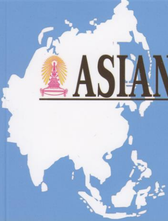

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TRANS-ASIAN HUMAN MOBILITIES AND ENCOUNTERS

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Contents

Introduction

Supaporn Phokaew and Koichi Iwabuchi

This issue of *Asian Review* contains articles focusing on trans-Asian perspectives and approaches to critically examine the diversity of forms of migration in Asia. It can be seen that the Asia region is home to a growing number of migrants moving from their communities to others in the same country or to other countries. The rise of a middle-class in many parts of Asia has been intensifying people's cross-border mobility within the region. Additionally, greater connectivity between and among countries has promoted human mobility. Migration can be a powerful contributor to economic and social development. At the same time it can add to overcrowding in cities, strain social cohesion in migrant-receiving areas, and be tied up with human trafficking.

The emergence of international retirement migration has broadly been conceptualized as "lifestyle migration" focusing on its leisure-oriented nature as a part of second-home residential tourism. This was certainly the case when the international retirement migration scheme was proposed by the Japanese government in 1986. Mika Toyota examines the increasing trans-Asia migration of elderly Japanese and the rise of the retirement industries. The article also discusses the interplay between the driving forces from above, namely state policies and industry initiatives, and dynamics from below, as represented by individual strategies and networks.

Koh Sin Yee also uses the concept of "lifestyle migration" to investigate the way through which real estate developers and their agents facilitate the investment-migration mobility of middle-class investor-migrants in Asia. Using cases from Brunei and Iskandar Malaysia, Koh

Asian Review 30(1), 2017, pp. 1–2.

Sin Yee shows that the growth of the middle-class in emerging Asian economies has resulted in a growing population of lifestyle migrants. Property agents and intermediaries assist in educating and influencing potential investor-migrants to realize their transnational lifestyle migration project. The international property marketing industry could be conceptualized as a transnational mobility industry.

Focusing on the relations between Japan and Thailand, Saikaew Thipakorn examines the development of Japanese mobility to Thailand since the end of World War Two. Japan-Thailand relations have been truly dynamic, shifting from a focus on economic investment to cultural diplomacy. Saikaew Thipakorn discusses that, in the case of Thailand and Japan, mobility of people happened mainly because of economic factors, but when the economic relationship was disturbed, it was the cultural sphere of people-to-people interactions that restored the overall relations between the two countries.

On human mobility within a country, Jelka Guenther investigates the domestic tourism in Thailand. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a small Northeastern town, her study found that the constructions of the "Other" in domestic tourism in Thailand are embedded in powerful notions of urban-rural relations in contemporary Thai society. By looking at these host-guest interactions, Jelka Guenther argues that domestic tourism produces its own surprising notions of the "Other." The urban Thai becomes the new "other" in tourism encounters. This finding, therefore, prompts a critical rethinking of notions of the familiar and the strange in tourism research.

Literature in transmigration is another significant element in trans-Asia flows and connections. Frederick B. Goss examines and compares the Rama story in various cultures and societies of Southeast Asia. The story of Rama, known as *Ramayana* in the Indian subcontinent where it originated, has migrated and spread to nearly every culture and society in Asia. In each place, the story has been adapted and absorbed into the local culture. The analysis shows how the tradition has moved and been shared from one locality to another, and has the ability to serve as a cultural peace ambassador promoting mutual understanding among the people of this region. Lastly, it should be noted that papers of this special issues (except Frederick Goss' paper) were originally presented at an international conference on Trans-Asian Mobilities and Encounters Exchange, Commodification and

Sustainability, which was co-organized by Monash Asia Institute, Monash University and Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University on 23-24 January 2017 at Chulalongkorn University. We are grateful for the support of The Japan Foundation, Bangkok for the conference organization.

Trans-Asia mobility from above and below: Elderly migration from Japan to Southeast Asia

Mika Toyota

Introduction

The development of Asia since the 1970s has been characterized by the model of the developmentalist state, that is, the state actively intervening in economic growth. This legacy has continued into the current era of globalization. States across Asia remain powerful and interventionist in the process of economic globalization. As such the ever-intensifying trans-Asia human mobility, be it student mobility, labour migration, elderly migration or medical tourism, has two important dimensions. One dimension is the institutional setups put in place by the state, often in cooperation with industries, which facilitate as well as condition mobility. I call this dimension the movement from above. The other dimension is that from below, namely individuals' self-initiated migratory projects. The relationship between the two is central to our understanding of trans-Asia human mobility and encounters, that is, movements of people and institutions across countries within Asia.

This article aims to shed light on the connections and gaps between institutional setups and individual strategies in the case of Japanese elderly mobility to Southeast Asia. The international migration of Japanese retirees to Southeast Asia that started in the 1990s represents not only a new pattern of mobility but also new experiences of ageing in the region. The scale of the mobility is noticeable even though no precise data is available. News reports for instance suggest that Malaysia and Thailand annually attracted 20,000 foreign retirees on various types of long-term visas in the early 2000s and that about 240,000 Japanese retirees, including short-term tourists, visit Thailand alone each year (*The Nation* 2003; Gulane 2006).

Asian Review 30(1), 2017, pp. 5–25.

Compared with the much studied retirement migration among Western countries and that from North America to Central and South America (e.g. Warnes 2009; Sunil et.,al. 2007), the mobility in Asia is special in that it has been facilitated by a "retirement industry". The term "retirement industry" in Southeast Asia, as it is used in official documents and the public media, primarily means business operations that are related to the relocation of foreign retirees. It has three main components: (1) the tourist industry that initiates "long-stay tourism" programmes targeting retirees, (2) the real estate industry that invests in so-called Retirement and Second Home (RSH) developments, and (3) medical care providers especially commercially operated care houses (Toyota and Xiang 2012). Furthermore, the retirement industry in Southeast Asia is special in that it has been promoted by the governments of the destination countries as part of their national development strategy, especially in Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines.

As such, retirement migration in Asia is not merely a demographic phenomenon that has resulted from the trend of population ageing and the intensification of mobility in general. It is also directly related to the reconfiguration of the political economy and changes in development strategies. In turn, the retirement industry must interact with individual migrants directly. In order to be profitable, the industry must meet and shape the individual retiree's needs. As such the case of the retirement industry provides us with an excellent example to examine the driving forces from above and the strategies from below.

In the remaining part of this article, I will first outline the background of the increasing trans-Asia elderly migration and the rise of the retirement industry. The second section describes the operations of the industry "from above". This is followed by a discussion of the migrants' strategy "from below". There are clear gaps between the two. The conclusion briefly recaps the findings.

Background: Retirement migration as a luxury or as a survival strategy

The emergence of the transnational retirement industry is first and foremost a response to the rapid progress of population ageing. With the baby boomer generation reaching retirement age worldwide, the retiree population from the U.S., Europe, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and mainland China was estimated to total 326.6 million in 2006, and will increase to 425.6 million by 2015 (Healthcare Coalition Institute, cited in Mollman 2007). The Philippines Retirement Authorities has projected that a "retirement tsunami" from the wealthy countries is under way (Department of Foreign Affairs, Philippines 2007). Japan is a major source of this tsunami in Asia. In 2015, 26.7 percent of the Japanese population were over 65 years old. By 2060, 39.9 percent of the population will be over the age of 65 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2016). This will inevitably create unprecedented demand for long-term, intensive elderly care.

For the retirement industry in Southeast Asia, the Japanese elderly are attractive customers not only because of their increasing numbers but, more importantly, because of their specific socioeconomic status. The seven million baby boomers in Japan is the first generation to fully enjoy the post-war economic development including the universal pension scheme. The Japanese pension system consists of three tiers. The first tier provides a flat-rate basic pension for all elderly, the second tier is the compulsory Employees' Pension which all the working population is entitled to and the third tier, the voluntary Corporate Pension, is provided by employers voluntarily in addition to the first two tiers. [Compared to earlier generations the majority of recent retirees have relatively large amounts of savings and receive high pensions. Thanks to remarkable economic growth in the past and the well-developed welfare system, it is reported that senior citizens (aged over 60 years old) hold 60 percent of individual wealth in Japan (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication 2006) Kenichi Ohmae, author of the once bestseller *The End of the Nation State* and who is known as "Mr. Strategy" in the circle of business consultancy, stresses that the Japanese elderly population possesses a total of capital of USD 510 billion and has urged northern Thailand to become a global hub for the Japanese elderly community.

The specific trajectory of the transnational retirement industry over the past few years has been directly conditioned by socioeconomic changes in Japan. The industry can be traced back to the Silver Columbus Plan that was put in place by the Japanese government in 1986. At that time the Japanese population had already started ageing but thanks to the very strong national economy at that time, the main concern lay with active ageing and well-being instead of financial affordability. Taking advantage of the rapidly appreciating Japanese Yen following the Plaza Accord of 1985, the Plan encouraged elderly Japanese to live overseas for a period of time to explore foreign cultures, hence the name Silver(-haired) Columbus. The main concern of the Japanese government was not how to lessen the burden of care but how to increase the elderly's well-being. Given the large amount of savings held by Japanese households, Japan could either import a large quantity of goods from overseas or encourage households to increase their expenditure overseas. It was thought that non-importable goods such as warm weather overseas would be more beneficial for the elderly than imported consumer goods. The Plan was thus seen as an alternative trade policy. In order to practically facilitate retirees' international mobility, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry set up a public-service corporation called the Longstay Foundation in 1992 to promote it. Most of the elderly Japanese who took part in the long stay programme at that time were economically well off and Spain and the Gold Coast of Australia were the most popular destinations. The Japanese construction industry lost no time in constructing Japanese overseas villages to cater for the pensioners' needs. The influx of the Japanese elderly along with the active purchase of property triggered resentment in some local communities, for instance in the Gold Coast of Queensland in Australia (Hajdu 2005).

The situation started changing in the early 2000s. The escalating process of population ageing and the decades-long economic recession made many Japanese retirees deeply concerned about the sustainability of the national welfare system, particularly its pension scheme and medical care provision. According to an opinion survey conducted in 2006 (Life Information Centre 2006), 83.5 % of those surveyed expressed anxiety about life in their old age. Repeated surveys across the years have indicated a growing level of anxiety. Among respondents above 60 years old, 25.9% felt "seriously worried about the life in their old age" in 2005 and the proportion increased to 34.5% in 2006. The proportion of those who are "somehow" worried increased from 43.4% to 44.6% over the same years. Many elderly Japanese are worried that their pensions may be cut or that the entire pension system may collapse under the ever mounting pressure of a super ageing society. In addition to the financial strain, Japan also faces a serious shortage in care labour. The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

(2009) projected a shortage of 400,000-600,000 by 2014. Currently 50.3% of nursing homes report difficulties in their operation due to a shortage of carers and some have had to reduce the number of available beds in spite of the increasing demand (Care Workers Support Foundation, 2010). Government subsidized care homes can accommodate a maximum of 440,000 elderly across Japan, while almost the same number of elderly (421,000) were queuing on the waiting list in 2009 (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2009). Facing these difficulties and fearing that things will become worse, an increasing number of Japanese retirees have considered moving overseas, especially to places with low living costs, in order to stretch their pensions and savings. According to an opinion survey, only 35% of Japanese in their 60s wish to continue living where they currently reside in 10 years time (Life Information Centre 2006). In other words, 65% are considering moving elsewhere, including abroad, in their old age. Another opinion survey conducted by *Nikkei Shinbun* indicates that 13.8% of respondents over the age of 60 showed interest in staying abroad for an extended period of time after retirement (*Nikkei Shinbun* 2003).

The Japanese government also sees the international relocation of retirees as a partial solution to the multiple pressures resulting from population ageing. Masajuro Shiokawa, the then 81-year-old finance minister who is popularly known as Grandpa-Shio, officially suggested at a meeting of Asian finance ministers in 2003 that Japan may "dispatch" some of its ageing people to nursing homes in the Philippines (Pilling 2003). Japanese corporations are reported to be planning to build sizable and affordable retirement villages overseas (Eyton 2006). Japanese nursing homes are also actively lobbying the government to extend the elderly long-term care scheme to cover the costs of overseas retirement life (interview with the managers of nursing homes in Tokyo, Japan Dec 2007)

These social demographic developments have led to a number of changes in retirement migration from Japan. Firstly, Southeast Asia, instead of Europe and Australia, has become a popular destination due to its low living costs, in particular, the affordability of hiring domestic helpers. Secondly, the migrant elderly have also become more diverse in their socioeconomic status and their motivation. The majority are still middle-class wishing to enjoy an active life style abroad but I also observed sizable numbers of destitute elderly, almost all male, in all the sites in the Southeast Asian countries I visited. A man of 58 years in Chiang Mai, Thailand, is a typical example. He had to take early retirement after working for his company for twenty years due to the recession. He had moved to Thailand six months after losing his job. He said:

> I lost face among the neighbours and the relatives. My wife was deeply ashamed of the situation. In order to preserve our household's honour my wife asked me to leave the house instead of lying around whole day. She can now tell others that I have got a job working overseas. I came here because the cost of living here is low and I can stretch my limited savings. (interview, Chiang Mai, 11 August 2006)

The receiving side: From short-term tourists to long-term consumers

Corresponding to the two-stage history of Japanese retirees' outmigration as described above, the Southeast Asian countries have also been through two phases in developing their retirement industries. The Philippines took the lead in the first phase by setting up the Philippine Leisure and Retirement Authorities in 1985. The Malaysian government introduced the Silver Hair Programme in 1996 to attract foreign retirees. The Thai Government, specifically the Ministry of Commerce, initiated the "Long-stay and Health Care Project" in 1998. These programmes in Southeast Asia were not particularly popular among foreign retirees in the beginning. Thailand, for example, attracted fewer than 20 retirees a year before 2000 and Malaysia had enrolled fewer than 50 in total by 2000 and the Philippines, in spite of its early start, brought in only 12,000 retirees over the 21 years from 1985 to 2006. (Gulane 2006)

All three countries introduced new, much more aggressive policy measures in the early 2000s. The Thai government set up a national committee in 2001 to lift the long-stay programme up to a new stage. Chaired by the Minister to the Prime Minister's Office, the committee brings together the ministries of tourism, public health, commerce, industry and foreign affairs. Malaysia remoulded the Silver Hair programme into the "Malaysia My Second Home Programme" (MM2H) in 2003 with a strong focus on encouraging retirees to purchase properties. (Lee 2006) The MM2H programme had 8,700 members in 2006 and aims to recruit 3,000 to 3,500 retirees annually from 2007 (Mollman 2007). The Philippines took a major step in 2006. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo appointed former Philippine National Police chief Edgar Aglipay to be the new "retirement czar", as the public media put it, and called the retirement industry in the Philippines a "flagship program of the Philippine Government for the 21st century and beyond." "Smiling at Life in the Philippines" is the official slogan of the Philippines retirement industry.

The Southeast Asian countries are so keen about the industry that they consciously compete with each other for foreign retirees. Promoting the Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) programme, the Malaysian deputy minister for tourism stressed that "It is much simpler to come and live in Malaysia than in Thailand, Australia, the UK and Germany... We are offering a 10-year multiple entry visa," compared to visas issued by other countries that are typically valid for one to four years only (Gomez 2006). But soon after Malaysia relaxed its visa regulations, the Philippines reduced the financial requirements for foreign retirees to apply for the long-stay visas and made the visas lifelong. The Philippines government announced that it is determined to become the "retirement haven" in Southeast Asia.

What is particularly striking about the development of the retirement industry in the region is the widespread, stunningly optimistic, projections about the future prospects. A business analysis of Malaysia for instance, predicted that long-stay retirees would bring in RM 33 billion (USD 11 billion) a year in foreign exchange from 2006 onwards (Gomez 2006). The Philippines' plan to host one to three million foreign retirees, hoping that an average of USD 1,500 monthly expenses by a retiree in the country would translate to a potential revenue of USD 564 billion per annum (Gulane 2006). Taiwan, which has one of the fastest ageing populations in the world, also set the goal of attracting 70,000 retirees from Japan a year. This is expected to bring in between USD 650-800 million annually (Eyton 2006). These mind-boggling figures remind one of "conjuring" and the "economy of appearance", as Tsing (2000) describes it, which is integral to transnational speculations on gold mining in Indonesia. While it is hard to verify how realistic these projections are, the enthusiasm as shown in the figures is genuine. Foreign retirees arouse so much interest not only because they are thought to be financially resourceful but also because they are conducive to relatively stable and "sustainable" development in a time of global economic uncertainty. A manager at the Thailand Long-stay Tourism Management emphasized that they must recruit "quality"—that is wealthy—retirees, who can spend generously and constantly:

> We now solidly target rich people. The appreciation of the Baht will not affect [them] at all. They will not be bothered by this kind of thing. This is the good thing when [we] deal with these kinds of people. They are not price sensitive. Once we recruit them, we know they will keep using our service. (interview, 19 February 2008, Bangkok)

Thus, the real value of foreign retirees lies in the likelihood that they will become long-term consumers in residence. This stabilizing effect, which distinguishes the retiree migrants from short-term tourists and speculative investors, is particularly attractive given that the general development model in these countries has been vulnerable to global economic volatility. Southeast Asian countries have transformed themselves from typical developmental states during the Cold War (Evans 1995) into post-developmental states in the global era (Ong 2004). No longer pursuing development within the national borders as a uniform political space (the developmental state model), they strive to improve productivity and competitiveness by strategically inserting different parts of the national economy into selected fragments of the global economy. The 1997 Asian financial crisis, however, violently drove home the potentially devastating consequences of unfettered transnational capital flows. After decades of heated growth, the financial crisis led to sudden and massive economic downsizing. One significant consequence has been the enormous overcapacity in the high-end housing market and private medical care in the three countries, especially in Thailand. Samitivej Sukhumvit Hospital, a large posh hospital hiring 1,800 staff in Bangkok, for example, was to go bankrupt in 1997 when the Thai upper-middle class lost a large portion of its wealth. The hospital swiftly turned to foreign patients as saviors. Now it treats over 200,000 foreign patients a year (including expatriates living in Thailand). One third of them are Japanese, followed by

Americans and Britons. (Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama) 2007; interview with the Head Nurse in charge of Japanese patients, 17 February 2008)

For the same reason, the real estate industry was particularly keen about the retirement industry. The director of the Philippine Retirement Inc., a business association, estimates that 80 percent of the retirement industry in the Philippines is involved in the real estate sector. Real estate development in the region had been extraordinarily profitable thanks to the active market speculation in the 1980s and 1990s but the financial crisis turned the once hot money icy cold. The skewed social structure in these countries, wherein a large amount of wealth is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small section of population, had been conducive to the fast development of the high-end real estate industry but also rendered the market vulnerable. After the severe economic downturn, foreign retirees were seen as potential buyers who might fill empty rooms and use facilities that had been grossly under-utilised. The so-called retirement and second home (RSH) sector has been identified as a golden new area of economic growth.

The assumed stabilizing effect of foreign retirees is also expected to benefit other sectors. Malaysia revived the "Malaysia My Second Home" programme in 2003 partly to help the tourism industry to recover from the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic of that year. Taiwan, a newcomer on the scene, invests in the industry as part of its strategy for rural rejuvenation. Taiwan's entrance into the World Trade Organization in 2002 dealt a blow to its agricultural communities but the government hoped that foreign retirees would bring in new developmental dynamics as they were expected to move to less populated, relatively remote rural places (Eyton 2006). Puli, a rural town in central Taiwan, became a pioneer of the transnational retirement industry after it was hard hit by an earthquake in 1999, and hoped this would boost the town's post-reconstruction economic viability (Eyton 2006).

The governments or the businesses in these three countries do not exclude unhealthy foreign retirees. The Philippines Retirement Authorities proposed nine business models, each targeting a category of retirees with distinct needs. The "seriously old" and those who need intensive care are both identified as important clients. The Thailand

Long-stay Management also targets the elderly with unstable health conditions including those who are chronically ill:

> We have no discrimination regarding retirees' health condition. We have [taken in] all kinds of people. Frankly, as long as you have the financial means, we are happy to have you. Bangkok Hospital has the ICU helicopter and the price is 0.2 million Baht (USD 6700) per hour, so long as you can pay. […] We are now targeting 24 countries with long winters [in recruiting retirees]. The idea is that many elderly people [in cold countries] develop health problems that cannot be controlled medically and the only solution is to move to a warm climate. (Interview 19 February, 2008 in Bangkok)

The retirees must be rich and active consumers and, in return, they are entitled to some benefits that other foreign residents have no access to. According to the director of PRA, foreign retirees can do almost everything except buy land and vote in elections. (Esplanada 2006) They are treated more favorably than foreign spouses of Filipino citizens, who have to reside in the Philippines consecutively for six years in order to become permanently resident. The question is: do the individual retiree migrants fit the profiles as projected by the industry?

Retirement migration as individual strategies

Retirement migration as an individual journey is very different from what the industry projected. As explained above, the increase in retirement migration from Japan to Southeast Asia is, to a great extent, driven by economic stagnation and concerns about welfare provision in Japan. Thus, retirement migration for many has become a means of survival rather than the pursuit of luxury. Only a few retirement migrants are high-power consumers. Furthermore, the retirees migrate to Southeast Asia not only to enjoy lower living costs but also to explore how they can manage their life in their own way, rather than relying on the industry. For instance, the retirees readily move elsewhere within the same country or internationally in search of a lower cost of living and deeper life satisfaction, a strategy that may be called "migration shopping" or, literally, "racing to the bottom". For example, a significant number of Japanese retirees left Penang in Malaysia from 2007 onwards due to increasing living costs. On the other hand, Laos and Cambodia became new favourite destinations. As one informant put it in 2010, "most of them start from Bangkok and move up to Chiang Mai, then to Chiang Rai. Once they find Thailand too expensive, they move to Laos or Cambodia." Many Japanese retirees also followed a pendulum pattern of movement: spending the winter in Southeast Asia and the rest of the year in Japan. A manager of TLM told us that he had been particularly disappointed by the Japanese because they want to be independent:

> The Japanese are very disappointing. TLM used to have an office in Japan but we closed down because of the difficulty in marketing. We tied up with ADC, the biggest real estate agent in Japan but they can bring in only one or two customers at a time. They are careful in spending money and they often try to find their own way to get things going. For example our survey shows that 77 per cent of the Japanese elderly look for apartments themselves. They don't want to buy or build their own houses.

The meaning of independence and the ways in which the retirement migrants search for independence are not the same for everyone. They are differentiated by both gender and socioeconomic position. This again differs from the projection of an industry that regards them as homogenous "consumers". For male migrants who have suffered the most from Japan's economic downturn, independence often means cutting off connections with others. The following experience was related by Hiro, a man of 58 years-old whom we met in Chiang Mai.

> I lost my job before retirement. I worked faithfully for my company for over twenty years but when my company made a serious retrenchment of personnel as a result of downsizing, I was asked to take early retirement. In another words, I was fired…. It is really hard to find a new job in Japan if you are a male in your late 50s. Young people or females are preferred as part-time employers in the service sector. Nobody wants to employ a bald man with limited sociability, you know. I was unemployed for over 6 months. I lost face among my neighbours and the relatives. My wife was deeply ashamed of the situation. In order to preserve our household's honour, my wife

> asked me to leave the house instead of lying around all day. She can then tell others that I have got a job working overseas.

These men often rent small rooms in local Thai neighbourhoods. They are also called "economic refugees" in the Japanese community, similar to the "marginal retirees" in Green's (2014) sample of British retirees and the "displaced pensioners" in Ono's (2008) research on Japanese retirees in Malaysia. Some of them entered Thailand without a visa which allowed them a maximum of 30 days of stay and others came with tourist visas which permit stays of up to 60 days. They may extend their stay by going out of the country every thirty days. This can simply be a day trip across the border to the northern border town of Mae Sai and back or going on the so called "Mae Sai pilgrimage"—walking across the bridge to Tachilek (the border town on the Myanmar side) and returning on the same day with another thirty days of stay permit. Some Mae Sai pilgrims have been doing this for several years. The situation in Cebu is more striking. The Japanese consulate there told us that some poor elderly do not even have money to take ferry or bus to travel to the consulate to renew their passports. On a number of occasions Japanese men have died alone in the apartments that they have rented, leaving no information about their next of kin back in Japan, which puts the consulate in a difficult position.

Retirees like Hiro have become a big concern for the retirement industry in the receiving countries. The Thai government has tightened its scrutiny over applications for retiree visas since 2006 and has added the new motto of attracting "quality" retirees. Vongthip Chumpani, a senior banker and adviser to TLM, was cited in the *International Herald Tribu*ne as saying, ''We are getting a lot of weird retirees here. They can't survive in your country so they come here." (Fuller 2007)

For the economically better-off and especially female migrants, independence means being useful, active and responsible. They seek independence by redefining or developing relations with others instead of avoiding them. Many retirees migrate in order to maintain independence from their children and therefore not burden them. Kiku, a 63-year-old lady from south Japan, moved to Chiang Mai in 2003. When she divorced in 2000, her children suggested that she live with them as her pension is rather limited. To avoid becoming dependent on the children, Kiku decided to go overseas. In Chiang Mai she went to the gym almost every day, and actively sought out Thai women married to Japanese, hoping that they would introduce her to their friends and relatives. She told us a few times that she was doing perfectly well alone. Her assertion is an assurance to her children—and to the world—that she is capable of being independent.

Akemi, in her mid-seventies, lives in suburban Manila and is developing a mini-retirement village of her own: a housing complex that accommodates four self-contained studios. She is doing so partly in response to the request of her sisters and friends in Japan, who share the idea that they should age independently from their children. Akemi considers this type of collective residence as the best arrangement. This enables them to spend the last stage of their life on their own yet they can look out for each other. She never locks her door from the inside during the night. Instead of being concerned about the safety of the surroundings, she is more worried that people will not be able to break if she has an emergency.

Some retiree migrants, especially female, take the initiative to serve the local society as a means of self-realization and empowerment. Hiroko, the founder of a shelter for street children, collaborated with a number of NGOs in Manila in spite of her inability to speak a single sentence in English or Tagalog. With her own savings, she hired a translator and a driver to work for the shelter. A 64 year-old female retiree, an art teacher, who moved to Chiang Mai with her husband in 2011 went through a period of helplessness before she finally found avenues to channel her expertise as a clay doll artist (Thang, Sone and Toyota, 2012).

> [O]ur intention was ….not to just come here for entertainment or a vacation but to stay here, to find our place of belonging here…. My first hope then was to be able to do volunteer work that involves more communication with the locals. But there was no such thing available. There was no route for such a thing. To start from zero by myself was extremely difficult and I really thought about and troubled over it for three months. What can I actually do? I struggled for three months with the thought that I could not do anything at all.

In the end she asked for help from the Japanese consulate and managed to run classes for local children in visual arts in the consulate's premise for a short period. She also started as a volunteer at a children's art programme taught by a younger Japanese woman married to a local Thai and held an exhibition of her works and those of her students' in Japan at the Chiang Mai Lana festival.

The new spaces created by the Japanese elderly are by no means "Japanese bubbles" like the industry envisioned. They are spaces of interaction and intersection. Regardless of gender and socioeconomic status, most of the elderly interviewed are wary about living in a Japanese bubble. In fact, many informants migrated because they had reservations about spending their later lives in Japan. Izumi in her mid-sixties in Kuala Lumpur made it clear that she "ran away" from Japan. Losing her husband at the age of sixty, she wanted to lead an active life but feared that it would be regarded as inappropriate and too "playful" in rural Japan for a widow to desire to make new friends and learn new things. When we met her for the first time in 2007, she had just returned from working out at the gym, with wet hair and looking radiant. Going to the gym was an entirely new experience for her. After moving to Malaysia, she also started to learn dancing and playing golf, which were both new to her. Akira, a man in his late sixties, moved from Okinawa to Bangkok and he enjoys his new life because the natural climate in the two places is similar yet the social environments are very different. As a single man with high school education and having worked in a small factory all his life, Akira constantly felt out of place in extended family gatherings in Okinawa. The custom that seniors in the family have to offer red pockets (monetary gift) to the young on numerous occasions throughout the year was a particularly heavy burden for him.

Conclusion: Connections and gaps between the above and the below

This article has proposed a framework that examines the increasing retirement migration from Japan to Southeast Asia as a result of the interplay between driving forces from above, namely state policies and industry initiatives, and dynamics from below, as represented by individual strategies and networks. The connections between the two are evident. It is the Japanese government that encouraged the elderly to live overseas for a period of time in the 1980s as a means of spending surplus savings and of improving their wellbeing and life satisfaction. The retirement industry in Southeast Asia laid the infrastructure that facilitates retiree movement. Quite a number of migrant retirees whom I interviewed learned about Southeast Asia as a destination through promotion materials disseminated by the industry; some retirees also took advantage of trial tours organized by the industry to compare different destinations before making up their minds. Fundamentally, individual mobility and networks are, to a great extent, a function of the intersections between various institutional factors across countries, for instance between the institutional deficit of care in Japan and the policy encouragement of the in-migration of foreign retirees in the destination.

While the concerns from above and initiatives from below largely aligned with each other in the 1980s and 1990s, the gap between the two has widened significantly in the new millennium. Contrary to what the industry and policy makers in the receiving countries hoped for, many new retirement migrants from Japan are "economic refugees" who are driven by economic hardship and financial uncertainty rather than wealthy consumers who are pursuing luxury. Instead of relying on the industry and confining themselves into high-end gated communities, the retirees attach great emphasis to independence. Increasing numbers of retirees seek to mingle with local communities and thus move further away from the "Japanese bubble" that the industry intends to create. Furthermore, while the industry projects the Japanese retirement migrants as socially homogeneous consumers and investors, the retirees are internally diverse. Gender and socioeconomic differences are particularly important in shaping their varying needs and expectations.

The interplay between the driving forces from above and the initiatives from below continues to unfold. Recently, for instance, the Japanese government started encouraging the export of medical equipment and experts on elderly care and committed itself to helping to build elderly care facilities in Southeast Asian countries. These measures are partly meant to facilitate the relocation of Japanese retirees who are increasingly concerned with care rather than enjoyment. Riei, a major Japanese company that had invested in developing care houses in Thailand before without success, decided to resume the initiative but changed its earlier "Japanese only" policy to "Japanese style care" policy and will make the premises open to those elderly locals who can afford to pay 60,000 THB per month. How retirement migration may evolve in the next context remains to be seen. The framework advanced in this article may enable productive comparisons between Asia and Europe. Given the large numbers of retirement migrants across Europe and the multiple institutional uncertainties that the European Union is facing, how the forces from above and the strategies from below interact in Europe will certainly have a far-reaching impact on retirees' transnational mobility.

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