the women's distinct value-producing process in Malaysia. What fascinated genders differently—the sense of purpose for many men and the sense of community for many women—can be related to the effects of gendered socialisation. When the husbands re-possessed their productive personhood by sharing information, women reclaimed their habitual environment through the use of everyday domestic products. Cling wrap signified permanence in an environment where their value was undermined, and the distribution of yoghurt regenerated the women's close-knit community of neighbours. Cling wrap and yoghurt, as they symbolically represented quality and communal ties, in turn, represented the values of women. In this way, the material environment became a site in which divergent and gendered forms of post-retirement productivity were played out and navigated by women in Malaysia.

More broadly, the shifting dynamics between husbands and wives in post-retirement suggest an unforeseen consequence of an economic practice for the intimate practices of spousal relations. The next chapter will delve further into the image of caring husbands that I touched upon briefly in this chapter. I will discuss symbolism and temporality of this shifting women–men relationship within the ties of kinship. I will show the potential and limits of shifting intimate practice in allowing men to rematerialise their ties to the family.

Chapter 5

Negotiating Kinship

Because of the commanding presence of my DSLR camera, I often became the default photographer at events organised by retirees. Once, at the Village Concert (see Chapter 3), I took a picture of Mrs Sasaki which I thought was rather well-taken.⁸⁹ I showed it to her. She was pleased and asked, ‘can you email the photo to me? I may use that picture as my funeral portrait’. I was taken aback by her morbid comment, which predicted her own mortality and by extension that of others, but people around us did not seem particularly disturbed by it. They laughed it off. Indeed, it was relatively common for Japanese retirees in Malaysia to talk about death. One of the staff members at a migration agency in Penang advised a client that he should not get a joint bank account with his spouse in case one of them should die. She further told him that not many Japanese in Malaysia opened term-deposit accounts because they might die before the accounts mature. Other couples told me, in a matter of fact way, that they had already drafted their wills. Death was always in their minds.

A few months later, someone indeed died. Mr Masayuki Mori, who was affectionately known to others as Choro-san, died unexpectedly. He had travelled from Bangkok to Kuala Lumpur when he had a heart attack and fell down at the immigration gate at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. He was immediately taken to the airport clinic but was pronounced dead soon after. His body was flown to Japan a few days later so that his funeral could be conducted there.

The news of his death spread rapidly among the retirees. He was one of the main members of the Second-Home Club (see Chapter 3), and he had helped many people settle in KL. I had an email correspondence with him when I was starting my fieldwork. He was extremely generous with his information, and many retirees I met also spoke highly of him. Although I could not meet him in person, I could tell that he was a much-loved member of the Japanese retirement community. People posted numerous obituaries on the Izumi SNS (see Chapter 3) and on other mailing-lists.

Mrs Yoko Sakamoto (see Chapter 3), as representative of his friends at the Japan Club, went to see Choro-san for one last time at the hospital before his body was

⁸⁹ Mrs Sasaki is the wife of the person who started the Helper’s Club. See Chapter 3.

flown to Japan. She wrote about her encounter with Choro-san's body and his family and sent her writings to the members of the Thursday Golf Club (see Chapter 3). Her email was later forwarded to members of various other clubs and societies. I received it via the Malay Club mailing list. Her email is worth reproducing here because it displays the key themes of this chapter: kinship, legacy and intimacy.

I have just come home from the Hospital Sedang. I saw Choro-san with his family. No tears came out of my eyes because I am still in disbelief. It is as if we lost him in a wrong time and space. He would wake up later, and we would have a good laugh about it. What a bad dream.

I met and talked to his family members—Hiroko-san [his wife] and his two elder brothers. I knew immediately that they were his brothers because they looked so much alike. I didn't feel it was the first time I met them.

Choro-san just celebrated his 60th birthday last month. 'Why did you go before us?' The brothers lamented in front of him.

I thanked the brothers for Choro-san's contribution to the activities of the Senior's Club. They laughed and said, 'he did nothing at *uchi* [literally, 'inside', but here, it could mean family and home—I will elaborate later in the chapter], but he was apparently useful (*yakuni tatteita*) at *soto*! [literally, 'outside', but here, it could mean non-family members and outside home]'

I have printed out everyone's obituaries to pass them to Hiroko-san. They added up to 11 pages. By reading these obituaries, his brothers will come to understand how much people loved and relied on Choro-san [here in Malaysia].

I just bought a new notebook. I will stick these pages [of obituaries] to the notebook. If you would like to write a message, please write them in this notebook. Hiroko-san said that Choro-san didn't take many photos. If you have photos of Choro-san, please stick them in this notebook too.

Tomorrow is our weekly dinner at the Royal Selangor Club.⁹⁰ We will make it a wake for Choro-san.

Yoko Sakamoto

Mrs Sakamoto's letter starts with the mourning of his sudden passing. It then introduces Choro-san's family members who came from Japan to collect his body. Choro-san's brothers referred to Japan and Malaysia by the terms *uchi* and *soto*. A

⁹⁰ It is a weekly dinner organised by the Second-Home Club. It introduces newcomers to experienced migrants. See Chapter 3.

kinship term frequently used for one's family is *ie* and *uchi*. As discussed in Chapter 1, *ie* refers to both a physical house and to its residents. It is organised on the basis of a stem family structure rather than a nuclear family structure, and it encompasses both the living and the ancestral members of the household (Kondo 1990; Traphagan 2003).

Uchi, on the other hand, denotes inside and home. It contrasts with *soto*, which means outside and outsiders (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; White 1988). In the high growth period, women's work was largely associated with *uchi* (inside, with family members) and men's work was largely associated with *soto* (outside, with outsiders). However, I have shown in Chapters 3 and 4 that retirees' activities and their narrative of friendship (*nakama*) in Malaysia blurred the boundaries of this *uchi-soto* divide. Men reproduced the practices of *soto* (work) to define their affective relationships with others in Malaysia; women reproduced the practices of *uchi* (home) to make *soto* (outside) more homely. By contrasting the terms *uchi* and *soto*, Choro-san's brothers humorously pointed out how Choro-san was useless (*yakuni tatanai*) within the family but he was useful (*yakuni tatsu*) outside the family. Mrs Sakamoto's letter then takes on a project-like narrative, refocusing her attention on ensuring that the legacy of Choro-san's contribution in the KL Japanese community (*soto*) is recognised by his family members back in Japan (*uchi*).

This chapter will explore the negotiation of relational belonging within familial and conjugal relationships in retirement. In other words, in contrast to previous chapters where I discussed the fundamental units of gender in relation to their (re)productivity and the relationships they formed in Malaysia, this chapter will discuss the fundamental units of kinship: spousal relations and intergenerational ties. I posit that these relationships can be interpreted as a dimension of life that undergoes restructuring in relation to shifting economic conditions (C. Freeman 2014, 58).

The chapter will start with different ways in which men and women related to their kin, followed by their negotiations of spousal ties. Before I start, a word of caution. In this chapter, I employ 'spousal intimacy' not as an analytic lens but rather as 'a found object' in the field (C. Watanabe 2016). To employ 'intimacy' as an analytic lens creates a false sense of objectivity in describing a practice that was often concealed from public gaze. Also, it was impossible to observe a single, unified idea of intimacy. On one hand, the discourse of romantic love and spousal

equality seemed to play a fundamental role in the crafting of normative ‘couple-hood’ in retirement. On the other hand, some couples called their relation, *sotsukon* (graduation from marriage). Women, in particular, seemed to frame their relationships in terms of the household. Although this gap initially puzzled me, I began to see that they might be opposite sides of the same coin. In their recent article, Goldfarb and Schuster (2016, 4) argue that non-mutuality is especially apparent in contexts ‘where kinship production has collided with value production’. During the period when they were working, the mutuality of spousal relationships was based on the strict division of labour. After retirement, the production of differentiated intimacy between spouses allowed for a crucial bond to emerge: familial ties. This chapter will explore how intimate practices between spouses shifted as men tried to rematerialize their ties to the family. The chapter will end with retirees’ return to Japan, which often came earlier than planned. On their return, they returned from *soto* to *uchi* just as they transformed public recognition accumulated with others into legacy within the family.

***Sotokomori* Elders and their Family**

Throughout the chapters, I have referred to Japanese retirees in Malaysia as ‘silver backpackers’. In a related vein, some of them called themselves, *sotokomori*, or ‘people who are socially withdrawn outside’. The word, *sotokomori*, was popularised by a travel writer Yuji Shimokawa (2007). He used the word to describe Japanese young backpackers who stay for a long period overseas and only go back to Japan periodically to earn the cost of living to fund their backpacking. It is drawn from a more popular term, *hikikomori*, which refers to the socially withdrawn youths of Japan. *Hikikomori* are mostly young men who are often socially withdrawn into their rooms, and they rarely, if ever, leave for school or jobs. Having not found a permanent job, they live day by day on temporary work or become what is popularly termed, *parasaito singuru* (parasite singles), who live ‘parasitically’ off parents for years (Allison 2013, 30).⁹¹ Allison (2013, 119) argues that one of the most pressing problems facing troubled youths today is the inability to find a place within society

⁹¹ Other troubled youth include NEET (not in education, employment, or training) and *furiitaa* (‘freeters’) which refer to youths who are on casual work or who are between such jobs (Hidaka 2011, 122).

(*yakuwariga mitsukerarenai*). *Hikikomori* and other troubled youths of Japan are typically seen as a symptom of wider sociological trends of the moment—‘the breakdown of communication and collapse of the family and human relations more generally’ (Allison 2013, 74; Carroll 2006, 121; Horiguchi 2011).

If youths feel that the future ahead and the present society is shut off to them despite having what it once took to become a winner (Allison 2013, 120, 132), the elderly ex-*sarariiman* who once successfully belonged to the capitalist life course are also feeling dislocated from the life plan that is moving forward—the familial milieu. As discussed in previous chapters, men generally found it difficult to inject themselves into the family life from which they had been long absent. While the troubled youths of Japan are withdrawing into the home and confining themselves inside a small room, troubled elderly people of Japan are withdrawing into the world and confining themselves outside Japan.

Allison (2013, 120) argues that ‘in order to “belong” today, the stakes for existence and connectedness (*tsunagari*) must be recast to open up new realms of possibility’. In the case of Japanese retirement migrants, the new realms of possibility may have been opened up from outside Japan. By becoming *sotokomori*, as contradictory as it may sound, the elderly men seemed to transform the meaning of ‘absent fathers’ and rematerialize their ties to the family.⁹²

Most retirees who moved to Malaysia had vacated their home and let their children’s generation stay in their houses in Japan. This gesture was much appreciated because the stagnating economy had resulted in a high youth unemployment rate.⁹³ The younger couples had faced difficulties in owning houses compared to the older generations for whom house ownership was part of the middle-class belonging (Hirayama 2011). The elderly who had lived through the

⁹² Rupert Stasch (2009, 115), in his ethnographic study of Korowai society in a Papuan village, argues that geographical separation gives kinship bonds special importance. The position of uncle holds a special significance: uncles are geographically distant but they are relied upon most heavily in times of emotional need. In the case of Japanese retirees, perhaps their leaving family geographically may actually effect emotional proximity with their relatives, under some circumstances. To investigate this, more study would need to be done, in the style of the detailed semantic analysis conducted by Stasch.

⁹³ The stagnating economy has also led to reduced numbers of marriages in the recent years (Rebick and Takenaka 2006, 9). The economic factor, combined with the cultural context in which one is not considered independent until married (Kato 2009; Suzuki 2002), had raised the rate of co-residence of unmarried children in the family home into the period of parents’ retirement (Borovoy 2010; Otani, Retherford, and Matsukura 2006). The rate of elderly over 65 years living with their unmarried children had increased from 16.7% in 1985 to almost 20% in 2000 (Kato 2009). In such case, parents, especially women, continued to care for them.

high growth era were in general better-off than younger people. According to the survey conducted by the Cabinet Office (2015, 11), about 71% of people above age 60 answered that they were financially secure. Each person in the household on average received about 1.928.000 yen (approx. AUD23.576) per year, which was almost as much as the national average of 2.053.000 yen (approx. AUD25,104) (Cabinet Office 2015, 11). On average, a household headed by a person over 65 had savings of about 24.990.000 yen (approx. AUD305.584), which was about 1.4 times higher than the national average (Cabinet Office 2015, 12). In such economic conditions, by vacating their homes for the precariously-living youths of Japan, retirees in Malaysia seemed to have filled in the domain of housing which should have been covered by the state.⁹⁴

The youths of Japan were also living precariously in that they faced the threat of another imminent earthquake and ongoing nuclear pollution. Some retirees told me that they were *hoshano nanmin* (radiation refugees) who had fled Japan for the lack of trust in government reports on the safe levels of radiation after the tsunami and the subsequent nuclear reactor disaster of March 2011.⁹⁵ Mr and Mrs Kutani (see Chapter 3), for instance, lived in Ibaraki Prefecture just outside Tokyo when there was a nuclear meltdown on the north-eastern coast of Japan. They fled their home to live temporarily in Nagano Prefecture. In Nagano, they met a journalist who warned them that the government's report on radiation levels was false. Their suspicion was confirmed by Mr Kutani's cousin, who lived in Melbourne and was an anti-nuclear activist. Having lost confidence in the state's reports on radiation levels, they felt that it was no longer safe to live in Japan. They moved to Malaysia. Although their children were still in Japan, Mr and Mrs Kutani were ready to receive them in Malaysia in an emergency. 'By living in Kuala Lumpur, we are creating a safe haven for our children and their family', they said. By vacating their homes or providing a

⁹⁴ In contrast, in the contemporary West, mixing of economic and affective relations is considered inappropriate, and therefore those kinship relations that manifest such connections—money and intimacy—are overshadowed by suspicion (For a critical view on this issue, see Goldfarb and Schuster 2016, 5). Of course, feminist scholarship has long shown how money and economic activity have always been used to create and maintain intimate social ties and are in turn shaped by such social forces (Zelizer 2005, 2011; McKinnon and Cannell 2013; Schuster 2015).

⁹⁵ Indeed, although not a focus of this thesis, a growing number of young Japanese families were migrating to Malaysia at the time of my fieldwork from 2014 to 2016. Rika Yoshino and her young family were one of them. She was a 35-year-old graphic designer who operated her own graphic design company in Tokyo. After the tsunami and the nuclear reactor disaster, she decided to move to Malaysia with her husband and her nine and five-year-old sons. She has set up a website to exchange information with the similarly positioned young Japanese families in Malaysia. She calls herself, 'a first generation overseas Japanese', analogising her situation with overseas Chinese.

safe haven, their retirement period in Malaysia became a ‘useful time’ (*yakuni tatsu jikan*) as opposed to the ‘wasted time’ (*mottainai jikan*) in Japan.

They further enhanced their ‘useful time’ by participating in various activities to maintain their health so that they did not become a burden to their children (cf. Thang et al. 2011; Jenike 2003; Kavedžija 2015). Japanese retirees in Malaysia often narrated their motivation for activities as *boke boushi*, that is, delaying the onset of senility, so that they could maintain their independence from their children (cf. Shea 2014).⁹⁶ There was even a class for exercising the brain (Figure 5.1). Members of the rhythm and sound class were instructed to sing Japanese folk songs while playing the drums, maracas and castanets. This was meant to activate both their right and left brains. Marie Kawashima (see Chapter 4) articulated to me what constituted the best relationship between parents and children: ‘one in which both parties are healthy and distant’.



Figure 5.1. Members of the rhythm and sound class.

⁹⁶ Jeanne Shea (2014) studies the new narratives of compassion among elderly women in post-Mao Beijing. She concludes that these women did not perceive the practice of self-fulfilment, such as enjoyment of tai chi classes and consumer goods, as a turn to self as opposed to that of the group. Rather, these practices were seen to improve their caring relationship with the family. For instance, they participated in tai chi classes for their health so that they would not become a burden for their children.

After coming to Malaysia, *sotokomori* elders maintained regular contacts with their children. Some did so over Skype, but many men seemed to feel awkward in the forms of communication which depended largely on talking. Mr Kosaka (see Chapter 3 and 4), for instance, lamented to me how he found it so difficult to communicate with his daughter over Skype. Having removed himself from the house, the emotional distance between him and his daughter had become more obvious. Mr Kosaka sighed:

At the end of the day, men are not needed at home. In their old age, women are still useful to their children. Whereas men just take up space. My wife and I regularly talk to our daughter using Skype, but I have nothing to say to my daughter. Whereas my wife can talk to her for hours and hours. Once, my daughter called when my wife was still in the shower. I had to talk to my daughter on my own until my wife joined me later. Oh lord, the awkward silences! It was so hard to find anything to say to my daughter.

Others resorted to a form of silent communication. Mr Takeda, for instance, installed a device on the TV in their son's home in Japan. This device enabled Mr Takeda to watch a Japanese TV program in Malaysia. Whenever he switched on his TV in Malaysia, the device in his son's home would flash in red. Mr Takeda told me that his son could see the flashing of the red light every morning as a check that his father was still alive in Malaysia. On days when he was too busy to watch TV in the morning, the son would call him to ask if he was okay. This way, he said, they didn't need to talk while still maintaining the familial bonds of care.

Some retirees maintained blog posts, not only to share the useful information with other Japanese retirees (see Chapter 3), but also to connect with their distant children. In Chapter 3, I mentioned that Mr Iida spent half a day every day replying to inquiries he received on his blog posts. When I asked him why he kept the blog, he answered without hesitation: 'for my grandchildren'. I was surprised to hear this, I had thought he wanted to share the information with other Japanese in Malaysia. He elaborated:

My grandchildren are now aged seven and five. They are too small to know what I am doing in Malaysia. I will probably die before they fully understand it. But my blog posts

will remain even after my death. When my grandchildren grow up, they can finally read them and understand how I lived my life.

For Mr Iida, what appeared at first a practice of accumulating public recognition among his fellow Japanese in Malaysia had an ultimate goal of connecting himself in the future with his grandchildren. His blog site, which kept the records of events in Malaysia, acted as an archive of ‘lost letters’ (Garcia 2016, 89) sent to distant relatives in a distant future.⁹⁷ The linear progression of a capitalist life course (see Chapter 1) was regulated by a generational temporality that ended socially with one’s retirement and ended physically with death. The leaving of his letters allowed him to transcend a limited generational temporality and enter the domain of intergenerational *ie* temporality. After his death, the letters will become a primary source for his family history or legacy (cf. Garcia 2016).

However, Mr Iida’s wish for inter-generational continuity remained ‘ego-centred’ (Weiner 1977, 120). He wished his blog posts to be read by his grandchildren in the future, but there was no guarantee. His grandchildren might not be interested in reading his blog after all. During their working lives, wages materialised men’s ties to their family. After their move to Malaysia, the materiality of absence—an empty home, the red lights on the TV and the blog posts on the computer screen—created their ties to their children. Although these acts reflected the relationships of care, it did not erase the sense of anxiety between the retired men and their children.

On the other hand, women’s intergenerational ties continued well beyond the men’s retirement because women controlled the sphere of *uchi* to a greater extent than did men. A male’s work in Japan Inc. ceased on retirement, but women’s domestic work exceeded the male’s working time. As Mr Koike said, ‘in their old age, women are still useful to their children’. Their husband’s retirement period often coincided with the birth of grandchildren, and women were usually called in to help

⁹⁷ Garcia (2016, 89) used the blog as a method in his study of underground music scenes in Paris. He kept a record of his observations on his blog site. In the article reflecting on this methodology, he notes that his blog can also be seen as ‘a trove of lost letters: missives sent to distant friends, local collaborators, myself, and an intimate public of strangers’ (Garcia 2016, 89). He also notes that the blog can be used as a ‘primary source’ for history, capturing the record of early twenty-first century music scenes.

with their children's household tasks. Unlike men, who derived value from *soto*, the source of women's value, *ie*, continued through generations to come.⁹⁸

In such socio-cultural context, Japanese women in Malaysia tended to long for the geographical and physical ties to their children and grandchildren. Claire Koreeda, a woman in her late 60s, often touched my cheeks and sighed that I reminded her of her children. One evening, after *The Failures'* Concert (see Prologue), she invited me to her home. After remarrying her current husband, who owned a house in Karuizawa, an exclusive hill station in Japan where the rich and famous competed to buy their second and third houses, she and her husband moved to Malaysia to begin their retirement. They used to go back to Karuizawa from KL every summer, but after a third summer, she suggested selling the house in Karuizawa for she was too tired of maintaining two houses. They sold their house in Karuizawa and bought and renovated a unit in an exclusive condominium in Mont Kiara. Reflecting on her background as a wedding planner, she painted the walls of the new apartment white and chose furniture made of marble to resemble the interior of the lavish church weddings that she used to organise (see Figure 0.3 in the Introduction). But when I visited her beautiful apartment in Mont Kiara, she told me that she had been homesick. It had been eight years since she and her husband moved to KL. She told me that she regretted selling her house in Japan. 'I have grandchildren. And I want to be close to them'. She said that she was looking forward to hugging her grandchildren when she would make a short visit to Japan the following month. Then she quickly looked at her husband, who was enjoying drinks with his friends at the kitchen bar. 'But Koreeda says that he wants to die here'. She called him by his surname. 'After all, it was my idea to sell the house in Japan'. She looked down and sighed.

Like Claire, many women explicitly lamented their dislocation from their family members.⁹⁹ Furthermore, while men sought to reduce the burden (*meiwaku*) on their

⁹⁸ Gendered conceptions of time are not unique to Japan. British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1992, 59) has said that 'men have assumed that their activities constituted 'history', whereas women existed almost out of time, doing the same as they had always done'. Annette Weiner (1977), a feminist anthropologist of the Trobriand Islands, doesn't think it's such a bad thing. She argues, 'the importance of women's wealth exceeds the importance of the historical time controlled by men' (Weiner 1977, 210) because 'Trobriand women control immortality through the recapitulation of *dala* identity' (Weiner 1977, 231).

⁹⁹ Of course, whether or not women were appreciated by their family in Japan is an empirical question which requires further ethnographic research in Japan. Borovoy (2010, 84) notes that although women devote themselves to their husbands and their children, their care was often unappreciated.

children by being away, some women felt that they were creating a burden upon their Japanese neighbours by being away. Mrs Miyakawa in Penang (see Chapter 4) felt social obligations to her neighbours in Japan. I met Mrs Miyakawa during the pilot fieldwork in 2013. She looked worried and somewhat sad throughout the conversation. When she smiled, her eyelids slanted downwards, and she seemed to forcibly pull up the corners of her lips. Mrs Miyakawa related to me how she was troubling her neighbours by being abroad for a long time. ‘We are not there [in Japan]. But the grass in our garden will grow. Leaves will fall. Mails will arrive. So my neighbours cut the grass, sweep the leaves, and take in the mail. Otherwise, it’s obvious that our house is empty. Thieves will come to our neighbourhood. I am troubling them by being absent (*inai kara meiwaku wo kaketeiru*)’.

The different ways that husbands and wives imagined their ties to their family translated into different ways that they viewed their move to Malaysia. While wives often called their stay in Malaysia, ‘prolonged tourism’ (*chouki ryokou*), their husbands tended to call it, ‘migration’ (*ijuu*).¹⁰⁰ This had a consequential effect on their perception of home. While wives tended to consider their home to be in Japan, husbands tended to call Malaysia their new home (*atarashii uchi*). This became a point of frequent contestation. I introduced Mr and Mrs Wakase in Penang in the Introduction and in Chapter 2. After Mrs Wakase likened her move to Malaysia as *shimanagashi* (a punishment) (see Chapter 2), she continued. ‘I am okay now; I participate in volunteer activities and have made some new friends. But I still like to go back to Japan at least a few times a year to meet my family and friends’. But her husband immediately interjected. ‘I don’t. I much prefer it here. After spending a week in Japan, I would be already missing Penang. It’s so expensive to do anything in Japan. I only go back to Japan once a year for medical check-ups and to lodge my tax returns. When my wife is away in Japan, I’d rather go to Cebu in the Philippines with my friends to practise diving. I started diving at the age of 62 you know!’ He smiled at me with his tanned face. I saw Mrs Wakase’s fingers gripping tighter. She persisted: ‘For me, home is still Japan. Life in Penang is at most an extension of

It was often during the birth of their grand children that gave women an opportunity to return to Japan.

¹⁰⁰ Given the gender difference in the perceptions of their movement to Malaysia, it might not be the most gender neutral way to describe Japanese retirees in Malaysia as retirement migrants. Although the terminology, ‘retirement migrants’, was borrowed from existing scholarship for an analytic purpose here, in the future research, it is worthwhile to interrogate and problematize the use of this term.

tourism'. Mr Wakase didn't back down, 'I disagree. I feel relieved when I come back from Japan to this condominium in Penang. I'd say, *tadaima!* (a greeting when entering a place regarded as one's home)'.

In making a new home in Malaysia, men created relationships that resembled fictive kinship (cf. Lynch 2013, 195).¹⁰¹ In Chapter 3, I mentioned how retirees in the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur found the place of belonging (*ibasho*) with their friends (*nakama*). The relationships that they animated were akin to those with family. In Chapter 3, I quoted Steve who compared his friends in Malaysia to his family in Japan: '*touku no shinseki yorimo chikaku no nihonjin* (Japanese people nearby are more valuable than relatives far away)'. They became families through dining and doing things together (cf. Weston 1991).¹⁰² The members of the Malay Club (see Chapter 3), for instance, gathered every week after the morning class for an hour-long coffee session that sometimes continued on to lunch. Mr Takada, one of the regulars at the Malay class, told me that the café session after the lesson was the reason why he stayed in the Malay class, even though his proficiency had not improved after two years. When one of the club's members returned to Japan, she gave away her clothing to female members of the Malay Club. We even took vacations together to Kota Kinabalu (Figure 5.2). In Kota Kinabalu, couples did not share bedrooms; instead, men slept in one room and women slept in another room. It created a sense of emotional culture in which the members of the Malay club as a whole felt like a family rather than a collective of a few couples. We would reminisce later about the trip to Kota Kinabalu at weekly coffee sessions, and it gave us a sense of a shared past. Therefore, when Yoko Sakamoto organised Choro-san's 'wake', which is usually done by family members, it nonetheless felt natural among the community of his fictive kin.

¹⁰¹ I use the term 'fictive kinship' cautiously because the term went under a constructive critique by David Schneider ([1968]1980), who argues that all kinship, including biological kinship, is in some sense fictional (Weston 1991, 105). Nevertheless, I used the term 'fictive' here in order to encompass the informants' narrative, *kazoku-mitai* (like a family) and to distinguish it from their families in Japan.

¹⁰² In *Families We Choose*, an anthropologist, Kath Weston (1991), talks about the growing sense of relatedness within gay friendships as meals are shared regularly in a domestic setting. Their mutual assistance went beyond cooking and cleaning to collecting the mail when one of them was on vacation, feeding the cats and so on. The emotional support they provided each other created the sense of family.



Figure 5.2. The members of the Malay Class during a trip to Kota Kinabalu.

But Choro-san's biological family in Japan did not recognise this form of family, as I discussed earlier. Retirees themselves distinguished *nakama* (friendship) in Malaysia from *kazoku* (family) in Japan. After comparing his friends in Malaysia with his relatives in Japan, Steve nevertheless said that friendship in Malaysia could be discontinued at anytime, if there was any sign of trouble (*nanika attara suguni kireru kankei*). The relationship of *nakama* was a transient one. Most retirees returned to Japan when their bodies declined. After their return to different parts of Japan, it was difficult to keep in touch.

Jieun Kim (2016, 845) observes that those who spend the last years of their lives disconnected from familial ties in Japan fear becoming *muenbotoke* (disconnected spirits). *Muenbotoke* refers to the spirits of the deceased whose death was not grieved by loved ones. Susan Long (2005, 61) writes that in Japan, 'dying without the presence of others is considered a terrible fate'. These spirits cannot enter the collective ancestral world because the descendants do not perform the necessary

posthumous rites or look after the gravestone (Kim 2016, 850). Instead of becoming *gosenzosama* (venerable ancestors), *muenbotoke* is 'doomed to wander around this world restlessly in a state of hunger, misery, and resentment' (Kim 2016, 845).

As 'absent fathers' in a society in which the virtue of filial piety no longer holds the traction that it once did, *sotokomori* men faced more risks of becoming *muenbotoke* than their wives. According to the statistics collected from people who lived by themselves, 58.2 per cent of women answered that they would want their children to look after them when they were ill. But only 41 per cent of men said the same, and 21.5 per cent of those men with children nonetheless answered that they did not have anyone who could care for them (Cabinet Office 2015, 33).

It was here that women played a crucial role in reconnecting men to the family. Annette Weiner (1977, 23) argues that 'the final control by women of the cosmic cycle leaves men destined to borrow some of the symbols of women's power and to create through women, artificial extensions of their own historically bounded time'. As the producers of the affective environment of *ie*, women were placed at the heart of the men's political process of re-materialising their ties to the family.

The roles played by Mrs Sakamoto and Hiroko-san after Choro-san's death constitute a case in point. When Choro-san died, Mrs Sakamoto swiftly collected people's reflections on Choro-san's contributions in Malaysia. They were bound together to be given to his family. Here, Mrs Sakamoto's notebook of obituaries is an attempt to get Choro-san's contribution to his fictive family in Malaysia (*soto*) recognised by his family in Japan (*uchi*). Otherwise, he would forever be considered 'useless' by his brothers. Choro-san's wife, Hiroko-san, also played an important role in this transition; she received the notebook and transformed his activities into a form recognisable within the family (*uchi*): legacy. Both women, Hiroko-san and Mrs Sakamoto, took charge, beyond biological reproduction, of reproducing legacy and recognition by the family for men.

Women's role in 'producing men' (Strathern 1988, 127–128)¹⁰³ in retirement generated the possibility of reshaping spousal relations. The rest of the chapter

¹⁰³ Marilyn Strathern's (1988, 127–128) observation among Gimi is worth reproducing here because it holds true for Japanese retirees: '[M]en have to be 'produced' by women because the whole difference between men and women lies in their respective enablements in production. Men break away from the endo-anthropophagic cycle of women's nurture. They are, in this sense, produced only by women: they do not themselves produce in life form. Rather, they transform themselves into the agents who coerce women to so produce (and thus produce them as agents). What women grow they create. A drastically differentiated capacity lays the basis for male identity'.

highlights how people re-negotiated intimacy within couple units, and how it re-configured family relations. Specifically, it critically analyses the emergent narratives of romantic love and partnership between the spouses.

Romantic Partnership

I have discussed in Chapter 4 men's tendency to support their wives in pursuing their *ikigai*, although there was a misrecognition on the part of men who assumed that women derived *ikigai* through public recognition. Interestingly, many men insisted that they did these activities in public with their wives, such as Mr Toyotomi, who taught his wife to play golf so that they could play together in retirement (see Chapter 4). Although it might not be immediately surprising for a couple to want to do things together, it did not come naturally for baby boomers who had led very different lives until retirement. I argued in Chapter 1 that the sentiment felt by the partners in marriage was one of obligation (patience for women and responsibility for men) to the relationship and to the gender roles rather than a positive feeling about the partner (Tokuhiro 2010, 19). But in the Japan Club, it seemed that there was an effort, more than usual, on the part of men to do things, and to be seen doing things, with their wives (*issho ni suru*). The ethnographic perspective reveals that the phenomenon of *nureochiba* (fallen wet leaves) might be less about men having nothing to do, but rather about men wanting to do things together with their wives.

The practice of exchanging name cards was a case in point. The exchange of name cards (*meishi*) is an essential business practice in Japan. A name card in a business context usually has one's name, the name of the company, and one's position in the company. After retirement in Malaysia, the retirees continued to produce and exchange name cards, which was not surprising given the resemblance of their other practices to work practices (see Chapter 3). What was surprising, however, was that many couples had joint name cards (Figure 5.3). They listed the husband's and the wife's full names, the nicknames they used on the Izumi SNS network (see Chapter 3), their Japanese phone number, their Malaysian phone number, email addresses, their Malaysian home address and, importantly, the couple's photographs. The need to insert a photograph for identification also showed how brief their encounters were going to be, and alluded to the limit of the fictive kinship. In addition to this information, people like Mr and Mrs Kosaka listed the link to their blog site. In

exchanging these name cards, the couple, rather than an individual, became the unit in the domains of public recognition.



Figure 5.3. Couple's name cards used in the Japan Club of KL.

Similarly, the Village Concert (see Chapter 3) encouraged the participants to join the activity as a couple. Although a single participant could choose a song for him or herself, a couple had to make a joint decision on one song. When the new couple joined, they were encouraged to introduce themselves. Often a man would talk about why and when they came to Malaysia, while his wife would stand quietly next to him. Somebody from the crowd would then shout, 'please, we want to hear from your wife too!' (*okusan no koe mo kikasete kudasai*). Women in such circumstances would either smile and shake their heads to indicate that they did not want to speak or would say, 'If you could please let us be part of this community, we would be very grateful' (*nakama ni irete itadakereba saiwai desu. Douzo yoroshiku onegai itashimasu*). These practices, from joint name cards to a couple's joint participation in activities which generated masculine productive values (see Chapter 3), show a spousal relationship being transformed into that of a 'partnership'.

Furthermore, men often emphasised the romantic aspects of this partnership. It was quite common to witness men publicly avowing their affection for their spouses,

especially during dinner after the Village Concert (see Chapter 3). I sat next to Mr Kawai one night. When I casually asked him why he joined the Village Concert, his affectionate response took me by surprise. He told me that, having been married to his wife for such a long time, he thought that there was very little that he didn't know about her. But choir made him realise that his wife had a very beautiful voice. He said that the moment he put his shoulder next to her shoulder, listening to the music of his wife, he achieved 'mental harmony' with her. In ways that evoke Euro-American discourses of romantic love in which self and other seek to enter into a state of fusion (Lipset 2004, 205; Bataille 1986), Mr Kawai explained that when their sounds harmonised, the sounds transcended the individual body and united the two bodies in one.

Another common genre of romantic stories was 'how I fell in love with my wife'. Most of my informants met their wives through *omiai* (arranged marriage). As I have shown in Chapter 1, for a long time before and after WWII, marriage was an economic and the national matter (Ryang 2006) (see Chapter 1). Although marriage was no longer considered alliance-making between *ie*,¹⁰⁴ the practice of *omiai* remained during the post-war period albeit in new forms (see Chapter 2). People met each other through an introduction by a third party, which could be a friend, a neighbour or a colleague. It was a mixture of formality and romance.¹⁰⁵ Mr Shimizu told me the following story of his *omiai* over the dinner table.

When I reached a marriageable age, I had a few *omiai*. The first woman was too beautiful. She worked at *Shiseido* [Japanese cosmetics company] as a model. She was way beyond my league. I couldn't be myself in front of her. I politely declined. The second woman didn't even put her make up on. She had cheeks so red that they looked like a pair of apples. She was short but had large hips. I bet she would have given birth to healthy babies. But the gap between the first and the second one was too large. I felt I was flung from one side to another. Again, I politely declined. The third woman was introduced to me by an *ikebana* [flower arrangement] teacher. She gave me a photo which had three women. A girl on the left was so-so looking. The girl in the middle was a teacher. The girl

¹⁰⁴ Before the war, marriage was considered a practice of alliance-making between families or between *ie*, rather than between two persons. The marriage was arranged between two households, and the spousal relations laid a basis for loyalty to the sovereign (Ryang 2006). See Chapter 1 for more discussion.

¹⁰⁵ *Omiai* (arranged marriage) prevailed over love marriage, although the baby-boomer generation evidenced increased instances of the latter (see Chapter 1). In 1996, when most of my informants were in their mid-40s, the proportion of love marriage exceeded 85 per cent (Tokuhiro 2010, 20).

on the right was very pretty. For the next two weeks until the *omiaai* date, I couldn't sleep for thinking which girl it would be. Then on the day of the *omiaai*, the teacher and I arrived early and we waited and waited. The time arrived, but she didn't show up! At last, she came seven minutes late. What would you say if you were the girl?

Without a thought, I said, 'I am sorry to be late'. 'Exactly!' He said with glee.

But you know what she said? She said, 'I got hungry on the way so I stopped to have *ramen*'. I was so amused by her boldness! I immediately liked her. And you know what, she was the pretty one! I was planning to propose to her after a year of courtship, but I couldn't wait. So I proposed to her after three months.

His story was well told. I suspected that it was a regular story that he had told to others. I asked him if I could see the picture of his wife. He replied. 'Oh, I don't have it. I have a picture of my dog, though. Do you want to see it?'

Jokes aside, I was surprised to witness these public displays of intimacy in the Japan Club. Showing affection was considered *memeshii* (not manly) when the baby boomers were younger. Love was considered antithetical to the preservation of *ie*, which laid the foundation for belonging in the productivist state (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, by emphasising her boldness, Mr Shimizu portrayed his wife as an independent woman who would not perform a submissive femininity before a prospective husband. The emotional rhetoric employed by many of my male informants seemed to redefine their spousal relationships as a romantic partnership.

But it is important to point out the gender difference in the perceptions of intimacy between the spouses. According to the survey by the Cabinet Office in 2012, although 36 per cent of elderly men answered that they felt *ikigai* when they were spending time with their spouse, only 29 per cent of women felt the same (Cabinet Office 2012b, 23). Instead, 43.4 per cent of women felt *ikigai* when they spent time with their friends (Cabinet Office 2012b, 23).

Many women I interviewed were uninterested in the activities of their spouses. Mrs Yamamoto (see Chapter 4) told me that one morning she realised that her husband was not at home in the Saujana Villa Condominium. She then learned, through her husband's Facebook page, that he had gone to travel in the UK. Similarly, Shiho-san, whom I came to know closely, only told her husband that she

was leaving for Vietnam the next day because her friend had asked her about the trip in front of her husband. If not for the friend, she said, she would not have bothered to tell her husband. Shiho-san and Claire also called their husbands by their surnames, a practice considered extremely distant (see Kondo 1990, 142).

Others were explicitly resentful of their husbands. In the Prologue, Mrs Iwatani was frustrated that she could not pursue her career after marriage because her husband asked her to quick her work. Neither could she let their daughter pursue a life abroad because, again, her husband objected. On the way to Kota Kinabalu, I sat next to Mrs Iwatani on the bus to the airport. Her husband sat behind us with another male member of the Malay Club. I asked her if she did not mind not sitting with her husband. ‘Not at all! I get sick of him sometimes’, she responded. She then quickly smiled and said she was kidding. But a moment later, she lowered her voice and told me in a serious tone. ‘But once in a while, I do contemplate a divorce. I never pursued it because it would render my past life a waste (*koremade no jinsei ga mottainai desho*). If I left him now, I would ask myself, “what was the point of my life with him?” (*kono hito to issho ni sugoshite kita watashi no jinsei no imi ha nani?*) So I must not get a divorce. It’s for myself’. For Mrs Iwatani, to pursue her retirement life with her husband was not out of love or out of a commitment to a joint partnership. Rather, it was a commitment to her decision and her past life.

As these examples show, although the couples might take part in activities together, the sentiments experienced by men and women might well have been very different. Even when the women did not resent their husbands, the difference in their perceptions of the spousal relations was demonstrated at times by the terms some couples used to address each other. In Chapter 4, I mentioned that it was relatively common for Japanese men in Malaysia to call their wives, *waifu*, a term directly adapted from the English word, ‘wife’. Men’s calling their spouses *waifu* pointed to men’s desire for aligning themselves with the romantic practices of the West, the place of their *akogare* (dreams) (see Chapter 1), in which marriage is associated with love (Yanagisako 1987, 97–98). Bardsley (2011, 115) argues that the Western model of men has been marketed as the pinnacle of masculinity in the Japanese magazines targeting a retiree audience.

Mr Sasaki (see the Introduction and Chapter 3) was one of them (Figure 5.4). He repeatedly emphasised his affection to his wife, saying that his *waifu*’s happiness was what energised him (*waifu no shiawase ga watashi no genki no minamoto*). One

night, I was walking with Mr Sasaki to the Chinese restaurant after the Village Concert. I suddenly heard Mrs Sasaki calling him from behind. ‘*Oto-san! Oto-san!*’ The word directly translates into ‘Father! Father!’ Mr Sasaki blushed in embarrassment. He grumpily replied to her. ‘Why can’t you call me *daarin* (a Japanese adaptation of an English word, ‘darling’) or at least *anata* (an affectionate way of saying ‘you’)?’ She ignored him. Mr Sasaki turned to me and recounted a story. ‘Let me share with you an embarrassing story. Once, we were staying at a five-star hotel in New York. I was waiting for my *waiifu* at the lobby. Everybody was well-dressed and sipping cocktails while listening to gentle jazz music playing in the background. Then suddenly there came my *waiifu* shouting from across the lobby. ‘*Oto-san! Oto-san!*’ Everyone turned to my *waiifu* expecting to see a young girl and instead found a 60-year-old woman calling me her dad!’



Figure 5.4. Mr and Mrs Sasaki in the Village Concert.

According to Lebra’s research (1984), in the 1970s when most of my informants were getting married, most women called their partners, *oto-san* (father) even before they had children. Men correspondingly called their wives, *oka-san* (mother) thereby stressing roles within the family rather than a relationship to each other as husband

and wife. The relationship between spouses was downplayed in favour of the household as a whole to support the continuation of the *ie* system and the family state (*kazoku kokka*) (Kondo 1990, 133–4). Mrs Sasaki's calling her spouse by the familial role title—*oto-san* (father)—exemplified how she continued to see their relationship in terms of the household obligations despite her husband's wish to transform it into that of a romantic partnership.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, Mrs Itoh, a woman who kept a blog in Malaysia (see Chapter 3), told me that she no longer felt jealous of her husband. 'At our age, I no longer see sex (*sei*). Women and men, we are all friends. I am not sure how my husband may think. For me, all that matters is that both of us are happy; he can do whatever he wants so long as he doesn't break our family. I no longer feel jealousy. Indeed, I cannot remember when I graduated from having such a feeling (*itsukara shitto wo sotsugyou shitakamo omoidasenaiwa*)'. A Japanese anthropologist, Joy Hendry (1981, 30), cites Blood (1967), whose elderly informants told him in the 1960s that 'arranged marriages start out cold and get hot, whereas love matches start out hot and grow cold'. This may indeed be the case for men but for women, the marriage might just stay cold.

Intimacy after Work

Why did some men want to transform the spousal relationship into that of a romantic partnership? Anthropologists who studied the advent of romantic love in non-European communities have tended to focus on its connection with literacy and modernity and how it was used as a tactic in intergenerational and gender politics (Wolf 1975; Abu-Lughod 1993; Marksbury 1994; Ahearn 2001). Here, I argue that love had become a principal idiom through which men claimed their belonging to the wife, to the family, and by extension to the imagined national collective of *uchi* or home in the aftermath of productivity. In making this argument, I draw from anthropological writings that highlight connections between shifting market forms and shifting ideas of intimacy, gender and marriage (e.g., Collier 1997;

¹⁰⁶ Borovoy (2010, 114) also observes in her ethnography that Japanese women view romance as peripheral to the marital bond.

Constable 2003; Lipset 2004; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; C. Freeman 2014; Stout 2014).

In particular, I engage with Berlant (2011) and Povinelli's (2006) notion that neoliberalism creates a particular form of relationship—a couple as a unit. They argue that love is shaped and re-shaped by neoliberalism, as normative intimate relations are used to imagine a national collective. In the making of a national collective, Berlant (2011) and Povinelli (2006) argue that particular forms of intimacy were made taboo. By questioning how some spousal relations came to be defined as 'normal' and others 'taboo' in the Japan Club, I began to comprehend the nature of collective belonging that was sought at the end of productive life and how spousal relations aided the making of such belonging. Here, I will focus on 'the wifeless husband' as a case study of a relationship that was considered taboo.

Some men came alone to Malaysia, leaving their wives in Japan. Some of them used the word, *sotsukon* (graduation from marriage) to describe their spousal relationships. Mr Okamoto, whom I met at the ballroom dancing club, was one of them. He was still legally married to his wife but they lived apart and led separate lives.

I came to KL by myself. My wife is in Japan now. We came to an agreement after my retirement to live separate lives and to do what we like to do. She graduated from a music college with a degree in singing but never had a chance to put that into use. Now she is employed in a hostess bar. She sings there four times a week. She is really enjoying it. As for me in Malaysia, I rented an apartment near a local university so that I could easily make new friends with university students. I go to the gym every day and play squash with them regularly. It's been four and a half years living apart from my wife.

Like Mr Okamoto, Mr Tanaka (see Chapter 4) and a few other men came to Malaysia without their wives. But to talk about their absent wives in the Japan Club was considered taboo. Instead, people routinely teased Mr Tanaka as if he was looking for a girlfriend in Malaysia. When I talked to Mr Tanaka over dinner after the Village Concert, people would always shout jokingly across the table, 'Shiori-san! Be careful of Tanaka-san. He can be dangerous!' One evening, during the dinner after the Village Concert, Mr Tanaka could not hide his shock after hearing that Mr Yamamoto had left for the UK without telling his wife. Mr Shimatani, who

was sitting next to him, immediately pointed out the contradiction. ‘What’s the big deal! You are doing the same thing. Your wife didn’t come with you to Malaysia!’ Mr Tanaka kept quiet and looked uncomfortable. People at the table looked at each other. After a second or two of awkward silence, Mr Shimatani suggested changing a topic. ‘Let’s not talk about it; we are entering taboo territory’.

When the economic activity no longer existed that was the base for the kinship obligations, why did they feel anxious if they were ‘unleashed’ from the spousal ties? Why did they feel the need to tease people like Mr Tanaka and cast doubt on his behaviour? ‘Wifeless husbands’ was a taboo topic in the Japan Club, more so than ‘husbandless wives’.

I interpret their anxieties about the wifeless husbands as reflecting the men’s anxieties in creating social belonging years after work. As I have argued throughout the preceding chapters, after retirement, Japanese men had lost their belonging to the company, the family and the productivist state. During the dispute in the Painting Club (see Chapter 3), Mr Isoroku, who advocated for female leadership, shouted, ‘women are stronger anyway!’ Indeed, women were stronger, because they had communities from which they could draw support in old age. Mr Sakamoto’s new mission to start a share-house for widows (see Chapter 3) reflected his thought that his wife and many other wives who outlived their husbands could have a fictive family.¹⁰⁷ Most women, however, could, and preferred to, go back home to Japan to their family.

In contrast, men were perceived to be in need of women to give substance to their kin ties. I argue that when neither the market relations nor the social organisations secured their sense of belonging, love became one of the few ways in which men could relate to, and naturalise, their relationships with their wives and by extension, their kin. The presence of loving women assured men that they will not become *muenbotoke*. The romance was considered timeless (Lipset 2004, 205), and it guaranteed men’s presence in the intergenerational ties of kinship. In this emotional context, people who pursued a life independent of their spouses, such as Mr Tanaka had, would have been an anxious reminder of the fragility of the new foundation of spousal ties.

¹⁰⁷ In 2014, the life expectancy was 80.50 years for men and 86.83 years for women (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan 2015).

In addition to love, the rhetoric of *ittaikan* (the sense of oneness) was also used to create a sense of unity between couples who had otherwise led very different lives until retirement. I mentioned previously the case of ‘mental harmony’ achieved through singing together. Others pointed to the sense of *ittaikan* through the metaphor of ‘air’ (Mathews 1996, 69). When I casually asked Mr Bessho why he joined the Village Concert, he responded in the following way. ‘I joined the Village Concert to utter a sound. If I just stay at home with my wife, I don’t say a word’. His wife was sitting next to him. She did not seem offended. Instead, she agreed with her husband. ‘Being married for a few decades now, we don’t need to verbally communicate anymore. We just know what another person is thinking. We are like air (*kuuki mitai*)’. It seems that after spending almost half a century together, there was really no need for a lengthy conversation to communicate. The long relationship was characterised by a lack of sound, or what they called *kuuki ni naru* (becoming air). One’s presence, like air, was taken for granted but at the same time, it was an essential element of life. The presence of one’s spouse became so natural that it almost became transparent and soundless.

The rhetoric of love and *ittaikan*, in turn, naturalised couples’ decisions to come to Malaysia together, leaving men to believe that women also wanted the same thing. Mr Kosaka (see Chapters 3 and 4) told me that the decision to come to Malaysia was mutually made with his wife and that his wife was equally excited to be in Malaysia. ‘It didn’t take any convincing. When I told her that I wanted us to move to Malaysia, she seemed so keen, as if we were always destined to be here!’ Mrs Kosaka, however, later told me that it was her husband who wanted to come to Malaysia. She hesitated initially because of social obligations she felt at home.

Other men emphasised how they appreciated having their wives in their lives, although they seldom seemed to consider if women needed them in their lives. Keita-san (see Chapter 3), for instance, told me that he couldn’t have survived the initial few years of hardship in Kuala Lumpur without his wife. Before he found his calling as a diplomat in Malaysia, he said that he wanted to go back to Japan so many times. But, he said, because his wife was there with him, he could stay strong and persevere. His narrative showed how he saw his marriage as a partnership in navigating through the new project (cf. C. Freeman 2014, 80). I could also sense a deep affection and gratitude in his voice. But when I asked him how his wife was feeling in Malaysia, he looked surprised. His look showed he had never thought

about the question. He became quiet and thought for a while. Finally, he said, 'I don't know. I never asked'. Love and the feeling of *ittaikan* seemed to have naturalised women's enabling of men's *ikigai*, but it did not go the other way. It muted the fact that women may have had a different *ikigai* from the men.

Ironically, I saw more evidence of 'romantic' relations between the couple who went their separate ways than some of the couples who came to Malaysia together. At the very least, the public discourse of a wifeless man as a miserable figure did not necessarily correspond with the subjective experience of these men. Mr Okamoto continued:

It's not that hard living apart from her. Before my retirement, I worked as a pilot so I was only home for ten days a month anyway. In fact, I think it's better this way. Living by myself now, I appreciate how hard it was to do household tasks. The fact that I finally appreciated her work seemed to have moved her. We still Skype each other about once a week for about 30 to 40 minutes. That's just enough. No more, no less. The distance keeps our relationship. I felt closer to her after living apart.

Mr and Mrs Okamoto both had independent communities of belonging such that Mr Okamoto did not have to depend on his wife. It seems that his affection for her grew even more after living apart. It was not to deny the division of labour or the differences between women and men, as many men in the Japan Club did, but the acknowledgement of her autonomy and the show of gratitude for her reproductive labour, that drew them together.

Conclusion: Return and Regeneration

Analysing 'intimate events' (Povinelli 2006) in the Japan Club revealed how a broader capitalist structure, which fostered strict gender divisions of labour in their working times, influenced the everyday intimate lives of people even in their retirement. The focus on disagreements between the spouses has shown how intimacy is a contested site in retirement. I have shown that romantic love became the principal idiom through which men tried to re-materialise their ties to the wife, to the family, and by extension to the imagined national collective of *ie* in the aftermath

of productivity. In the process, men were 'blinded' by love in that they thought that their wives desired the same things as they did.

Indeed, in many cases, women did not desire the same thing. Neither did they share the same view of spousal relations. Some women, like Mrs Yamamoto, Shiho-san, and Mrs Iwatani, made explicit the emotional distance that they had developed concerning their spousal relationships. Others, like Claire and Mrs Miyakawa, lamented their dislocation from their grandchildren and neighbourhood. For men, who worked in a highly stressful and competitive environment of work, home in retirement may well have been a refuge which should have offered them love and healing (Ueno 1994, 77). Family relations may have shifted from one which emphasise responsibility to one which emphasise partnership to enjoy joint activities. But for women, who were expected to provide that very love and healing for men into retirement, their Malaysian home may have just appeared another place of work (Ueno 1994, 77).

The struggles within spousal relationships were simultaneously struggles over access to intergenerational relationships. At first, men tried to be useful to their children by being abroad or becoming *sotokomori*. Although men created fictive kinships in Malaysia, the ties of *nakama* was fragile and transient. They longed for familial intimacy with their kin.

The central role women played in connecting men to their kin gave some women power to negotiate a return. Although their visa allowed them to stay in Malaysia for ten years, most retirees I met returned within three years. Some returned when their bodies declined. Some returned to look after their elderly parents. But quite a number of retirees returned because their wives insisted on it. Mrs Ando, who told me that her value had not been realised (*mottainai*) in Malaysia (see Chapter 4), excitedly approached me one day in 2014.

The other day, my daughter called and asked my husband to teach his grandson. He would be entering the junior high school from next spring. I think it's good for us to go back and help our grandson.

She said that she was planning to return in two years' time. But when I returned to my field site a year later, Mr and Mrs Ando had already gone. Mr Kosaka, who was their neighbour (see Chapter 4), told me that they went back to look after the

grandson. Mrs Ando's excitement at going back to Japan typified the experience of many women. In persuading their husbands to return, they evoked the rhetoric of giving, such as teaching grandchildren. The value that is generated by his teaching his grandson would not be public recognition, but a familial legacy. By inviting their husbands to teach their grandchildren, women tactically invited them to establish the intergenerational ties.

In addition to being closer to the grandchildren, Mr Kosaka told me that Mr Ando had also developed a hearing problem. Mr Kosaka himself had become partly deaf in the one year I didn't see him. Mr and Mrs Kosaka were leaving KL when I met them again for the last time at the end of 2015. When the three of us met for a meal, Mrs Kosaka caringly repeated our conversation to him in a louder and a slower voice so he could follow. Borovoy (2010) notes the persistence of nurturing ideology among Japanese wives even as they developed a distance from their husbands. Women's ability to care for men and then to mourn their deaths provided the women with the power to re-negotiate the terms of new spousal ties.

By the time I returned for the second period of fieldwork in 2016, Mr and Mrs Iwatani had also returned to Kumamoto, Mrs Iwatani's natal home. Mr Iida, the leader of the Malay class, told me that Mrs Iwatani insisted on returning home to look after her mother. Mr Iwatani returned with her and started working as a delivery truck driver. Although Mrs Iwatani had always felt that her life was constrained by her husband, after a few years in Malaysia, she insisted on returning to *her* natal home to look after *her* mother, even though it meant that Mr Iwatani would take up a job for which he was vastly overqualified. There had been a dramatic shifting of power between Mr and Mrs Iwatani over the period of time they spent in Malaysia.

Similarly, by the end of my fieldwork in mid-2016, Mr Iida (see Chapter 4), too, had begun to plan his return to Japan. 'I just got a good idea, Shiori-san', he told me with his characteristic enthusiasm. 'I had originally set my goal to live overseas for ten years. But I may change my mind about that. I am now thinking of going back to Japan to start an Airbnb'. His plan was to buy a house—a plan that his wife always wanted—but with a few extra bedrooms. He would let these bedrooms to backpackers from around the world. 'I can interact with travellers and feel the sense of being overseas without needing to travel myself!' He told me that this would be good for his wife as well, because she could help him prepare food for the backpackers. 'I can make my *sashimi* too!' He said with glee. An Airbnb, in his

eyes, was a compromise. His wife could be in Japan, while he could continue to accumulate the sense of public recognition and purpose there. He has found a perfect project. ‘With this plan, I can go home (*ie he kaereru*)’. He smiled.

By returning to *ie*, Mr Iida redrew the boundaries between *uchi* and *soto* on different scales. An Airbnb as his new retirement project, Mr Iida transferred the home into the domain of public recognition. He also transgressed in performing what were traditionally feminine forms of labour such as the provision of care and food. However, in considering this project as being ‘good for his wife as well’, he continued to misrecognise her different sources of *ikigai*. Although the regulatory work of gender is not re-ordered completely, over the course of their stay in Malaysia, there was a partial shift in the norms of intimate relationships.

Conclusion

Towards an Anthropology of Anxiety

Shiori-san, to live is to add different layers of colours to your life. Every event you go through, every person you meet, will give you a different layer of colour. Life is an accumulation of these layers of colours. This is how you get your distinct colour by the time you get old.

Mr Sasaki, 2014

In the past decade and a half, retirement migration has emerged as a popular retirement option for middle to upper-middle class Japanese baby boomers. Taken together with other *ikigai* activities, such as community volunteering, the government policies and the media have promoted activities that manifest the ideologies of an independent and mutually supportive retirement. My thesis presents an ethnography about their anxiety to maintain productive citizenship in retirement and its generative potential to reshape gender and intimate relations. Through the examples I gave in the preceding chapters, I illustrated how the sense of intimacy between themselves and their friends, spouses and the children became a locus for the articulation of national discourse that tied social citizenship with the sense of productivity in one's retirement. At the same time, the anxiety arising from the negotiation of these relationships in the aftermath of work helped reshape some of these regulatory norms.

My arguments throughout this thesis have been built on the interpretations of different practices at different scales, from my informants' life courses, to retired couples' interactions, to the institutional culture of the Japan Club, to larger social transformations in Japan. It mirrors Mr Sasaki's idea of different layers of colours that they have accumulated throughout their life course and just as importantly, that they continued to accrue in their old age. My ethnography tried to fathom these different layers of colours of my informants. In doing so, what started off as a project on retirement lives abroad became a project on life itself.

An exploration of independent and mutually supportive retirement as a site for a new middle-class belonging in the ageing society led me to focus equally on kinship, political economy, material culture, and most important, gender. These many levels of analysis have revealed not only the effects of capitalist and neoliberal ideology on

the intimate lives of Japanese retirees but also pointed to a new way of understanding neoliberalism as subject to interpretation and shaping within specific political and economic contexts. That is, the ways in which the meaning of independent and mutually supportive retirement was shaped through struggles for belonging in the post-work Japanese context showed how the idea of productivity and intimacy were constitutive of each other in enacting life and personhood in retirement.

In this concluding chapter, I will first flesh out some of these arguments by taking stock of what the preceding chapters have revealed about the hopes and dreams of Japanese retirement migrants in Malaysia. I will highlight three aspects of their lives: (1) their performance of affective labour to expand the temporality of productivity; (2) their partial refashioning of intimate relationships through affective labour; and (3) the sense of anxiety they felt around these transitions. I will then link the discussion to wider debates in feminist economic anthropology over gender and value. I suggest the generative potential of anxiety as an anthropological category to theorise how it can shift society's wider regulatory forms.

The Temporality of Productive Citizenship

As I write this concluding chapter at the end of 2016, Japan's economy had not defaulted, contrary to predictions made by some of my Japanese male informants. Baby boomers were situated on a tectonic shift as the Japanese economy plummeted from post-war growth to enter into its fourth decade of depression. The idea of an independent and mutually supportive retirement, and the neoliberal economic system more broadly, had set up anxieties around the temporality of productivity and intimacy. The sense of 'being stuck', that is, not filling their time with useful activities, framed their moral debates over the politics of the temporality of retirement, as they differentiated productive, meaningful time of retirement migrants from the leisured, wasted time of many male retirees in Japan (cf. Chu 2010, 258).

I have shown that the distribution of social resources and the fulfilment of one's role (*yakuwari*) in the Japan Club reproduced a sense of productivity among men. For instance, in the Second-Home Committee, forms of leisure activities and systems of mutual support were endowed with the gravitas of waged labour. This includes various embodied, temporal and material practices, such as the wearing of business

suits, a diagram of productivity, the temporality of school, and the seemingly competitive devotion to these supposedly voluntary tasks.

The affective resemblance of their activities to that of work said a great deal about the reproduction of regulatory structures in the Japan Club. After retirement, the men's process of capital accumulation was integrated with the moral practices of 'being useful to others' (*yakuni tatsu*). By offering themselves for the service of the other, they refashioned themselves into doing 'affective labour' thereby blurring the boundary between paid and unpaid work.

On another scale, Japanese retired men in particular frequently referred to Malaysia as Japan's 'younger brother'—a rapidly growing country which they viewed with a sense of nostalgia. It created an international hierarchy of nation-states, in which men who had lost their corporate masculinity through work could reinscribe their masculine power. At the same time, the rapidly growing Malaysian economy symbolised the future for the retirees. By aligning themselves with the space and temporality of progress, they were unabashedly neoliberal subjects striving for temporal progress beyond their position as elderly people in the period of 'comfortable retirement' in a stagnant and depressed Japan. Retirement migration was centrally about shaping an uncertain future. Their quest for a sense of progress and the associated sense of rejuvenation and youthfulness that they experienced made retirement migration less about the negotiation of ageing than about escaping the structures of ageing.

On the other hand, many women largely lost their sense of mobility there. In following their spouses to Malaysia, women were removed from their ties of social belonging such as family, children and their neighbourhoods. The sense of autonomy that they enjoyed as they got older in Japan was thwarted because they had to rely on their husbands for communication and transport in Malaysia. The feelings of 'being stuck' which were evident among retired men in Japan were now evident among Japanese women in Malaysia.

Many women I met constantly self-monitored and assessed their moral worth—*mottainai* (what a waste). Women's complaints that they were wasting their capacities in Malaysia suggested that there were distinct ways in which women and men assessed their values in retirement. Like men, women accumulated their values through an exchange, but what they exchanged was not information or time. Rather, they exchanged seemingly mundane Japanese objects, like cling wrap and yoghurt.

They collectively celebrated the material connections with home through the circulation of these Japanese domestic objects. The relationships that they animated were integral to women's quests for asserting some control over the permanence of their sources of value—spaces of relationality within their home. This assertion highlighted the mundane, domestic material culture as productive forces for women's regeneration of their values in retirement.

The Partial Refashioning of Intimate Relationships

It is important to note that the forms of intimate relations created as a result of affective labour differed from ones created through capitalist labour, although the two were often conflated. This thesis highlighted a partial refashioning of intimate relationships between the retirees and their children, their spouses, and among the fellow retirees as a result of affective labour.

Sarariiman's long-term absence from home during their working lives had broken down the *ie* system in which the patriarch was the head of the family. Without the wage that had materialised their ties to the family in retirement, retired men struggled to form intimacy with their children. In such socio-economic context, I argued that the physical distance between retirement migrants in Malaysia and their children in Japan was not just a symptom of widespread solitariness and loneliness in Japan but it was also a way with which male retirees actively coped with it. From those vacating their home in Japan for their children to those establishing a safe haven in Malaysia and to those religiously taking part in activities to maintain their physical and mental health, *sotokomori* male elders expressed their care for their children from a distance. Unlike the filial path that baby boomers had taken to live with their parents and to look after them later in the same home, Marie said to me that the best relationship between parents and children in contemporary Japanese society was one in which both parties were healthy and distant. After their movement to Malaysia, the materiality of absence, such as the flashing red lights on the TV, materialised their ties to their children.

'Absent fathers' then found the new *ibasho* (space for belonging) in the Japan Club of Kuala Lumpur. The excess of a neoliberal, independent retirement model was the enfolding of friends into the normative kinship system. Instead of eating meals with one's family, retirees in Malaysia ate meals with their friends. The bond

of friendship (*nakama*) was also created through mutual support. On that night in the Backyard Pub, they were the elderly partying. Other than ‘quietly sipping tea’ in Japan, retirees in Malaysia got drunk on beer, and partied all night long. When Choro-san died, Mrs Sakamoto organised a wake for him. The Japan Club sheltered ‘a family’ of retirees.

In making a family with fellow retirees, male retirees made an explicit effort to mark a departure from their working lives. Asking people about each other’s previous occupation was considered taboo, and many of them adopted English nicknames to be used in the Japan Club. This was so even when their practices of affective labour drew extensively from the practices of work. They carefully distinguished the forms of ties that were produced as a result of affective labour. For instance, in choosing to follow the seniority principle to elect a leader in the Painting Club, the justification for adopting this corporate practice was narrated to reduce the pressure on the chosen person to prove him or herself worthy of the position.

Name card exchange was another practice that had had a place in corporate lives but was refashioned with new meaning. Japanese retired couples in Malaysia produced and exchanged joint-name cards. In exchanging these name cards in the Japan Club, the couple, rather than an individual, became the unit in the domain of affective labour. I observed that some men tried to reorganise their spousal relations into that of an equal, romantic partnership. Some explicitly couched their retirement migration as a caring act for their wives: freeing wives from domestic labour; encouraging them to take up public roles to transform their private hobbies into a source of publicly recognisable value; and desiring their wives to pursue hobbies with them. The transformation of the spousal relationship into that of a partnership did benefit some women who could not pursue these activities when they were younger.

Anxieties in Re-organising Intimate Relationships

However, because intimate relations that had been formed through affective labour were uncertain, fluid and indeterminate, conflicts of misrecognition occurred frequently in the Japan Club. Mr Inoue was dismissed from the leadership team of the *Igo* Club because, according to Mrs Naruto, he misunderstood the scope of his power. ‘It’s just leisure. Yet it is really difficult!’ She exclaimed. If it were work, Mr

Inoue could have restricted access to advanced players only. But because it was leisure, and furthermore it was hosted by the newly constructed family of retirees, he could not be so exclusive. Similarly, Mr Baba left the Painting Club frustrated that people did not follow the Club's Constitution. He drew on his previous experience as a public servant and warned people that it was wrong to ignore the Constitution. The rest of the Painting Group regarded him as too uptight. On the other hand, even though Mr Sakamoto volunteered his labour to help new migrants, he was asked to step down from the leadership position for he was seen to be too senile for the role. 'Why couldn't you wait until I was dead?' Mr Sakamoto asked. Even though he framed his affective labour as his *ikigai*, because these activities were a site of the production of social values, the competition for control over their management was intense. In asking Mr Sakamoto to step down, retired men used the same principle of productivity to create hierarchy among members as had previously been deployed to marginalise older employees in Japan.

In the domain of spousal relations, there was a misrecognition of gender values, which had the detrimental effect of reinscribing pre-retirement gender norms for some couples. I argued that despite the rhetoric of equality and romantic partnership, women were not equal to men, as long as they had to adopt a masculine structure of value production. While some husbands wanted to emphasise the romantic aspects of their relationships, many wives continued to see their relationships as within the family. It caused anxiety in people like Mr Sasaki, who was frustrated that his wife continued to call him *oto-san*, despite his calling her, *waiifu*.

The struggle for intimacy between the husbands and wives was linked to competing ideas about the boundaries between the home and the family. Women tended to locate both of them in Japan, and hence referred to their move to Malaysia as a prolonged tourism. Men, on the other hand, typically created a fictive family in Malaysia, and hence called Malaysia their new or second home. However, I have already mentioned the fragile nature of the affective ties made between men in the Japan Club. Furthermore, the fictive ties of *nakama* were transient ones, because most migrants returned after a few years to go back to different parts of Japan from where they had lived previously. Malaysia and the Japan Club provided them with a temporary *ibasho*, but it was not permanent.

Some men tried to blur the boundaries between *nakama* in Malaysia and family in Japan to secure a permanent *ibasho*. For instance, Mr Iida wished to transform his

affective labour in Malaysia into a filial legacy in Japan by writing blogs for his grandchildren. But anxiety remained, because they might never be read. Mr Kosaka talked to his daughter using Skype, but it only deepened his anxiety when he failed to establish any emotional connections. They lacked the techniques to establish ties with the family. When Choro-san passed away, his brothers said that he was useless within the family.

It was here that women mediated the transformation of men's affective labour into a filial legacy. In organising Choro-san's wake, it was Mrs Sakamoto, not other male members of the Second-Home Club, who initiated the move to collect letters of gratitude. This ensured that Choro-san's contribution was recognised within his biological family. She did so even though she had already announced her 'graduation' from her role in the Second-Home Club to look after her husband.

In connecting men to their kin, spousal relations were further reshaped in the direction of partial empowerment of women. Some women drew on their ties to family and their ability to look after their spouses to negotiate a return. Most retirees I met returned within three years because their wives insisted on returning. In persuading their husbands to return, women evoked the male rhetoric of being useful, such as teaching their grandchildren. Women tactically invited those men into the domain of reproductive labour and thereby allowed them to rematerialize ties to the family. Then what gave women power in the spousal relations was not the denial of the division of labour or the husbands' declaration of love, but the incorporation of men into the feminine structure of value production.

The trajectories from work to retirement to arrival in Malaysia to return to Japan tracked shifting forms of production and reproduction in the lives of my informants. After work, the regulatory work of the family, the couple, and the gender which were once associated with work were subject to change such that they could be re-ordered. Women as the main holders of access to kinship in their husbands' retirement required men to redefine their expectations of these taken-for-granted norms.

Towards an Anthropology of Anxiety

This ethnography has been concerned with largely male retirees' anxiety around social belonging, over powerfully pervasive forces of productivity that extended beyond their working lives. I will use the rest of this concluding chapter to analyse

‘anxiety’ more closely, and launch an argument for an anthropology of anxiety. In doing so, I hope to contribute to a debate that is already well under way among feminist anthropologists: I will discuss ‘the generative powers of capitalism’—the ways in which capitalism is formed through ‘the relational performance of productive powers that exceed formal economic practices’ (Bear et al. 2015). Japanese retirees in Malaysia provide an excellent case study of the effects of capitalist and neoliberal politics in non-economic spaces because the anxiety around belonging is a kind of experience profoundly entwined with the contemporary global economy. The distinctiveness of the Malaysian site provides a unique place from which to address the larger debate over the politics of intimacy and productivity.

Anxieties are everywhere seen in today’s uncertain world; from the macro-level anxieties concerning Brexit, Trump’s election and the treatment of refugees in Australia, to the more familiar and personal level of neoliberalisation of the university and educational systems. Along with depression, anxiety came to define the emotional experience of many of us living in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis (Luhmann 2015). As Laurent Berlant (2011, 203) aptly summarises, ‘everyone now lives capitalism in ongoing anxiety’.

Recent ethnographies have highlighted various forms of anxiety as they arose over society’s transition to a neoliberal economic system. Some anthropologists presented the issues in explicit terms of ‘anxiety’. For instance, in an ethnography titled *Anxious Wealth*, John Osburg (2013) observes multiple forms of anxiety among the new class of rich. They tried to distinguish themselves from *baofahu*, ‘a derogatory term for the nouveau riche’ and keep their elite status by constantly organising entertainments (Osburg 2013, 17, 51). At the same time, they feared that ‘the game was rigged against them from the beginning’ in favour of foreign businessmen, European aristocrats and overseas Chinese (Osburg 2013, 110). Noel Stout (2014, 98) documents the rise of ‘moral uncertainty and anxiety’ over the meaning of love as people began to trade sex for love in post-Socialist Cuba. She notes that ‘government leaders expressed anxiety about what the rise of the sex trade would mean in terms of Cuba’s international reputation’ (Stout 2014, 199). She narrates, in her beautifully written ethnography, how her informants ‘manage[d] the anxiety produced by participating in homoerotic relationships’ in this new economy (Stout 2014, 128).

Although these scholars explicitly used the word ‘anxiety’ to describe their informants’ experience, they have fallen short of conceptualising anxiety as a category of anthropological analysis.¹⁰⁸ They observed anxiety as an empirical phenomenon, a feeling in the people’s social and cultural lives. What I want to propose instead is a systematic and analytical conceptualisation of anxiety based on reflexive engagement with an ethnography. Understanding anxiety as a category allows for a comparative analysis, which enables a more nuanced reading of the entanglement between the political-economic transformations and the affective dimensions of life.

Anxiety has, of course, been dealt with extensively in psychological literature. Psychologists mainly focus on its diagnosis and causes (e.g., Hadley and Patil 2008). Anthropological perspectives on situated social actors and action can instead allow us to highlight people’s engagement with anxiety and illuminate its potential to reshape regulatory forms such as gender.

To think about developing an anthropology of anxiety, it is worth reminding ourselves that anxiety has always been at the heart of capitalist economic activities. Max Weber’s ([1905]1992) Protestant ethic contains at its core a thesis about the role of anxiety provoked by an ‘inscrutable divinity’ which drives the entrepreneurs’ devotion to work (Illouz 2007, 1). Weber ([1905]1992) argues that the worldly activity could ‘be considered the most suitable means of countering feelings of religious anxiety’, which constituted ‘fundamental peculiarities of religious feelings in the Reformed Church’. He goes on to develop his thesis that ‘in the era of the *ecclesia militans* it was the small bourgeoisie who were the principal representatives of Calvinistic ethics’ (Weber [1905]1992).

For early capitalist entrepreneurs, work was to assure themselves that they were chosen in the eyes of the God. Capitalism, in turn, promised a dreamworld of industrial abundance (Buck-Morss 2000, xi). However, this mass-utopian project has enabled a construction of an unequal economic system characterised by a growth of an increasingly precarious, low-wage, labour market (Muehlebach 2012, 7). Berlant (2011, 19) argues that the languages of ‘sacrifice, upward mobility, and meritocracy’

¹⁰⁸ This is in contrast to other emotional experiences which have been extensively conceptualised. These include risk (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982), uncertainty (Samimian-Darash and Rabinow 2015), optimism (Berlant 2011) and hope (Miyazaki 2004).

which used to accompany economic activities have been replaced by languages of ‘anxiety, contingency, and precarity’ in the contemporary global economy.

Similarly, Japanese baby boomers signed the ‘sacrificial contract’ (Sennett and Cobb 1977) to assure themselves of the good life. The linear productivist life course provided a clear path for upward mobility. On the other hand, it had also set in motion a society in which one’s membership was determined by one’s contribution either in terms of productive or reproductive labour. The social dislocation and the intense sense of anxiety awaited those who fell outside, such as retired *sarariiman*. It was the women’s kinship ties and men’s lack of access to them that gave post-retirement intimacy its particular anxiety.

What emerged from these capitalist ruins was the renegotiation of the regulatory categories of the family, the couple, and gender, which were once associated with work. Anxious intimacy unsettled many of these taken-for-granted categories, as well as their very primacy. From men setting up clubs to help new retirees from Japan to women sharing Japanese yoghurt among themselves to husbands declaring love to their spouses, who continued to call them *oto-san*, the everyday dramas that played out in the Japanese retirement community in Kuala Lumpur provided openings into new possibilities of shifting gender and intergenerational relations.

Japanese policymakers have been considering how to increase the role of the elderly in society. By pointing to the ways in which people reproduced and regenerated their relational ties, my ethnography shows what needs re-working in contemporary Japanese society is not the balance between work and life, as the Cabinet Office proposes. Rather, it is the gendered division of labour which continues to prescribe gender norms in contemporary Japan.

It is important to note the shift in gender norms among the younger generation in contemporary Japan. The increasingly dire economic situation facing young people has not only unsettled taken-for-granted categories of intergenerational norms but also gender norms themselves. Allison (2013, 99) cites the Marxist sociologist, Adachi Mariko, who told her that ‘the era of the family-corporate system has ended’ as the men’s wage can no longer support their family. A shift in gender norms was reflected in the survey done by the Japanese Cabinet Office in 2014. The survey asked, ‘what do you think of the idea ‘men should work outside, and women should protect the family at home’’. 49.4 per cent of those who answered the survey disagreed, in contrast to 34.0 per cent in 1992 (Cabinet Office 2014, 1). Among the

respondents between the ages of 20 and 29 years, 56.1 per cent disagreed with the statement (Cabinet Office 2014, 1). Fewer people are getting married, and if they do, both husbands and wives are expected to work and raise a family. The shifting gender roles resonate with the celebration of new masculine ideals antithetical to the figure of the *sarariiman* who contributes little work at home. New masculine ideals include *ikumen* ('good looking men who raise a child') and *soshoku danshi* ('grass-eating or herbivorous men'), which refer to men with sensitivity towards feelings. They are often said to prefer a quieter lifestyle, with little interest in corporate advancement (Bardsley 2011, 133; Allison 2013, 99). Ueno (1994, 35) also observes the rise in the form of *do-kokai kappuru* (interest group couples) among Japanese young couples. *Do-kokai kappuru* are united together by their common interests, and are often described as being 'like siblings'. The term underplays the sexual nature of their relationship and instead emphasises their openness to allow others to join the couple's hobby activities.

Having said that, the media has recently reported on the increasing desire among young women to pursue the lives of housewives (Asahi Shimbun 2017; Shirakawa 2014). Due to the prolonged depression, Japanese people, both women and men, work for long hours with inadequate compensation. Having been brought up by their mothers who were housewives, some women fantasise an alternative lifestyle as housewives. Although many working women rarely have time for themselves, there emerged a new term to evaluate women's skill: *joshi-ryoku* (feminine-skill) (Kikuchi 2016). Someone with *joshi-ryoku* is said to possess *yutori*, and hence they will look after their own physical appearance while also displaying a sign of care for people around her. By attributing the word 'skill', femininity became something that could be measured and be competed for. The fastest way to accrue these skills is to get married to someone who can support themselves so that they can quit their work to devote themselves to look after their own physique and display the care for others. Being a housewife, in short, is an ultimate form of gaining *joshi-ryoku* (Kikuchi 2016). I argue that it is these gendered ideologies that resurfaced with neoliberal ethos that need to be addressed in contemporary Japanese society.

Beyond Japan, with the retirement of the baby-boomer generation, the rising proportion of the ageing population around the world sparked concerns that drove support for successful ageing campaigns. The findings of this study call both features of successful ageing ideology—its neoliberal and its masculine tendencies—into

question. That is not to say that I question the seemingly unproblematic statement that the elderly should pursue their *ikigai* in retirement. Rather, retiree's engagement with the idea of being useful illustrates precisely how successful ageing discourse enables active, socially involved retirees on the one hand and reproduces discourses that have marginalised them on the other, including the oppressive ageist and gender structure inculcated during the high-growth era. The exaggerated emphasis on the dream-like qualities of active ageing can obscure the broader processes of the marginalisation of the non-productive population that go beyond retirement migration.

In a related vein, the existing scholarship on active ageing treats the experiences of ageing as equal between women and men and assumes that this idealised ageing model is perceived and interpreted equally by them. But ignoring the gendered nature of retirement comes at a cost, as the anxious, and sometimes painful, experiences of my informants can attest. The meaning of potentially liberating ideology was differentially experienced by gender, and it was interpreted and negotiated constantly by both women and by men. Gerontological literature rarely asks questions of how active ageing or successful ageing produces differences between people, even when my informants constantly drew boundaries between each other and insisted on my meeting differing categories of retirement migrants. Much more study of ageing needs to be done that critically analyses these gendered trends in post-work life.

The implications of these findings go beyond the anthropology of ageing. They point to the need to go beyond the domains of youth and work to explore people's involvement with the neoliberal ethos in the most unexpected of places. Exploration of the multiple forms of anxious intimacy that emerged in the Japanese retirement context therefore provides an important comparative perspective to 'unearth the nuances of neoliberalism' (C. Freeman 2014, 4). If an ethnography of Japanese retirees in Malaysia seems a surprising angle to contribute to the study of gender and value in global capitalism, it is worth observing that in today's economic milieu, even retirement had to be framed within the neoliberal narrative of independent and mutually supportive ideals. The making of productive retirement reflects broader global neoliberal trends in which one is to be responsible for one's welfare. Therefore, my informants' anxious intimacy helps us think how the form of

neoliberalism is produced and negotiated by an ‘unexpected community’ of retirees (Hochschild [1973]1978), or *homo economicus* minus the market (Li 2014).

Japan, which had gone through rapid economic growth and then, perhaps just as rapidly, a decline in this century, provides a powerful setting for some of the most critical questions of contemporary society: how does one form social relations in a life after a long period of secure, permanent work? Independent retirement is no more a product of neoliberal welfare policy than is the entrepreneurial youth in the era of non-permanent jobs (cf. C. Freeman 2014). Japanese retirees in Malaysia explicitly refused to get re-employment, left their family members and actively tried to find new meanings overseas in this ambiguous stage of life. Their sense of anxiety and hopes prompted me to ask why engagement with neoliberal ideology continued when people explicitly tried to escape it. By highlighting the making of solidarity and intimacy in the space supposedly removed from social obligations, I have shown that new values were generated in the retirement community. It is the everyday negotiations of tension between freedom from a regulatory framework and desire for it that defines the working of neoliberal self-responsibility.

Anthropologists themselves have been anxious over the last few decades. They have long debated the relevance and the value of their own discipline in the post-colonial, post-modern world (Lambek 2011; MacClancy 2002). In my doctoral research in anthropology, the question of ‘what’s at stake’ came out of the intimate domains of my informants’ lives. They led me to ask why some people were losing the sense of belonging in retirement, and to move outward from apprehending their sense of anxieties to theorising how intimate relations are both shaped by, and shaping, the operations of society’s multiple regulatory forms. I suggest that anthropological perspective can highlight the generative power of social relations in shaping wider discourses in uncertain times.

Epilogue: Post-Retirement Migration

For many silver backpackers, their time in Malaysia was one of many chapters in their retirement life. What will come after retirement migration? A few of my closest informants had returned permanently to Japan. Ricky Tanaka, a humorous man who was the life of any party, was one of them. We regularly met in the *Igo* class before the Village Concert. After dinner following the Village Concert, he sometimes took a few friends and me to pub crawl in Bangsar, the trendy district of Kuala Lumpur. After a few bottles of beer, he liked to challenge people to guess how old he was. '55?' Newcomers to his drinking club guessed innocently. Old friends kept quiet and let him savour the moment. Ricky paused and smiled silently for effect, and then whispered to the table: 'I am 73!' He appeared satisfied with the amazed look on our faces. He claimed that he was still working as an advisor to a local firm in KL, though no one believed him because he was always available to a party, any day, any time. One night, after a house party at Marie Kawashima's, he insisted that he would drive home even though he had had a fair amount of alcohol. While we were getting ready to go home, he disappeared. We thought that he had already gone home. The next morning, Marie found him sleeping in his car in the car park. He never left the party.

But he did eventually leave the party. I received an email from him in early 2015, a few months after I returned to Australia.

Hi Shiori-chan,

I hope you are well.

I returned to Japan after 12 years in Malaysia. I returned mainly for eye surgery.

For the first two months, I was concentrating on my recovery. I am feeling much better now.

But I am also feeling very bored. On sunny days, I walk around the neighbourhood for an hour. Once a week, I go to the community centre to play *Igo*. Are you practicing your *Igo*?

It's nice to see the change of seasons here in Japan. The food is tasty too.

Oh yes, on Saturdays and Sundays, I go and watch horse racing. Do Australians like horse racing too? Sometimes I go and dip myself in *onsen* as well.

I am sounding like an old man, aren't I? But if there was a job, I am still keen to take it up.

I hope I can see you again in Malaysia.

Ryosuke Tanaka

Ricky signed off his email as Ryosuke Tanaka. The time of Ricky was over. For him, it was his medical condition that ended his chapter in Malaysia. In Japan, he enjoyed the different rhythms of life which were marked by seasonal changes. But he was also bored. Compared to his social life in Malaysia, he described what he did in Japan as 'old man's' activities.

Post-work life was fluid and flexible; retirees became young and old with changing spaces and time. What I captured in this ethnography was a snapshot of who they were and who they became in Malaysia. But who they hoped to become in the future changed little, no matter where they were. Ricky was still hopeful in Japan: He was hopeful that one day, he could return to Malaysia. Later, he did come back briefly to Malaysia to vacate his apartment, but I was not there. Later I heard from our friends that he had become forgetful.

Most retirees still had long years to live after their return. Despite his medical conditions and memory loss, Ricky was still hopeful that one day, he could work again. After completing a project of retirement migration, his retirement period in Japan became a waiting period until the next 'project' began. When he becomes too senile to work, he will enter another waiting period before the final project of death, which retirees carefully planned for.

My informants' stories could be read as a chapter in their life, or a chapter in the history of ageing in Japan. But even more, it could be read as elucidating a widespread neoliberal trend told through the lens of a group of retirees who felt the effect of these ideologies on their intimate lives, even in spaces seemingly far removed from the reach of neoliberal hands.

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