

## COMPLETION REPORT

### **A Study of Japanese women, aging and migration**

Later age migration is a relatively recent phenomenon among Japanese. In focusing on older Japanese women who have migrated to Western Australia (WA) in the recent years, this study juxtaposes the issues of aging, gender and migration while highlighting a recent migration trend among Japanese.

Through qualitative inquiry, the research explores the complexities of the trajectories and circumstances impacting decisions to migrate and the experiences of older women living overseas. In-depth interviews were carried out with 26 Japanese residing in the vicinity of Perth in WA in 2007. They comprise 20 women and 6 men (as comparison) with an average age of 61 years old. The female respondents, who have lived in Australia for an average of 10 years, varied in their marital status. Their visa status include permanent residency (business or family reunion type), retirement and student visas.

Among the female respondents, their motivation to move overseas - although included noted reasons such as the attraction of warm climate, lower cost of living and leisured lifestyle - have focused much on their desire to enjoy freedom and find *ikigai* (meaning in life). Especially among those who are divorced, widowed and single, they often stressed the desire to get out of 'hard life in Japan' and be away from social obligations and expectations in Japan. They stress an independent and individualistic lifestyle in later life. Their determination to leave Japan are shown through thorough preparation and strategies to obtain visas for long term stay in the host country.

The desire for freedom also means the freedom to 'chase after their own dreams', which may include identity change— such as from a full time housewife to a career woman. A few have shown a blossoming of late life creativity through artistic pursuits such as in jewelry design, pottery, dance, art and craft. They usually discovered their talents after enrolment as mature college students in art and design overseas. They also expressed freedom through active pursuit for later age romance.

However, there are also less successful cases, such as an example of a respondent who was less proactive in the decision to migrate. She migrated with her enthusiastic husband, but felt isolated due to language barrier, health issues and the lack of social network.

The study also found that migration may contribute to closer family relationships. Over time, many have moved their children and/or siblings from Japan to live with them overseas. Their connection with Japan remains strong as they receive frequent visits from Japanese friends and relatives. They also return to visit regularly. Looking forward, an overwhelming number of them intend to return to Japan when they become frail. The study suggests that although later age migration empowers older women with new opportunities for an active and blossoming later life, it also entails concerns such as health issues, successful adaptation to new environment, family connection and networking. By conceiving migration only for the active phase of later life, such migration also spells issues for Japanese policymakers on the globalization of health insurance and health care provisions for the aged.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

1. November 24, 2008. National Harbor, Maryland, USA. GERONTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA 61st ANNUAL MEETING (November 21-25, 2008), Title of presentation: Dare to venture out: Older Japanese seeking *second life* in Western Australia. Presenter : Thang Leng Leng
2. 6-9 August 2009. Daejeon, Korea. INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF ASIA SCHOLARS 6 – THINK ASIA! Title of presentation: Aging, migration and gender: a study of older Japanese female migrants in contemporary Australia. Presenter: Thang Leng Leng

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Both articles will be submitted in 2009, journal titles to be confirmed

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)