

COMPLETION REPORT

Cross-cultural adjustment of Japanese expatriates in Malaysia

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Within the expatriation subset of the wider IB literature, the focus of research has been on contemporary contextual factors. Perhaps one of the reasons for the limited attention given to historical factors in the corpus of expatriate literature lies in the fact that they are, well, historical and thus not perceived as being of immediate relevance to the contemporary expatriate. However, given the scramble among nations for global dominance and influence over an increasingly 'shrinking' world over the last century or so, very few countries today have in fact had no 'difficult' relations with other countries in recent times. As a result, many expatriates do actually find themselves working in countries that have not always enjoyed jovial diplomatic exchanges with their home country, and it was therefore important to explore this subject in a little depth.

The purpose of this project was to pick up on this point and to link the present to the past by investigating how the expatriate experience may be affected by a troubled historical relationship between host and home countries. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative interview-based approach eliciting thick, detailed descriptions of the practical experiences of a small number of Japanese expatriate managers working in Malaysia was adopted.

What the study found was that the respondents were largely unanimous in their view that the difficult period in Malaysian-Japanese relations during the 1940s had no negative impact on their experiences in the country. On the contrary, the expatriates all spoke positively about being welcomed by locals and that all parties (employers, employees, governments, and so on) were very much future-oriented. This was a very important observation and one that runs counter to some of the literature, which has suggested that expatriates working in what were once colonial outposts of their home country tend to confine themselves within 'bubbles', surrounded mostly by their compatriots and/or fellow expatriate managers. In other words, these types of expatriates are cut off, both physically and socially, from host-country nationals.

In spite of this largely positive observation, there were a small number of concerns expressed primarily by expatriates with accompanying children, who were concerned that as the other children in their neighbourhoods learned about the Japanese occupation of Malaya their own children might be on the receiving end of some negative comments.

The findings described above should of course be considered in light of the study's limitations. First, the small, single-context nature of the investigation limits generalization. Second, there are many particularities in this study (nature of Japanese-Malaysian historical relations, cultural values, elapsed time between the 'difficult' relations, and so on) that are simply not relatable to other contexts. Having said this, qualitative research is not always geared towards generalizability but rather towards contextual intricacies and nuances

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

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

Date: 4th December 2020

Venue: Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (via online)

Conference: 2020 Academy of International Business Southeast Asia Regional Conference

Title of presentation: Don't Look back in Anger: How does a Troubled Past between Host and Home Countries Affect the Expatriate Experience? Some Insights from Japanese Expatriates in Malaysia

Paper Number: MS0028

Presenter: Christopher Richardson

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

Richardson, C. It's all in the past: how do colonial legacies between host and home countries affect the expatriate experience? *Journal of Global Mobility*, 10(1), 36-54.

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