CHAPTER 1

The Emergence of Lifestyle Migrants in Japanese Society

In American life, intimacy has traditionally been found in the family, the club, the neighborhood, the lifelong friendship, and the church. [...] In the Japanese example, we find a successful industrial society in which intimacy occurs in the place of work as well as in other settings. The Japanese example forces us to reconsider our deeply-held beliefs about the proper sources of intimacy in society (Ouchi 1981, 8–9).

The quote above is indicative of the typical representation of the “traditional” Japanese workplace, characterised by intimacy and collectivism. Because of close human relationships in workplaces, workers were expected to help others after working hours. In some big companies, leisure activities such as company trips, athletic festivals and other social gatherings were also commonly provided by the company. Another feature of Japanese work was the loyalty to the company or organisation. A self-sacrificing work ethic was commonly perceived as a “virtue” for Japanese workers who were expected to be loyal and sacrifice their private time in return for guaranteed lifetime employment and job security provided by the company. However, in the 1990s when Japanese society experienced a massive social transformation in the economic recession, something unprecedented happened in Japanese society. It was the rise of individualism. The famous Japanese-style management, celebrated by “Japanologists” such as Ouchi (1979, 1981) and Pascale (1982), collapsed. As the recession worsened throughout the 1990s, Japanese companies reconsidered their employment systems and the consequences were the end of lifetime employment, massive retrenchments and restructuring. This caused major changes in Japanese society, particularly in the social structure and lifestyle values of the Japanese, including an unexpected mobility in the labour market and an increase in part-time labour. The Japanese middle class, particularly younger generations, began to search for alternatives to the work-oriented lifestyle and stable life course models. Some willingly chose part-time labour and others began to “discover” work-life balance. This shift away from well-established collectivist behaviours and expectations to an individualist ethos was unprecedented. As part of these radical transitions, there has been another
very significant change: an increased and historically unparalleled interest in overseas tourism and migration.

This book is a study of the migration and settlement processes of Japanese “lifestyle migrants” in Australia. As discussed below, migration motivated by lifestyle rather than economic factors has recently become a focus of academic attention in the field of migration studies. While the definition and characteristics of the term “lifestyle migration” differ, most research in this area tends to use terms such as “lifestyle migration” or “lifestyle-motivated migration” to indicate lifestyle as a significant factor enticing individuals to migrate either domestically or internationally.

The research on lifestyle migration can be divided into research focussing on domestic or international migration. As an example of studies on domestic lifestyle migration, Burnley and Murphy (2003) in their book, Sea Change, discuss the increase of domestic migration from Australian inner cities to surrounding areas in relation to an anti-urban/pro-rural sentiment. Swaffield and Fairweather (1998) assess lifestyle migration to rural areas of New Zealand from a similar perspective. McHugh and Mings (1996) discuss seasonal migration of the elderly between northern states and Phoenix, Arizona in the United States along these lines. Walmsley, Epps, and Duncan (1998) argue that lifestyle “pull” factors, such as physical environment, climate and relaxed lifestyle, are more important than “push” factors such as economic considerations for domestic migrants to the New South Wales coastal areas. Fountain and Hall (2002) describe four types of domestic lifestyle migration to a rural city in New Zealand: retirees, an artistic class, stressed professionals and telecommuters. Stimson and Minnery (1998) in their quantitative research on domestic migration to the Gold Coast assert that the most powerful factor in attracting migrants to the Sunbelt area is not economy, but lifestyle.

Compared to domestic lifestyle migration, lifestyle-motivated international migration remains relatively under-examined. This is probably due to the smaller number of migrants involved. Salva-Thomas (2002) suggests that British and German migration to Spain’s Balearic Islands is motivated by an aspiration for a more leisurely lifestyle. Scott (2006), in his study of the British middle class in Paris, discusses that skilled migration has become diversified and lifestyle plays a role among transnational middle class residents. Truly (2002) examines the retirement migration from North America to the lake Chapala Riviera in Mexico, making a strong link between retirement migration and tourism. Ley and Kobayashi’s (2005) research on Hong Kong migrants to Australia points out that both political concerns and the expected quality of life in the migration destination are factors in choosing emigration.