地理學報　第五十七期：55-70 (2009)
JOURNAL OF GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCE (57) : 55-70 (2009)

新加坡的日本女性海外工作者與日本人力招募公司的活動之探討

Japanese Women's Work Overseas and the Activities of Recruitment Agencies in Singapore

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Abstract

Japanese corporations are significantly represented in the rapidly growing international business center of Singapore. This paper examines the processes by which Japanese women are recruited as support staff for secretarial, clerical, receptionist and related work by such corporations. It identifies why these women have been attracted to such positions, emphasizing the changes in labor practices in Japan since the 1990s that have made employment there less secure. The paper then turns to the key role of labor recruitment agencies in the processes of identifying, selecting and training candidates, emphasizing the ways in which they use websites to conduct their business.

Keywords: Labor recruitment, clerical workers, women, Japanese agencies, Singapore.

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摘　要

新加坡是成長快速的國際商務中心，而日本企業在其中具有顯著的代表性。本文探討這些日本企業招募日本女性到新加坡從事秘書、行政職員、接待員及相關工作的過程，並分析吸引這些女性任職的因素爲何，以及在本研究中強調自 1990 年代以來日本就業不穩定之勞動條件變化。本文也進一步探討人力招募機構在辨認、選擇、培訓職務申請者的過程中所扮演的角色，以及如何利用網路來經營其業務。

關鍵字：勞工招募、行政職員、女性、日本仲介、新加坡

Introduction

Economic globalization is a powerful factor in expanding the international mobility of workers of many different kinds. Some movements are voluntary, others involuntary. Such transnational labor flows have been classified by Yeoh and Chang (2001) as including the transnational business class of highly mobile, highly skilled professional, managerial and entrepreneurial elite, a large group of low-waged immigrants filling unskilled and semi-skilled niches in the urban service economy, and performing artists who enliven the international cultural and artistic scene for urban residents attracted by cosmopolitan ambiences. Yeoh and Chang (2001) also pointed out that key destinations for these workers are global cities, the “most powerful manifestations of internationalization of capital in the world space economy” (Beaverstock, 1996: 424), distinguished by a high concentration of corporate headquarters, advanced telecommunication and R&D infrastructure, and international financial services. They contain disproportionately large clusters of high-waged professional and managerial expatriate workers (Beaverstock, 1996). These skilled professional and managerial elite depend upon assistants and support persons, such as bilingual secretaries, who may be local or internationally mobile workers, especially in the global cities where English is not the native language. Thus globalization induces not only movement by skilled professionals but also a substantial flow of workers in supporting positions as well as offering employment for local workers. The identification and recruitment of both categories of workers involves diverse mechanisms. To secure highly-paid elite workers in, for example, global accountancy firms, strategies of secondment, transfer, or exchange procedures, are implemented (Beaverstock, 1996). Since advancement for these workers also can involve gaining international experience, an important industry of intermediary “headhunters” has developed, to bring together employers and potential employees (Faulconbridge *et al*., 2008). In this paper, I go beyond recruitment of the elite to examine how such intermediary agencies are involved in the recruitment of support workers, a subject neglected in research which has tended to focus either on unskilled workers such as women working in domestic service or men in construction (see, for example, Momsen, 1999; Huang and Yeoh, 2003) or highly-skilled professionals, though the latter research has not paid much attention to women

(for exceptions see, for example, Fechter, 2008; Kofman, 2000; Willis and Yeoh, 2008). As a case study, I expand the literature by examining agencies that match Japanese women clerical workers with global businesses operating in Singapore.

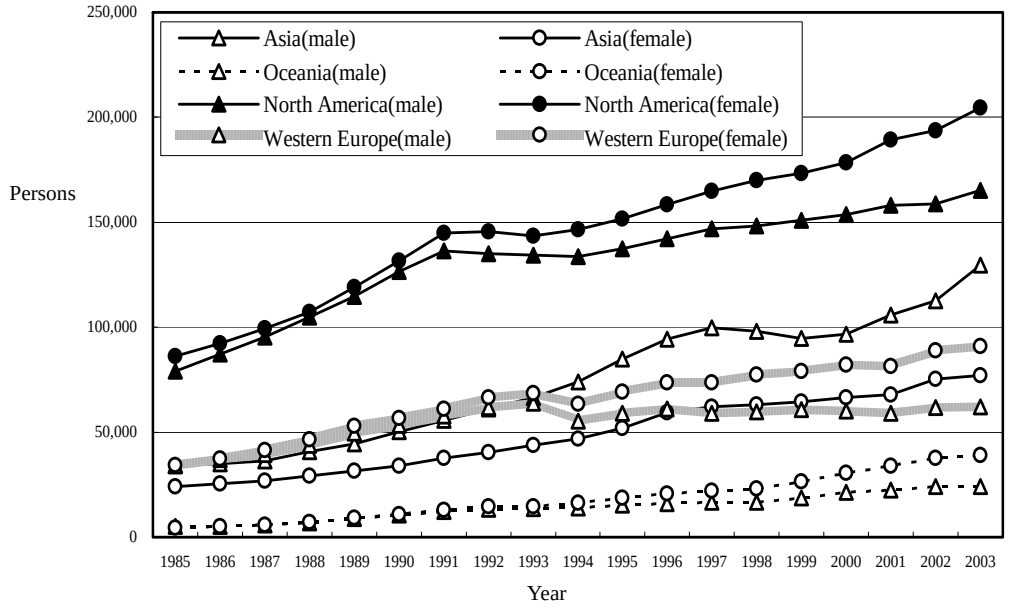
Singapore serves as an example of a rapidly growing business center. Strategically located as a regional hub for East Asia, it offers opportunities for short-term business travel to Jakarta, Hong Kong, and other regional international financial centers. Such international experience is seen as important for career development of professionals while enabling them to accumulate local knowledge (Beaverstock, 2002). Staff are thus posted to Singapore in order to fulfill corporate business strategies, develop international human resources and also to train local staff. When it comes to the practicalities of everyday home and social life, these expatriates, however, are disembedded from Singaporeans in the "global" city.

Japanese businesses have been significant within the growing international hub of Singapore. In the 1970s, over two hundred Japanese companies moved production offshore in South East Asia, with further direct investment in the 1980s and 1990s in manufacturing industries (Thang *et al*., 2002). There were about 3,000 Japanese companies located in Singapore in 2007, involving many Japanese expatriates. Japanese continue to constitute one of the largest expatriate communities in the city-state.

Japanese Migration and the International Labor Recruitment of Women

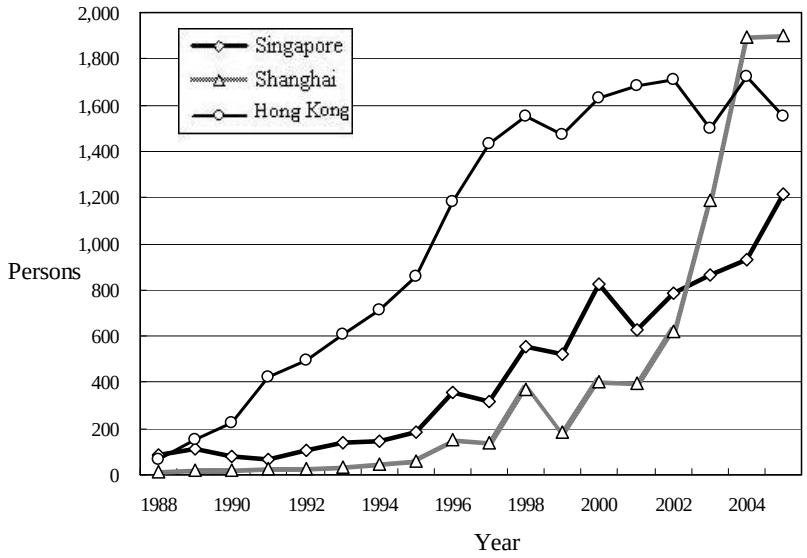
The movement of Japanese to Singapore, and especially movement by women, has to be understood in relation to both overall patterns of migration from Japan and to conditions at home as well as those in Singapore. Since the mid-1990s, overseas employment of Japanese has increased rapidly both to North American and Asian countries (Fig. 1), with the numbers of Japanese women in foreign countries exceeding that of Japanese men. Japanese women are aggressive in seeking overseas education and employment. The number of Japanese women working in Asian mega-cities especially is increasing remarkably (Fig. 2). Indeed, several recruitment agencies have reported that, over eighty percent of registrations on their web sites are Japanese women.

Underlying this gendered pattern are increasing and diversified needs for workers in office procedures, service sectors, and customer service to support Japanese expatriates. In particular, the demand from Japanese companies is for more staff members who are bilingual in Japanese and English. Given the gender division of occupations within firms, these supporting positions in Japanese firms have required hiring Japanese women. In this way, globalization influences Japanese women's work. In their research on Japanese women's work and their experiences in Singapore, Thang *et al*. (2002; 2004; 2006) showed that Singapore and Hong Kong emerged as two of the top destinations for Japanese women seeking employment overseas. Human resource recruitment agencies in Japan recorded huge upsurges in the number of women applying for jobs in these locations, and by 1994 at least one major recruitment firm had established a profitable business in career



Source: Annual Reports of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas.

Fig. 1. Japanese Nationals Overseas.



Source: Annual Reports of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas.

Fig. 2. The Number of Japanese Women Employed by Private Companies.

seminars catering to women looking for job opportunities in the region (Thang *et al*., 2006). Recruitment agencies play a major role in facilitating emigration. According to Thang *et al*. (2004), one of the famous agencies had more than 14,000 Japanese registrants by early 2002, 60 percent of whom were female. The women in their study were representative of Japanese single women working overseas. Most obtained their

jobs either through classified advertisements, recruitment agencies specializing in placements for Japanese or personal recommendations from friends already working in Singapore. Some had signed up with recruitment agencies in Singapore and attended job interviews while vacationing, but the overwhelming majority were local hires. They held full-time positions, usually as secretaries or in administrative occupations in sales, marketing, and teaching positions. These jobs usually required Japanese language proficiency (Thang *et al*., 2002).

While most of the Japanese men working abroad are sent by their companies, most Japanese women working in foreign countries go abroad as local hires on a voluntary basis. In another research study (Nakazawa *et al*., 2008) we interviewed Japanese women who were working in Singapore about their motivations, experiences, and future prospects. During these interviews we asked about their sources of information and learned that most had registered with several recruitment agencies and used their job information. The study highlighted the extent to which job seeking depends on the information provided by recruitment agencies and that recruitment agencies' activities influenced the placements of Japanese women. The role of the agencies is especially important because most of the job seekers have little information about labor markets and working conditions in foreign countries. In the remainder of this paper we analyze why Japanese women are attracted to work abroad and how the agencies recruitment processes function.

The Background to Seeking Overseas Work

Since 1990, the employment situation in Japan has deteriorated. Employment systems have changed drastically. The most remarkable change has been in increasing the flexibility in the labor market and of work conditions. Many Japanese companies have tended to end the established practices of a lifetime employment system and the seniority system. Regular employment is changed for nonpermanent employment which includes part-time employees, "dispatched workers"[1] and temporary staff. In 2006, nonpermanent employees represented over 30 percent of all the working population. This phenomenon has had obvious and serious effects on young people and women who make up most of the nonpermanent employees. They are in a fragile position and are afraid of their unstable condition in Japan. It is recognized as a social problem that there are increasing numbers of "*freeters*", a Japanese-English word which means young, freelance, part-time worker and "NEET" which means young people "Not in Education, Employment nor Training". Additionally, this problem influences late marriage and low fertility. Many young people who face instability of employment avoid marriage and childbearing.

The next remarkable change in the Japanese labor market is the rapid progress of feminization. Both the ratio and volume of employed working women have been increasing since the 1970s. However, this has not been accompanied by the social advancement of women or equality of pay between the sexes. In international comparisons, Japan has not even made the top 100 countries on indicators of the status of women. While the number of professional or skilled women is increasing in Japan, so is the number who are part-timers and temporary workers. Because women are viewed as having the role of facilitating temporary adjustments of

demands in the labor market, they do not have options and take what jobs are available. The result is that economic disparity between elite women and others is increasing in Japan. Further, many unskilled women suffer from unstable and low-paid work and women are easily laid off in times of economic recession. In any case, the young generation in Japan must adjust to the new reality of the job market. It is difficult to find jobs they would prefer, and it is especially more difficult for young women to obtain stable and attractive jobs. Thus some young Japanese cannot avoid taking unstable and nonpermanent jobs. As a strategy for identifying a wider range of jobs, in recent years many of the young generation have turned to job-information magazines and websites. Some of these sources specialize in publishing opportunities for employment overseas, as do some of the job information websites. In the current context, it is becoming more common and acceptable to choose a foreign country as a place of employment, and to select “working abroad” as a personal choice, rather than only in response to an employer’s assignment.

In the context of the severe Japanese economic recession of the 1990s, the growing numbers of highly-educated and highly efficient women found it particularly difficult to secure desirable and regular employment. The boom of Japanese women working overseas is considered to have been initiated in 1994-1995 when the topic of Japanese working in Hong Kong received considerable attention in the media, reported as a way of coping with the severe employment situation in Japan. Hong Kong was an attractive destination because of the relative ease of getting a working visa under the United Kingdom’s policies and because Hong Kong is an English-speaking area. This contrasts with many Western countries which only grant working visas to workers with special skills or expertise. By comparison, in Singapore, where the government seeks non blue-collar workers from foreign countries in order to develop its position in the global economy, graduates from four-year colleges can secure a working visa with relative ease.[2] Like Hong Kong, Singapore is also attractive as an English-speaking country. Moreover, many Japanese-owned companies with overseas operations have tried to cut their costs by reducing the number of business people stationed overseas and to switch to local employees or locally-hired Japanese. An added attraction of Singapore for Japanese, and especially for women, is that it is seen as a secure and safe environment where they can live near expatriate families.

As noted above, in previous research with Japanese women employed in Singapore (Nakazawa *et al*., 2008), we learned that most of them had secured their positions by using the websites of recruitment agencies. Additionally, interviews with recruitment agencies indicated that over 80 percent of Japanese applicants are young women. Given this finding, it is important to examine in more details the role of these agencies in recruiting Japanese women for employment in Singapore.

The Activities of Recruitment Agencies

The recent international growth of labor-related producer services is remarkable, reflecting the ways in which globalization has induced the promotion of outsourcing of personnel affairs. Before exploring the roles

and practices of Japanese recruiting agencies in this milieu, we briefly explain how they are structured. In Japan, they are divided into two categories: temporary staff employment agencies regulated by the Law for Worker Dispatching Undertakings and recruitment agencies which are fee-charging employment placement bodies matching those seeking workers and those seeking jobs that are regulated by the Employment Security Law. The latter are called “personnel introduction businesses” from the perspective of employers and “job placement businesses” from that of the applicants. As job turnover has been increasing, the activities of these agencies have also expanded. Although the business license (qualification) differs between these two types of agencies, both categories tend to operate jointly due to recent deregulation. Review of the business performance on the web sites of recruitment agencies dealing with both temporary staffing and recruiting indicates that most of their revenues were from temporary staffing. Though recruiting brings in only about 10-30 percent of the worker’s annual income, temporary staff workers are employed at the amount of nearly half of the contract price, with the agency gaining about the other half of the contract fee from client companies. By comparison, headhunting, which introduces a talented-person for a managerial position, brings in a referral fee comparable to the person’s annual income. The higher the job grade, the higher ratio an agency charges as referral fee. Interviews with a recruitment agency indicated that introducing such an executive class person can yield higher profit.

The service menu of recruitment agencies is follows:

1) Sales sector: the collection of job information from client companies. Most agencies assign male workers to this position. However, much job information is obtained directly from the client.

2) Consultation sector: the matching of job offers and job seekers. This work is seen as better suited for women, requiring delicate speaking skills and friendly attitudes. Thus there is quite a high ratio in women working in such recruitment agencies.

3) Staff education/training (in-house training): Many Japanese companies have their own training programs. However some companies depend on the agencies to learn local business and trade customs.

4) Others: translation service etc., since businessmen in many Japanese companies in Singapore depend on bilingual translators, there are many job offers for such positions.

The Changing Conditions of Business for Recruitment Agencies

When recruitment was a component of the national Public Employment Security Offices (job placement offices) in Japan, it was limited to dealing with 29 kinds of job descriptions, including nurses, but with deregulation in 1999, Japanese firms changed their employment systems from regular to temporary workers or part-timers. Also in recent years, recruitment of white-collar workers engaging in clerical and engineering work has been increasing. Additionally, the recruiting business has diversified into such areas as increased mid-career recruitment and job change, headhunting, and reemployment support for the middle-aged or older workers. These changes reflect the changes described above in the labor market in Japan which destroyed long-standing Japanese employment practices and caused unstable employment. Thus we can say that the

growth of human resource business has been caused by the liberalization of labor market which is influenced by economic globalization.

As the result of the deregulations and liberalization of practices, the Japanese labor market has become unstable and labor mobile. With increasing flexibility, the demand for job information has expanded as workers seek more stable companies and higher income jobs. Concurrently, job information becomes more and more important, and both job seekers and employees desire more attractive and more reliable information. Thus they have come to depend on recruitment agencies because they have huge banks of job information and also personal information on job seekers. As a result, the human resource business is growing rapidly. The business is facilitated by the ability of the agencies to collect and store information on opportunities on web sites and to offer electronic registration to job seekers and their credentials. Internet recruiting is used to target relatively skilled workers including managers, professionals, and other skilled workers. Firms explained the use of Internet recruiting as a substitute for what appears to be the norm for hiring skilled workers in a tight labor market. Employers did not view Internet postings as a substitute for referral-based recruiting which however remains the preferred hiring strategy because of its low cost, speed and reliability (Niles and Hanson, 2003). Rather, employers used the Internet medium narrowly to recruit for relatively high-level positions which are usually advertised region-wide because they are harder to fill locally than lower level positions for which many more people could be considered qualified (Niles and Hanson, 2003).

In Japan, as in other countries, however, internet recruiting is increasingly accompanied by diversification of services. Agencies are roughly divided into two groups: one includes foreign-affiliated companies, such as "*Manpower*" and "*Adecco*", the latter based in Switzerland and one of the best known international human resources companies; and the other includes independents such as "*Recruit Ablic*", "*Tempstaff*", "*Pasona*", "*JAC*", "*Staff Service*", and "*Intelligence*". Some temporary staff employment agencies have been established to meet their leading parent company's demand for human resources. Some manufacturers are securing workers through subsidiary temporary staff employment agencies founded for saving or cutting personnel costs. Such a trend has been seen in all fields: some universities, for example, have a sudden surge in the number of non-regular clerical staff employed by the university-established temporary staff agency.

Recruitment Agencies and Their Websites

Niles and Hanson (2003) point out that employers use the Internet strategically to enhance the volume of applications when the labor market is tight and to segment the applicant pool when the market loosens and the number of resumes is overwhelming. The Internet is a potentially revolutionary technology, offering the possibility of increased access to information by greatly reducing the time and costs of transferring it over distance and of sending information to many places simultaneously. Online job-postings expand the occupational opportunities and geographic scale of the labor market for job seekers. Advertising jobs on the

Internet can be a way to extend job opportunities to all qualified workers and to expand the social and geographic diversity in an employer's applicant pool. Niles and Hanson (2003) also remind us that online job postings bypass the constraints of grounded social relations, for both employees and employers, by giving people direct access to job information that they would not otherwise learn about. The Internet has potential to provide job seekers with information with which they could improve their livelihoods through access to better jobs and to provide employers with information about better qualified workers.

Table 1 shows the list of recruitment agencies operating in the Singapore market. This table is compiled from the job information sites. They were *"Space ALC"* (http://home.alc.co.jp/db/owa/cr_agency2_src) of ALC Press in Japan and from the web site "*Singapore oyakudachi jouhou*" (http://www.singaweb.net/) which translates as "Useful Singapore web for Japanese." It shows attractive job information for Japanese women and is popular in the Japanese community in Singapore, used by many Japanese residents and visitors. Its main business content relates to recruiting and placing Japanese and Japanese-speakers. Most of its recruiting business relates to temporary staffing. Although there are many recruitment agencies in Singapore, few domestic Singaporean or other foreign agencies are included in this site. On a website "Useful Singapore Web" (http://www.singaweb.net/) which Singaporean residents often use, ten companies were posted on the "recruiting" page. Among these, five were of Japanese origin, two were local Singaporean recruitment agencies (one of which was undertaking recruitment service specializing in the Japanese and South Koreans), two foreign-affiliated companies, and one of Malaysian origin. A major foreign-affiliated recruitment agent, "*Adecco Personnel PTE Ltd.*", had 15 branch offices in Singapore, one of which is recruiting for the Japanese. "*J-Power Consultancy*" and "*Y. N. Career Consultants PTE Ltd.*" have become independent of major Japanese recruitment agencies. According to the founders of these two companies, a recruitment agency was an easy industry to become independent when one had information and know-how (technique).

The agencies on the websites maintained minimum registration requirements in Singapore: a college degree, over five years working experience, office automation (OA) skills, and English proficiency with a TOEIC score 650-700. These requirements are reflect the defined standards of the Singapore government. Good abilities in making arrangements are also required of Japanese women. Many Japanese companies believe that Japanese women can make better arrangements for Japanese business men. Some agencies request only that job seekers express strong enthusiasm for working abroad. These requirements support the interpretation that it is easier to obtain a work visa in Singapore than in other countries such as the U. S., U. K. or Australia which are also attractive for Japanese. The Singaporean government adopts an immigration policy which makes positive efforts to absorb skilled, high-educated, professional workers and managers in order to build up a "global city".

Table 1. Outline of Recruitment Agencies on the Website.

Company name	Capital base	Customer's rate of Japanese companies	Business contents
Adecco Personnel Pte. Ltd.	Switzerland	60%	Recruiting and human power dispatching Japanese and Japanese speaker
J Power Consultancy	Japanese	80%	Recruiting and human power dispatching for Japanese, in-service training for local staff (business manner on-the-job training, Telephone skills training, translation and interpretation, and business consulting
N-Quest Pte. Ltd.	Malaysia	90%	Recruiting, EP representative service, translation/interpretation, account representative service
Pasona Singapore Pte. Ltd.	Japanese	60%	Recruiting Japanese and local
PeopleSearch Pte. Ltd.	Singapore	60%	Recruiting Japanese and Korean, Japanese speaker and Korean speaker scout (searching human resources)
Salesbridge Search & Recruitment	Singapore	80%	Recruiting and human power dispatching
Staff Service (Singapore) Pte. Ltd.	Japanese	No information	Recruiting and human power dispatching
Tempstaff (Singapore) Pte. Ltd.	Japanese	70%	Recruiting and human power dispatching for Japanese and alien companies, like equivalent level of Japan Human resource management service
Y. N. Career Consultants Pte. Ltd.	Japanese	70%	Recruiting and human power dispatching, human affairs outsource, translation/interpretation, education training

Source: http://www.singaweb.net/, http://home.alc.co.jp/db/owa/cr_agency2_src, interview and each agencies' web site.
Accessed Date: 28th April 2006.

In addition to these websites listing opportunities through multiple agencies, many Japanese or foreign major recruitment agencies also have branches or establish subsidiaries in Singapore. The network of recruitment agencies included on each agency's website is linked with the area of activity of Japanese companies. They depend on Japanese customers and have significant networks, for example, "*Pasona Singapore*" has a network in Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, China, Taiwan, U. S. A., Canada and U. K. "*JAC*" and "*Tempstaff*" also have a similar pattern. These agencies' networks span Southeast Asia and China, the territory of Japanese companies. Indeed, the recruitment agencies and Japanese companies have a close relationship. Foreign-affiliated agencies have similar pattern with branches in the U. S. and European countries. Singaporean's domestic agencies and non-Japanese agencies, however, have no network in Japan.

"*Space ALC*" (http://home.alc.co.jp/db/owa/cr_agency2_src) of ALC Press in Japan is almost the same as the web site of "*Singapore oyakudachi jouhou*". Though recruitment agencies tend to advertise in several web sites, Japanese job seekers prefer the sites of famous agencies because they value the reliability of the web site and also of these recruitment agencies. Reliability is especially important in seeking a foreign job. Most of these recruitment agencies introduced more than half of their registrants to Japanese companies. The smaller the business scale of an agency, the higher the rate of introduction to Japanese companies. This reflects the economies of profit to the agency for placements whereby profit depends on the payments of high wage workers which yield a better profit than placements of local Singaporeans.

In addition to the agencies listed in Table 1, "*Hello Singapore 2005*", the Yellow Pages, listed seven other agencies used by many Japanese living in Singapore including "*Recruit Ablic*" and also two independent recruitment agencies which are represented by Japanese presidents. These recruitment agencies also advertise for Japanese and Japanese-speaking Singaporeans.

Activity Areas of Recruitment Agencies

The "recruiting" page of "*Useful Singapore Web*" (http://www.singaweb.net/), used by many Japanese in Singapore, reveals that major recruitment agencies mainly targeting Japanese were cooperating and placing employees in jobs across Asia through their branch networks (Table 2). The two recruiting agencies that have become independent of major companies were recruiting for Japanese companies in southeast Asia, although they had their bases only in Singapore.

Although most of the businesses were deployed in Southeast Asia and China, they were also partly connected to recruiting networks in the U. S. and the U. K.; in many cases, however, such connections were limited to engineering or managerial positions, instead of clerical work, reflecting national policies related to acquisition of working visas. The advertisements for Japanese job seekers on the website of each recruitment agency include a variety of industries and job descriptions in Singapore in manufacturing, finance, and trading sectors with an increasing demand in sales, marketing and customer service. The information of each agency is similar, because most of companies make requests to several agencies in order to increase the potential response.

Table 2. Network of Recruitment Agencies.

Company name	Global network					Domestic network in Japan
	South East Asia	China	North America	Europe	Others	
Pasona Singapore Pte Ltd.	Singapore Thailand	Hong Kong Shenzhen Guangzhou Shanghai	USA Canada	London	Taiwan	Group companies (Pasona Group): 41 Connecting companies: 9
PeopleSearch Ptd. Ltd.	Malaysia Singapore: Executive search branch	Hong Kong			Taiwan	Japan branch
JAC Singapore Pte Ltd.	Singapore Indonesia Thailand Malaysia	Hong Kong Shanghai	New York	London		JAC Japan: Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Fukuoka
Temstaff (Singapore) Pte Ltd.	Singapore Thailand	Hong Kong Shanghai	Los Angeles		Seoul	Domestic chain
Kelly Service	Global network of offices across Asia-Pacific, Europe and America					None
Staff Service (Singapore) Pte Ltd.	Singapore	Beijing Guangzhou Hong Kong Shanghai	New York	Alliance with Fairplace London,	Mumbai Sydney	Domestic branches: over 90 Original site: "Oh Jinji net" Tokyo
	Global network 230 branches: Fairplace consulting Japan and select appointments (Holdings)					
Y. N. Career Consultants Pte Ltd.	Singapore					None
Adecco Pesonnel Pte Ltd.	Singapore (15 branches), Japanese (1 branch)	71 countries: 6,000 branches				Japan: over 130 branches
J Power Consultancy	Singapore					None
N-Quest Pte Ltd.	Singapore (and Southeast Asia)					None

Source: each companies' website. Accessed Date: 28th April 2006.

Although most of Japanese women job seekers want to work abroad in order to use English and to brush up their English conversation ability (Nakazawa *et al*., 2008), few countries allow work visas for such applicants. Every recruitment agency turns this passport control to its own advantage. They recommend Japanese women job seekers to Singapore as an English-medium country. They recognize Japanese women

job seekers as “spiritual migrants”, driven to leave Japan because of their disillusionment with Japanese workplace, and/or curiosity to experience independent living overseas rather than being motivated by the desire for economic gains. Many such women have taken jobs as local wage earners, without the luxury of housing and transportation allowance, and often live modestly overseas, frequently receiving less income than they would in Japan (Thang *et al*., 2004).

Business Achievements of Recruitment Agencies

While there are many local and international employment agencies in Singapore, ventures supported by local and foreign capital and designed to support the high rate of “job hopping” which characterizes the location. Japanese agencies in Singapore mainly recruit within their own culture, placing local Japanese employees in Japanese-owned firms and in foreign-affiliated companies in Singapore and its neighboring countries, and also local Japanese-speaking Singaporeans and Chinese-Malaysians in Japanese-owned firms. Because most of the Japanese recruitment agencies in Singapore do not open their detailed business results to the public and would not respond to requests for interviews (because information itself is the key to business in the recruiting industry), it is difficult to estimate the volume of business they handle and the success of their ventures. One company, however, reported that it generated its top sales by recruiting Singaporeans for their domestic jobs for which Japanese language was not needed. Although this sector accounted for 57.8 percent of all placements, lower referral fees meant that its relative profitability was lower than that generated by placement of Japanese. The latter accounted for only 22.8 percent of placements but 32.8 percent of sales, reflecting the higher referral fees involved. Such fees are about 10 percent of the annual salary of the worker. The discrepancy in returns indicates that salaries being paid to Japanese were higher than those being paid to Singaporeans for the same jobs.

Concluding Remarks

Singapore presents a curious business situation for Japanese companies. Their main customers are Japanese companies, as are the main customers of Western companies. Both Japanese and multi-national companies need employees in a range of positions who understand the Japanese culture and working style. In this context, they identify Japanese women as appropriate staff, especially in secretarial, clerical, receptionist and various sales and service positions, in Japanese ways of arranging functions, serving tea, and being “polite” to customers. It is important that they speak Japanese and know Japanese business practices. As there are many transactions between Japanese companies, there is also the need to entertain clients appropriately in order to win contracts. Thus the women are placed in supporting staff positions for the local Japanese-speaking business class, rather than in technical employment. In these roles, however, the Japanese companies think of Japanese women as temporary and flexible workers in Singapore, rather than as highly qualified expatriates. In that sense, Japanese women are marginalized in the workforce as Thang *et al*. (2002)

have described.

We come back to the question, why is Singapore attractive for the business of recruitment agencies? First, most of Japanese companies depend on recruitment agencies for identifying, selecting and training candidates in order to cut their own costs. Second, job turnover is high in Singapore. So, the recruitment agencies have many customers. Both Singaporeans and Japanese often change jobs, and almost all applicants use several recruitment agencies on the web sites. Further, there are the cultural expectations of Japanese women who tend to leave their jobs in Singapore to return to Japan, assuming that they will not be acceptable candidates for permanent jobs at home if they are over 35 years of age (Nakazawa *et al.*, 2008). In Japan, it is difficult for women over 30 years of age to get a permanent job, and especially for those over 35 years of age. These women often feel despair because many Japanese companies will only take in younger women as regular employees. The result is that in 2006, 50 percent of employed women over age 35 were in nonpermanent positions. Third, the Singaporean government, in its quest to become a “Global City”, readily grants employment permits for white-collar employees in contrast with other nations. The demand for managerial, professional, entrepreneurial and elite labor, and the support staff for these high level employees is increasing, and those high-level staff are themselves highly mobile as they see Singapore as a “step ladder” for their global business careers. In seeking service staff, the rapidly growing finance sector in particular has turned to Japan for competent and experienced job seekers, with Japanese-type work ethics and styles. These elements are more important than their academic backgrounds, as is Japanese language fluency in order to communicate with clients and headquarters in Japan. Many foreign-affiliated companies also need Japanese language proficiency, and the demand for perfect Japanese is particularly expressed in the finance sector.

As for the Japanese women’s private life in Singapore, they enjoy the “exotic” milieu, though they feel disappointed in their working conditions. They want to use English and to shape up their ability, but few companies satisfy their career expectations or opportunities for advancement. Additionally, because much of the work requires communication in Japanese, their ambitions to strengthen their English are hard to fulfill.

In summary, the tendency of Japanese women to work abroad is influenced by economic globalization, as many Japanese companies need lower-paid employees to support costly expatriate staff. Contrary to economic theories that would propose a wage benefit for taking up expatriate positions, however, Japanese women decrease their income in Singapore. The attraction is that they are able to experience the life style of residence in a foreign county. The role of the recruitment agencies is to provide excellent cheap workers for Japanese companies in Singapore, and to offer Japanese women an experience for overseas exposure at a particular point in their life course.

Notes

1. “Dispatched workers” are those registered with human resource agencies who take up assignments on short-term contracts, thus reducing a company’s need to hire permanent staff.
2. In U. S. A., U. K. or Australia, it is difficult to obtain a work visa except for special or professional skill holders or business men assigned abroad. As Yeoh (2006) explained in detail, there is different eligibility rule in Singapore. “S-Pass” type is not so hard to obtain for foreigners, because its criteria for validation are monthly basic salary of at least S$1,800 (about U.S.1,500), education qualification, skill, job type and work experience. In interviews with some Japanese recruitment agencies, these conditions are attractive for Japanese women and the agencies. In the U.S.A., U.K. or Australia, it is difficult to obtain a work visa except for special or professional skill holders or assigned abroad business men.

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Submitted: Dec. 11, 2008
Revised: Mar. 9, 2009
Accepted: Apr. 12, 2009