HIDDEN VOICES OF JAPANESE RETURNEES:
THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND LIFE TRAJECTORIES

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to discuss and analyze Japanese returnees' life story and self-perception on their identity by emphasizing how the host country affected their identity development as well as their vision on the future. The data were drawn from in-depth interviews with three kikokushijo students and qualitatively analyzed. The research finds three areas related to how the host country shaped their identity and future life trajectory; the development of bicultural identity, the feeling of being kikokushijo in Japanese society nowadays, and the impact of living overseas to future life trajectory. Three kikokushijos in the research demonstrate the different processes in their bicultural identity formation. Among the key factors in such a process are the family and school. The social contexts of the country where they resided play a greater role not in shaping their cultural identity, but in shaping their life trajectories, particularly, their career aspirations and future mobility. However, the research suggests that the discourse on kikokushijo paves the way to the idea of individualism and heterogeneity in Japanese society.

Keywords: identity questions, Japanese returnees, Japanese society, Kikokushijo

INTRODUCTION

Today's globalized economy has seen the increasing of free circulation of goods, people, and ideas. Some people move on an autonomous scheme while others migrate abroad due to work duties and assignments. These overseas work assignments are common practices in some countries, such as Japan, which is known for its job transfer system. In Japanese corporations, job transfer, referred to as *tenkin*, is often seen inseparable with career advancement. The *tenkin* system in the Japanese business world refers to the established business practice of various kinds of personnel transfer that require employees to move house (JILPT in Fujita, 2016) as the employees are no longer be able to commute to work. Following the age of transnational-globalized economy and the promotion of global human resources (*gurobaru jinzai*) within Japanese corporations, many employees are sent out abroad on long-term work assignments to the overseas branch.

According to the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, 2019), there are 1,39 million Japanese citizens who are living overseas as of October 2018, marking the highest number since records were first kept in 1968. These Japanese overseas residents include those living abroad in the long-term but on a temporary basis, such as students and company employees, and their family members and their children (MOFA, 2019). As of October 2016, according to MOFA (2016), there are approximately 79.000 young Japanese who are studying and living abroad on a long-term basis. Among this group of Japanese people, those who accompanied their working parents overseas are referred to as *kikokushijo* when they came back to Japan. *Kikokushijos*, according to MOFA (2017), are classified as native Japanese students who have lived abroad and gone to foreign educational institutions for at least one full academic year, and then have returned to Japan to reenter the Japanese educational system. In Japanese society, *kikokushijo* is a particular group of people who are often seen (Goodman, 1990) as a

relatively privileged one due to some reasons; their middle to the upper-middle-class background and their English skills.

The image of *kikokushijo* in Japanese society has been changing over the centuries. Initially regarded as suffering from social, educational, and occupational discrimination, *kikokushijo's* image has shifted to a new elite group that enjoys privileged access to positions of power in the Japanese government and business (Goodman, 1990). Others have seen these people have a strange mix of East and West traits, Japanese on the outside and a foreigner on the inside (Kanno, 2000).

One of the early period studies on *kikokushijo* is done by Fujiwara et al. (1985). They have categorized *kikokushijo* into three types. The first group consists of those who made efforts to adjust themselves to Japan despite all the consciousness on differences between the country of their ancestral origin and the host country. The second group is those who managed to adjust back to social life in Japan even though they do not necessarily make an effort on it. The third group is those who were very conscious that they are returnees, constantly feel like a stranger in the country of their ancestral homeland, and face problems in the process of re-adjustment and reintegrating.

According to a longitudinal study by Minoura (1992), among those who experience difficulties in the adjustment process, *kikokushijos* who spend their time overseas during the age period of nine to 15 are more likely to face such a situation since the period is when cultural identity formation takes place. Another factor that would affect the adjustment process is the location where these children grew up. *Kikokushijo*, who lives in Western culture, tends to assertive and direct in expressing their opinion (Minoura, 1988). The patterns of self-assertion (*jibun no dashikata*), and the relationship between the individual and the group (*kojin to shuudan no kankei*), according to her study, are the causes of problem in the interaction between *kikokushijos* and their peers. In this sense, Nae (2019) argues that *kikokushijos* might fall in the category of 'hidden immigrants' since they go unnoticed, among other Japanese.

Kikokushijo, as a social phenomenon in Japanese society, has further drawn scholars' interest. Many studies on *kikokushijo* to date have discussed a wide range of issues related to this group of people. The first group of studies on *kikokushijo*, on the one hand, tends to focus on the issues related to the resettlement process. It can be seen from the readjustment in Japan and the age in which they live abroad (Minoura, 1992), the reentry process of *kikokushijo* and peers' perceptions on them (Minoura, 1988), the adaptation process adjustment based on education style (Ozaki, 2011), and significant readjustment struggles in general (Yoshida et al., 2002). The other group of study, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on the identity formation, such as *kikokushijo* and their bilingual-bicultural identity (Kanno, 2000; 2002), identity and the sense of self (Sueda, 2014), the relationship among age, readjustment and cultural identity (Perez, 2016), *kikokushijos'* social identity (Enomoto, 2018), and *kikokushijos'* self-perception (Nae, 2019). In what way, the host country affects *kikokushijos'* identity development and their vision on the future; however, they remain under-examined. Therefore, the research attempts to focus on the analyses of how the host country where they grow up shaped their identity and future life trajectory. Two research questions are employed to frame the data collection and analysis: (1) how and to what extent does the host country where *kikokushijos* grow up shape their identity, and (2) how do *kikokushijos* perceive their current life and future life trajectory.

METHODS

The research applies a qualitative approach to examine Japanese returnees' life story and self-perception on their identity. The data are drawn from in-depth interviews with three *kikokushijos* students. The interview as the data collection method is chosen as it best fits the aim of the research, which is to understand *kikokushijos'* life story and how they perceive their identity and life trajectory.

The interviews are conducted in English and Japanese. The interviews are recorded, transcribed, and translated. The narratives of their life-story are carefully coded, categorized, and analyzed. For data analysis, the research follows what Sueda (2014) has done in making use of Scheff's (1997) 'part/whole' analysis to get a broader picture of globalization and social change by examining an individual's understanding of their identity in different social situations. The narratives of *kikokushijos'* life story and identity are therefore examined to reveal a substantial picture of contemporary Japanese society.

The *kikokushijos* are recruited through the researcher's personal social networks and introduction (*shoukai*). Due to the limited time to conduct the research, the researcher only manages to recruit three *kikokushijos*. All of them, by the time of the interview, are enrolled as university students in Tokyo. The in-depth interviews were carried out several times in May and June 2019 in a one-to-one interview format. Each interview lasts for 60 to 120 minutes.

All three *kikokushijos* have had their education outside of Japan for a certain period of time. At the same time, previous studies cited in the research have analyzed *kikokushijos* who had lived in North America (Kanno, 2000, 2002; Perez, 2016; Yoshida et al., 2002). However, the research includes the narratives of *kikokushijos*, who had lived in Singapore and North America. Singapore, as a host country, is chosen because of some considerations. First, Singapore is one of the popular locations in the region for expatriate assignments and, at the same time, still has a strong colonial legacy in its today's society (Hof, 2018). Second, Singapore remains to represent Asian tradition and culture, but at the same time have been

developed and modernized country, making it distinct to more liberal and individualistic Western societies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researchers introduce the three *Kikokushijos*; Ken, Hana, and Shin. First is Ken, the conservative. Born in Singapore in 1993, Ken spends more than two-thirds of his life in the country before relocating to his ancestors' homeland in 2010. His family migrated to Singapore in 1985 due to his parent's work assignment. At that period, many Japanese companies, including where his father worked for, opened overseas branches in Southeast Asia. In the 80s, Thailand and Singapore, and later Indonesia, were the main countries for investment.

During his childhood in Singapore, he went to local kindergarten and ordinary public elementary and secondary school with the Singaporean education system. Besides, he also attended a Japanese language school on the weekend, where he learned the Japanese language, culture, and norms, as well as how to interact with fellow Japanese nationals. That school was the place where he gained knowledge of Japanese society by watching videos or books about Japan. In addition, he also used to return to Japan every year during summer and stayed at his grandparents' house for one to two months. He finds this regular visit to Japan as a significant factor in exposure to Japan.

He describes himself as a more conservative and quiet person. Unlike his father and sister, whom he describes as more vocal, loud, and straightforward, he finds his personalities more similar to his mother. The relationship with his parents is described as normal. However, there is less time of sharing between him and his parents as he finds himself not really a sharing kind of person. He is more like asking question kind of person rather than sharing; he would ask his parents what they think about an issue. Even though he was born and socialized in Singaporean society and the education environment, since both of his parents are ethnically Japanese, he always identifies himself as a Japanese person first. He jokingly describes himself that on weekdays he was probably culturally Chinese Singaporean, but on the weekend, he was Japanese. He recalls that in his daily life in Singapore, he was more engaged with predominantly Chinese Singaporean friends and eating Chinese food.

He came back to Japan in December 2010 for senior high school while his family came back two years after. Following his resettlement in Japan, he did not really find any cultural problems. He recalls his memory:

"Because both my parents are Japanese, and I used to interact with Japanese people since young, mainly with school friends or my parents' business partners. I think cultural gap wasn't really there. I have heard stories of Japan being like this and coming to Japan to see,

aahhh, this is how Japan works, for example, the escalator stuff, waiting in line, those which are quite different from Singapore or SEA countries." (Ken, 26)

He finds that past exposure to Japan and the Japanese language and culture has formed his cultural expectation. It has helped him navigate himself during the process of readjustment in Japan.

Furthermore, he describes that Singapore's culture, in some ways, is similar to Tokyo's where norms are quite strong, and where failure in observing norms comes with punishment. In a broader sense, he feels that Singapore is still Asia and similar to Tokyo, making it easier for him in the process of acculturation to Japan. Among the cultural aspects that he noticed after coming back to Japan is the regional difference. He finds that even in Japanese culture, the divergence of how to follow norms in Osaka and Tokyo is quite different. After about eight years of living in Japan, he still makes efforts to understand the sociological and anthropological background of the country of his parent's homeland. He feels the necessity to understand certain norms and rules. As he thinks and perceives things more like the way Singaporean would do, he feels the need to understand more about the society where he lives now.

"I watch Bura Tamori, for example, I keep track to understand how Japanese society works. I don't really interact much with Japanese outside of school. The Japanese I do interact outside of school tend to be Japanese returnees, or half-kids. I don't interact with ordinary Japanese who are in the same age group. I do see the need to understand it a little bit more, and also, the unspoken rule and their perspective." (Ken, 26)

When the researcher asks about how living in Japan different from his life in Singapore, he comes up with an unusual answer, or perhaps different from how other *kikokushijos* would answer. He finds that Japan's political culture is more open, which makes it easier to talk about politics compared to Singapore, where it is more controversial to talk about politics, especially for domestic politics. His interest in politics is inseparable from what happens in Singapore and what he used to do at his young age. He used to read the newspaper in elementary school. His interest in politics is also what drives him to study politics in the current university.

The second *kikokushijo* is Hana, the assertive. A 22-years-old, Hana, is at the time of the interview, a fourth-year university student. Because of that, most of her days are now occupied with job-hunting activities. When the researcher first met her, the researcher found that Hana does represent the general image of *kikokushijos*; outgoing, assertive, and strong English skills. In fact, these traits often make other Japanese think that she is half or even non-Japanese. Born in Ehime Prefecture in 1997, she spent only two years in her parent's hometown before relocating to Singapore

due to her parent's employment.

In Singapore, she attended a local kindergarten and an international elementary school with the British education system until grade 4th before returning to Japan in 2006. Her mother decided to put her in an international school, hoping that her daughter to be able to learn English while they were living abroad. After returning to Japan, she still wanted to continue learning English, so she decided to attend a private school for middle and senior high school. In the university's second year, she also got a chance to study abroad in the UK for one academic year. The English exposure on her remains until today. In the university, most of her communities and social circles are those fellow returnees and those interested in English or cross-cultural communication. She describes her being comfortable speaking English as follows.

"I know my English isn't exactly perfect either, but because I know it's a language that makes me different with other Japanese people after all, I enjoy speaking English. If I have a chance to speak English, I would be happy to do so." (Hana, 22)

Even though English is her favorite language, Hana is able to speak Japanese very well. During her childhood in Singapore, she spoke in Japanese not only with her parents at home but also with a couple of Japanese friends living in the same apartment complex, whose she spent time a lot with. She also attended Japanese school in Singapore during her school summer break, where she learned the Japanese language and culture. However, as other *kikokushijos* would feel, Hana had kind of self-doubt of her Japanese skill, even, for now, she feels that her Japanese level is not to some extent sufficient for a 22 years old university student, especially for job hunting purpose. Even though she feels unconfident with her Japanese, she does love Japanese culture.

"But then when I was in junior high school, I was in Japanese calligraphy club, that's when I discovered how I enjoyed showing Japanese culture to other people. Creating a platform to show how Japanese culture is to other people. And that's when I realized how important my Japanese identity is to me as well." (Hana, 22)

When she was in middle school, four years after returning to Japan, she realized that she loves Japanese culture. She describes herself enjoy introducing Japanese culture to other people. Even when she was studying abroad in the UK, she keeps this trait. The trait that later influences her future career decision making.

The third *kikokushijo* is Shin, the easy-going. Among the *kikokushijos* whom the researchers interviewed, Shin is the youngest one. Relocated to California at the age of six, he recalls his experience of four years living in the US as a life-changing experience. His family migrated to the US due to his father's temporary work assignment. In the US, he attended a local public elementary school where everyone is a local, making himself the only foreigner there. His settlement process in the new environment did not take a long time. His parents told him that it only took two or three weeks for him to adapt and adjust to the new culture as well as to make new friends. Prior to the departure, the parents provided him and his sister English conversational private lessons with a native tutor.

During his childhood in the US, Shin found it easier for him to communicate in English with school friends and even with fellow Japanese whose parents worked for the same company as his father. At home, his parents always spoke to him in Japanese. His mother made him and his sister speak in Japanese as she believed that it would be more difficult for them to adjust when they come back to Japan if they only speak in English every single time. After he came back to Japan, in fact, it was also his mother who gave him full support to learn Japanese. He describes how tough his days back then were as a 5th-grade elementary school student to study very hard every single day for six months. It is in order to catch up with his lack of Japanese language skills, and in order to get prepared for school entrance exam as his parents wanted him to go to private school.

Apart from language adjustment, he experienced little difficulties in adjusting to the social environment. He recalls *nandarōne*. It is probably because of his easy-going personality, so it is kind of easy to make friends. Besides, he also loves playing sports, so it is really easy for the social relationship like the language part. The experience living in the US is what made him grew up to be more socially open, easy-going, and better to adapt to the new environment.

"Well, I am more aggressive kind of person. In a group, I listen to others' opinion. But, I also express my opinion and explain the reason. I don't really care about my opinion. I just say it. If I am too shy, other people will miss something from other perspective. About confronting others, *amari ki ni shinai* (I do not care so much)." (Shin, 19)

He finds it is important to express himself rather than being shy, worrying that his act would break the harmony. This way of thinking demonstrates a quality that differentiates him from other Japanese who do not grow overseas. His experience living abroad also drives him to study abroad in Canada when he was in senior high school.

From the life-story of the three *kikokushijos*, the research examines three areas that are related to how the host country where they grew up shape their identity and future life trajectory. These three areas are (1) the development of bicultural identity, (2) the feeling of being *kikokushijo* in Japanese society nowadays, and (3) the impact of living overseas to

future life trajectory.

The research finds that *kikokushijos*' identity formation process would be different depending on the timeline in their life. The place where they grow up to some extent affects their bicultural identity formation. During their life in the host country, the process is greatly influenced by external factors, such as what took place at home and school, and in a broader context, what happened in the society at that particular time. Following their settlement in Japan, however, those external factors play less-role as the *kikokushijos* themselves play an increasingly active role in shaping their own cultural identity.

In the host country, the parents, especially the mother, plays a significant role in shaping these *kikokushijos*' primary cultural identity. The mothers are the ones who teach the children the Japanese language, culture, and norms. In many cases, as Shin describes, the mother is the one who creates the Japanese atmosphere at home. Shin describes his house in the US.

> "Basically, in the house, it was a normal Japanese home, my mom went to a Japanese grocery store, and made misoshiru, she cooked rice. It was basically Japanese food everyday and very healthy. In other houses, we didn't take of shoes but in my house we ask them to take off the shoes." (Shin, 19)

In Shin's family, it is the language the parents speak and the food they eat, as well as the fact that the parents are ethnically full Japanese that constitutes the identity formation of the children. These all take place in the house, and therefore, the house is where they first recognized their identity and finally accept it. These all allow them to identify themselves as Japanese. Once the Japanese identity is recognized, these *kikokushijos* start to develop another form of identity, or the 'foreign' identity, mainly from socialization at school, which is different from what they have learned at home. It is because school is the second place where they start to develop other forms of identity. The type of school really matters and determines what kind of identity they will develop.

The exposures on identity formation from attending international schools would be different from those who attend the local schools. In the research, even though Ken and Hana both grow up in Singapore, they experience different exposure because of the type of school they attended. Hana, who goes to the international school in which the students are basically from all over the world, tends to be more 'western' in how she thinks and perceives things. On the other hand, Ken, who graduates from local elementary and secondary school in Singapore, develops more Asian-like personalities. Attending a local school means living in Singapore that allows him to get more access to socialize with local school friends where he internalizes his secondary or 'foreign' identity.

Furthermore, the contexts of the country where they live also play a great role in shaping not only the cultural identity but also preferences in identity itself. Ken describes what he loves about Singapore, the country where he was born and grew up.

> "Singapore is more dynamics. Many changes are occurring every few years so buildings change, policy changes, it's very stimulating mentally. So many people are very driven, so competition is there. I do like competition. People in Japan are more laid back, I think." (Ken, 26)

Therefore, the formation of cultural identity is inseparable from the socio-political context of the country where *kikokushijo* lives. Following their return to Japan, these *kikokushijos* tend to realize that their foreign identity develops much stronger than their Japanese identity. As these people have had heard about Japan and gained some know-how on Japanese culture and norms, their return to Japan, in fact, serves as a cultural reconfirmation of what they have expected before. Furthermore, after returning to Japan, they start to consciously put some efforts in adapting and adjusting to the new environment of their ancestor' homeland. These *kikokushijos* would later experience a gradual shift in their identities, as Kanno (2002) suggests, from a polarized to a balance between two cultures, allowing them to choose parts of each culture that fit their value. *Kikokushijos*, in the research, feel differently about their bicultural identity, that they want it to be balanced, as what Shiono (2014)'s suggestion on the importance of balancing the identities.

> "Even right now I do feel like two identities exist in me. I am sure it's like half-half. In term of language, how I think or if you look at it closely it would be different, but overall, it's like 50:50. I don't feel I favorite this identity over other, and I want it to be 50:50. I can't change my nationality and blood line, unless I am married somebody outside, but still I am 100% Japanese in term of nationality and blood." (Hana, 22)

Identity is basically something attached to themselves, and it is also something difficult to change. Bicultural identity for *kikokushijos* is not only about choosing which parts of each culture that fit their value but also how they could make use of their identity to navigate themselves in social life. They value their one identity as the other.

The research finds that all students perceive their status of being *kikokushijo* in a positive way. They describe how they see themselves and their feeling of being *kikokushijo* as following.

> "Living in the US for 4 years made up my personality now. I think I am more foreign than a normal Japanese people. In discussion, I speak up, I say what I want to say most of the time. *Kūki wo yomu mo* (reading the air),

I do it. But I think it is more important to say, express my opinion. A lot of Japanese identity is part of me. I am 70% Japanese, most of the time is Japanese. I live in my own pace. […] and about living in the US, it was huge part of my life because if I didn't live in US for four years at that time, I wouldn't be able to speak English like this for sure. During my life, I've been speaking English and my English skills have helped me a lot." (Shin, 19)

Firstly, they see living abroad as an experience that has changed their life, made up their personality, and shaped the way they perceive things. It also what makes them able to speak a foreign language. In the research, all the *kikokushijos* grow up in English-speaking countries, which provide them with an environment to speak and master the language naturally. The English skill is seen as an advantage and important cultural capital that distinguishes them from other Japanese. Furthermore, being *kikokushijo* in this sense also means that they are different and unique compared to other 'ordinary' Japanese.

"I am more a positive person, I never thought that being different is bad. But I do sometimes kind of sense that awkwardness or uncomfortableness surrounds me. Especially, when you're in elementary school. If you're different, you might get bullied. I didn't experience that, nothing too bad. […] I think it's more about being unique rather than being different. In a positive way. I have never tried to hide it." (Hana, 22)

Being *kikokushijo* means that they are different from other Japanese who are considered more 'homogeneous'. It often comes with the challenge of being different. Hana recalled her experience when she needed to adjust herself from an international school in Singapore to a Japanese public school when the first time she returned to Japan. It is not how people live or lifestyle in Japan that surprised her, but the set of rules they have in a Japanese school, such as classroom cleaning by the students. Likewise, the Japanese language also made her struggling in the beginning before she eventually managed to catch up. After 13 years of living in Japan, she could confidently say, "I like Japan. I am proud of being Japanese. I like my Japanese identity. It is the place where I was born after all." In a similar tone, Ken also feels comfortable being kikokushijo.

"I feel comfortable as being Japanese who grew up overseas, I think. Some Japanese have this complex of being *kikokushijo*. They do face obstacle or prejudice by being Japanese returnees. But I think, that's actually positive for me. It gives me skills, perspectives that Japanese person would otherwise not have so I do feel value in that identity. I do feel comfortable being a *kikokushijo*." (Ken, 26)

Despite all of the confusion and mixed feeling of being *kikokushijo*, it is what makes him stronger. Being a *kikokushijo* is indeed seen in a positive way as it gives him a valuable skill set that not every Japanese folk would have. However, even though all the students perceive their status of being *kikokushijo* in a positive way, the case of Ken demonstrates complicated feelings that *kikokushijo*, in general, might have.

"Singapore nurtured me so it where I grew up and where I got my education so I got to thank for it. It has helped me a lot. […] Japan is where my parents grew up and where my nationality is. Also, where my relatives are, so Japan sort of, I mean, both feel like my home but both do not feel like home at the same time. I didn't grew up in Japan, didn't grew up around Japanese people grew up in Japan, so I still feel outsider in both countries, the problem I still feel like an outsider in Singapore maybe the historical memory case, and the ethnic background. I am not really part of Singapore's mainstream." (Ken, 26)

In Ken's case, 18 years living in Singapore, it argues more than enough to establish a quite strong emotional feeling to the country. During the interview, the researcher could sense his tendency towards his country of birth. He always uses 'we' when referring to Singapore as a country or Singaporean while he keeps using 'they' when referring to Japan or Japanese people.

After living in Japan for about eight years, he has not yet felt Japan as his home. He finds that the fact that he does not grow up in Japan around Japanese people becomes Ken's influential factor in affecting how he perceives a country as his home. He experiences what others *kikokushijo* might do, the feeling like an outsider. The context in Singapore is also quite interesting to examine further. As a multi-racial country, Singapore uses CMIO (Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others) system to categorize its people depending on its race. This racial system puts Ken in the 'others' category, which eventually makes him a double minority. Likewise, the historical memory of the wartime period also to some extent hinders the integration of Japanese people, including Ken, into Singaporean society.

Even though each of the *kikokushijos* in the research aspires different pathways regarding their own life trajectory, however, it finds that each life trajectory is shaped by their bicultural identity of being *kikokushijo*. Ken, who describes himself as a conservative person, aspires to work in Japan as a salaryman in a non-Japanese company.

"I think same with other Japanese returnees, I still feel some hesitation to enter Japanese company. I am not so familiar with interacting with Japanese people who grew up in Japan. Even though we try gaining information and

try to conform, there are still some gaps. That's one issue. Cultural practices here, you do about doing unnecessary work, or nomikai you should go to but do don't have to go to, such kind of practices. And my Japanese isn't perfect yet so maybe international corporations are better. If the situation is entering the Japanese company or become unemployed, then Japanese companies are okay. Japanese salaryman is my preference." (Ken, 26)

Regarding his career preference, Ken has two typical issues that other *kikokushijos* and non-Japanese candidates would feel; the language and the working culture issue. As a *kikokushijo*, he is really conscious of his lack of Japanese skills. He feels what other *kikokushijos* might feel; he is worried that his Japanese language is insufficient for working in a Japanese company with stick Japanese working culture. Another aspect that he emphasizes is the purpose (*mokuteki*) of working in the company. He would only find a job in a company where he thinks he would have a clear purpose. He even promises himself that he would quit the job if he ends up only doing a simple job, like preparing copies or making PowerPoint slides.

Furthermore, Hana also believes in the importance of having a 'purpose' when looking for a career. She describes in detail her aspiration to work for a Japanese company in the future.

"I didn't really look for international company. So the reason why I focus Japanese companies is that I still proud of my Japanese identity after all, I still want to use English as well to connect with people internationally. I am proud of my background so I want to bring Japanese stuff abroad to other countries. Which is why I am not focusing a lot on the manufacturing companies, I don't focus on what they manufacture, but, as long as they have the connection with the overseas, I want to be able to work really hard and get good status in something." (Hana, 22)

Her career aspirations come from her background as a *kikokushijo*. She is going to make use of not only her 'foreign cultural capital' but also her 'Japanese identity and cultural capital' in supporting the business of Japanese companies overseas. She feels proud if she could make use of her both cultural capital for work. Career aspirations of these *kikokushijos* reflect their identity as a *kikokushijos* who have a bicultural identity and also might indicate the career choice and preferences of Japanese young people.

Besides shaping different aspirations of future work and career preferences, their bicultural identity also paves the way to the different pathways of international mobility.

"If there is an opportunity in Singapore, then maybe yes. Because that's where I am most familiar with. Cultural gap is not big. I think cultural gap is important, even in working environment cultural issue always do come up. Norms. […] Other countries, Southeast Asia in general is okay. […] In Singapore, I lived near the sea so the whole tropical environment yet being very modernized is really good. You can have the comfort of a society and enjoy the comfort of tropical weather, or the tropical feeling. Singapore's urban landscape is actually better than Tokyo. Tokyo is quite chaotic." (Ken, 26)

Similar to Ken, Hana also loves to go back to the place she used to live. She wants to return to Singapore someday if there is an opportunity. She also opens to the option to return to London, where she studied as an exchange student. She confidently said, "When they ask where I want to work outside of Japan, I always say Singapore!" The different aspiration is told by Shin. As a second-year university student, he has not yet decided on his career path. However, he hopes someday that his future company would send him abroad so his children would experience what he has had.

"Working in Japan is fine, but I really appreciate my dad bringing me to the US when I was a child, so if I become a dad, I want to give my kids that kind of opportunity to live in an English-speaking country. So, basically working in Japan, but a couple of years working in the US, but not constantly working in a foreign country. Well, English speaking country." (Shin, 19)

Even though all *kikokushijos* in the research desire international mobility where they would be able to go back and forth, they hope that their retirement and their final days would be in Japan. Everyone sees the importance of family and relatives when it comes to their final days. The fact that all family members and relatives, who are all Japanese people, live and reside in Japan make up their decision to end their life in the country of their ancestors' homeland.

CONCLUSIONS

The present research has discussed Japanese returnees' experience by emphasizing how the host country becomes part of their life and affects their identity development as well as their vision of the future. Three *kikokushijos* in the research demonstrate different process in their bicultural identity formation. Among the key factors in such process are the family and school. Unlike students who go study abroad without living family around, the condition of expatriate families that allows *kikokushijos* spend sufficient time abroad with their nuclear family and live at a same house eventually serves as the platform that allows them to internalize their core primary identity as a Japanese person. The social life at schools, on the

other hand, allows these people to develop 'foreign' secondary identity that paves the way to the complex identity formation of *kikokushijo* in the future.

Even though these *kikokushijos* received certain influences from such external factors that structure and shape their bicultural identity, these people eventually play a more active role in shaping their own cultural identity. They demonstrate more agency in navigating their bicultural identity following their return to Japan. They consciously put some efforts to adapt to the new environment of their ancestors' homeland. Their return to Japan, in fact, serves as a cultural reconfirmation of what they have expected.

The social contexts of the country where they resided play a greater role not in shaping their cultural identity, but in shaping their life trajectories, particularly, their career aspirations and future mobility. The research argues that each life trajectory is shaped by their bicultural identity of being *kikokushijo*, meaning that their identity plays a significant role in their career and work decisions. Moreover, their identity also shapes their desire for transnational mobility where they would be able to go back and forth to the country where they used to live in. Despite having the desire for international mobility, they do hope that their retirement and their final days would be in Japan and around their beloved family.

For *kikokushijos* as Japanese returnees, it is somehow they proud of. It indeed includes some complex feelings and often comes with the challenge of being different and feeling like an outsider. These people, however, always perceive their status of being *kikokushijo* in positive ways. As they think that living abroad is a life-changing experience, they see its value because of that experience. They could acquire important cultural capital that distinguishes them from other Japanese, and they see it as advantages.

As part of Japanese society, *kikokushijos* occupy a unique position. It reminds of what Goodman suggests that the way people see *kikokushijos* demonstrates two groups of people. First is the group that supports traditional concepts of groups, consensus, homogeneity, and 're-Japanization'. The other group supports the idea of individualism and heterogeneity in Japanese society and sees them as valuable assets. However, the research suggests that the discourse around *kikokushijos* is more relevant with the latter group, particularly in today's social context where such themes as multiculturalism, heterogeneity, and multicultural co-existence (*tabunka kyousei*). They are getting stronger in the discourse on not only Japanese society but also in Japanese corporations. In this context, *kikokushijos* might fall in the category of 'hidden immigrants', along with Japanese Brazilian returnees, might be valid to some extent since they go unnoticed among other Japanese. The present research follows those who support the idea of individualism and heterogeneity in Japanese society, suggest, and emphasize the call for more understanding of these people situations and allow them to shine in every field for a more multicultural Japanese society.

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