CHAPTER 5

From Tourists to Migrants: The Lure of the Australian Lifestyle

In the previous chapter, it was argued that Japanese society experienced socio-structural changes in the 1990s that facilitated new lifestyle values and greater life course flexibility, thus causing many people to contemplate, and actively seek, alternative lifestyles. One aspect of this growing trend towards alternative lifestyles included a heightened interest in overseas tourism. This chapter will explore in greater detail how this change in lifestyle values contributed to interest in life abroad, and in particular, to Japanese lifestyle migration to Australia. In doing so, my earlier discussion of the push factors leading to Japanese emigration abroad will be expanded and a focus on pull factors—factors that enticed Japanese to migrate to Australia—will be highlighted.

This chapter will show how individuals’ decisions to migrate are formed not only, as shown in the last chapter, through their lifestyle values and experiences in Japanese society, but also through aspirations and expectations about their potential destination, and their tourism experiences. The personal observations and research suggest that the decisions of contemporary Japanese to migrate to Australia are more closely governed by their experiences in Japan, and the appeal of alternative lifestyles abroad, than by structural pull factors within the Australian labour market. As Mizukami (2007) and DIMIA (2003) point out, the qualifications and experience of Japanese immigrants generally enable them to assimilate into the Australian middle class with relative ease following their migration. However, fieldwork in the author’s research indicates that these migrants often lack strong aspirations for further upward social mobility. This is in sharp contrast to Taiwanese or other Asian migrants who remain committed to upward social mobility after settlement (e.g. Collins et al. 1995; Min 1984). In this chapter, it will be argued that upward social mobility is a relatively lower priority for Japanese immigrants to Australia because their decisions to migrate are more heavily influenced by “lifestyle” factors than by interest in career advancement and economic prosperity. This point will be claimed by examining the processes by which Japanese decide to migrate to Australia and their underlying motivations for doing so. In other words, this chapter addresses what Japanese immigrants look for in migrating to Australia. It explores how the push factors of Japanese outbound migration interact with the pull factors of Australia as a migrant destination, so as to
provide a clearer account of the reasons why Japanese migrate to Australia. In analysing interview data, I identified four key pull factors that were mentioned on a regular basis: the lure of a relaxed Australian lifestyle, the sense that values of freedom and individualism pervade Australian society, gender equality in Australia, and the promise of escape from the high population density of Japanese cities and Japanese bureaucracy. Some may regard mixed-marriage as the most prominent pull factor. In my fieldwork, most Japanese migrants who had married Australians had stayed or visited Australia before their marriage as an independent traveller including as a working holiday maker and/or overseas student. Therefore, in this book, mixed-marriage is not considered as an independent pull factor that makes Japanese people migrate to Australia. Rather, the following discussion shows the overall story that entices Japanese people to immigrate to Australia.

**The Lure of a Relaxed Australian Lifestyle**

In the previous chapter, I argued that in the 1990s, the importance of corporate loyalty and self-sacrificing work ethic diminished, only to be replaced by lifestyle values that emphasised harmony between the spheres of work and leisure. The interview data indicated that many respondents felt increasingly dissatisfied with their own lifestyles. Accordingly, some viewed migration as a viable avenue by which they could achieve a greater balance between work and leisure in their lives. Respondents perceived Australia as a country where such work-life harmony could easily be achieved. In what follows, I will use interview data to show how the hectic experience of corporate life in Japan and the lure of a relaxed Australian lifestyle are factors whose interaction is particularly important in accounting for Japanese migration to South-East Queensland.

The in-depth interview data suggest that for those who had worked full-time in Japan, this work-oriented lifestyle was an important factor in their decision to migrate. This is illustrated by the responses given to the open-ended question “Can you provide some reflections on your experiences in company life in Japan?” Of the twenty-nine respondents who had worked full-time in Japan, eight provided clearly negative responses, eighteen answered ambiguously and only three responded positively.

Most respondents relayed a mixture of positive and negative impressions of company life in Japan, on the one hand citing a sense of pride and accomplishment in their work, and on the other, complaining of long working hours and general feelings of unhappiness. Dissatisfaction with working hours was