True Self, True Work:
Gendered Searching for Self and Work among Japanese Migrants in Vancouver, Canada

KATO Etsuko
International Christian University

In any post-industrial society today it is common for "youth," including those who are in their 30s and 40s, to keep searching for "what I really want to do" and to cross national borders in pursuit of their personal searches. Japan, where the idiom of "self-searching" (jibun-sagashi) has become a cliché, sends thousands of youths to various parts of the globe every year, including to Vancouver, Canada. Two characteristics are notable among Japanese sojourner-migrants in that city: seeking identification of their "true self" and doing "the work they really want to do." The gender imbalance in the population (80% women, 20% men) is also remarkable. Based on eight years of fieldwork, this study will clarify: (1) what motivates young Japanese people to pursue their search for their true selves overseas, especially in Vancouver, and (2) why this phenomenon is heavily defined by gender. By exploring Japanese women and men's respective relationships with work, this study critiques simplistic popular views of "oppressed Japanese women fleeing from male-dominant Japanese society" and also problematizes a peculiar form of patriarchy in Japanese society that hinders young Japanese men from searching for self-identification and work overseas.

Key words: self-searching, work, migrants, gender, postmodern, post-industrial, post-adolescent, Japan, Canada

Introduction

Japanese society was too harsh for me. Being an OL\(^1\) drives me mad...I really feel that I live in a transition period [in Japanese history]. I regret my ending up being just an OL (ESL\(^2\) student, 33 years old).

You need to quit your job to go overseas, but it's a disadvantage for men to change their jobs

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\(^{1}\) OL is the abbreviation of a Japanese-English idiom "office lady," which means non-career clerical female worker. For a detailed ethnographic study, see OGASAWARA (1998).

\(^{2}\) An ESL student refers to those who are learning English in English as Second Language courses or at an ESL school.

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many times. That’s a disadvantage for their marriage too (Working Holiday maker,\(^3\) 30 years old).

The two speakers above have several things in common: both are Japanese citizens who have several years of experience working in a corporation in Japan and both quit their jobs to go to Vancouver. They are both now sojourning in that city, prolonging their stay, ultimately wishing to become permanent residents (or so-called “immigrants”) in Canada. Unsatisfied with the work they had at home, both want to get a job that requires English skills and/or to work overseas. The difference is gender: the first speaker is a woman, who comprise 80% of Japanese sojourners in Canada. The second speaker is a man who gave the above reply when I asked him, “Why do you think [Japanese] women can come overseas more easily than men, or rather, men less easily than women?”

In any post-industrial society at present, it is common for “youth,” including those in their 30s and 40s, to keep searching for “what I really want to do” (hontōni yaritai koto) and to cross national borders in pursuit of their personal searches. Japan, where the idiom of “self-searching” (jibun-sāgashi) has become a cliché, is one such society that sends thousands of youth to various parts of the globe, including to Vancouver, Canada.

Due to its relative proximity to Asia, this West Coast Canadian city has been attracting Asians since the late 19th century. Unlike other Asian countries such as China, Korea, or the Philippines, which currently send out emigrants as well as sojourners (which refers to temporary workers and students in this study) in notable numbers, today Japan is a major source only of sojourners. Several sojourners from Japan, however, gradually change their life plans after coming to Canada, often unexpectedly. They tend to prolong their stays, to search for a stable job, and often to apply for permanent resident status. In this respect, all Japanese sojourners in Canada at present are potential immigrants. Since one can no longer draw a clear line between “sojourners” and “immigrants,” I use the word “migrants” to cover both.

According to my participant observation and in-depth interviews with 109 young Japanese migrants in Vancouver, stretching across eight years, two characteristics are notable. First, many come to the city to search for what they really want to do (sometimes they have already determined what it is, such as learning English, but in several cases they have yet to find the object itself). This search often overlaps with a search for the job that they really want to do. In other words, for young Japanese migrants in Vancouver, the search for what one (self or jibun) really wants to do is often synonymous with job searching. The second characteristic is a gender imbalance in the migrant Japanese population, of whom 80% are women and 20% are men. One can thus raise two questions: What motivates young Japanese people to pursue their search for self-identification and work overseas, especially in Vancouver? And why is the phenomenon heavily determined by gender?

\(^3\) For the details of the Working Holiday program, see the section below on “Searching for Self and Work in Canada.”
To answer these questions, this study first explores contemporary global conditions that impel youth in any (post-) industrialized society to “search for self,” emphasizing the Japanese relatively intense identification of “work” with “self” in contrast to European and North American views on work. The study then clarifies the different connotations that “work” and “working overseas” have for Japanese women and men, respectively.

While elucidating the relative marginality of women in Japanese society, this study, at the same time, critiques popular discourses of “oppressed Japanese women fleeing from male-dominant Japanese society,” as presented, for example, in KELSKY (2001). Such a simplistic discourse depicts Japanese men as monolithic group of oppressors, while overlooking the uneven power distribution between older and younger men. The discourse also fails to explore a peculiar form of patriarchy in Japanese society that hinders young Japanese men from searching for self-identification and work overseas as their female counterparts do. Rather than simply asking why Japanese women want to “escape” from their society, this study also asks why young Japanese men do or can not get out of their society, and explores the “male problem” of Japanese society.

Searching for Self, Searching for Work: How Japanese Is It?

Emergence of Three “Posts”: Postmodern, Post-Industrial, Post-Adolescent

“Jibun-sagashi” (self-searching) is a Japanese idiom that emerged in the mass media in the 1980s along with the phrase “watashi-sagashi” (me-searching), though in the 1990s, the use of the “jibun-sagashi” idiom outnumbered that of “watashi-sagashi” (HAYAMIZU 2008: 178-9). From 1990 to the present, some 130 books whose titles contain “jibun-sagashi” phrases have been published in Japan, according to the catalogue of the country’s National Diet Library. It is interesting that 1991 is the year that witnessed the collapse of the so-called “bubble economy,” a period of extraordinary economic prosperity in Japan in the late 1980s. Considering the economic recession that continued over the following 10 years, one can argue that the implication of “jibun-sagashi” has changed over the course of time from a lifestyle choice based on material affluence in the 1980s to a more desperate search for the prospect of life under conditions of increasing uncertainty.

Self-searching, however, is at present not unique to the Japanese. The search for the true self by “youth,” sometimes overseas, is rather a global phenomenon based on three inseparable “post” conditions: postmodern, post-industrial, and post-adolescent. These three conditions are assumed to affect the world views and migration behaviors not only of Japanese youth, but also of youth in any (post-) industrialized society.

The “postmodern” age—also referred to as the “late modern age,” “high modernity,” (GIDDENS 1991) and “modernity at large” (APPADURAI 1996) by those who emphasize its continuity with modernity—is a phrase that came to refer to the era in the late 1970s which

4 For reasons discussed later, I use this term to refer to those who, regardless of age, are in a preparatory stage before they fully commit to career and other social responsibilities.
was characterized by an emerging set of values and institutions that differed largely from modernity. "Modernity" in this case refers to a set of values (including efficiency, productivity, scientific objectivity and rationality), as well as institutions (including factories, nation-states, and nationalism) that developed in the West from the 17th to the 20th centuries. In the 1970s, however, the major industries in industrialized societies shifted from manufacturing to services. Also, the development of mass transportation and mass media greatly broadened the values and choices available to each person. As a result, the pursuit of values became a highly individualized task, even going so far as to pressure each one of us: "We all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so—we have no choice but to choose" (GIDDENS 1991: 81).

At the same time, the geographic boundaries of nation-states have gradually lost much of their meaning. It is due to this trend that individuals or groups, from all ethnic groups and including tourists, immigrants, refugees, expatriates, and temporary workers, migrate all over the globe defying national borders in unprecedented numbers and with unprecedented speed so as to create a global "ethnoscape," often motivated by "mediascape," or the images of certain places put forth by the mass media (APPADURAI 1996: 3, 31-6).

The shift in a society's major industry from manufacturing to services is called the "post-industrial" situation (KOTO 2006: 7-8). "Post-industrial" situations caused an essential change in people's life cycles, creating a new life stage called "post-adolescence" (MIYAMOTO 2004, 2005).

"Post-adolescence," meanwhile, refers to the transitional period between "adolescence" and "adulthood." Adolescence, as explained by Eric ERIKSON's famous metaphoric term "moratorium," allows youth to postpone their full commitment to work or marriage; it also allows them to adopt different values or lifestyles without committing to any particular one. Since the 1970s, however, the boundaries between "adolescence" and "adulthood" have become blurred in advanced societies as their major industries shifted from manufacturing to services. Unlike manufacturing, the service industry requires more specialized skills and knowledge, and as a result, the duration of education for youth was extended. These services-oriented societies offer abundant part-time working opportunities to youth who are still being educated. In these societies, a new life stage of "post-adolescence" emerged, which is neither full-fledged "adolescence" nor "adulthood."

In Japan the boundaries between "adolescence" and "adulthood" collapsed in the 1980s. This phenomenon, however, was overshadowed by extreme prosperity or the so-called "bubble economy," which offered abundant fulltime and part-time job opportunities to youth. It was only in the early 1990s when the "bubble" burst and the economic recession started, that Japanese society recognized and problematized the collapse of the former life cycle. Youth were now in the "Ice Age of job hunting" (shūshoku hyōga-ki), which would last for the following 10 years. Economic independence, marriage, and becoming parents were no longer guaranteed for youth. Instead, more people now lived an "individualized, more risky life of choices" (MIYAMOTO 2005: 143), experiencing a prolonged "post-adolescence" whether or not
they wanted it.

Among these post-adolescent youths are those who seek new jobs and life opportunities beyond national boundaries. Here, both the economic prosperity of Japan in the 1980s and the economic recession from early 1990s seem to have affected their travel and migration patterns. First, overseas trips and short-term studying abroad (usually ESL) become popular among Japanese youth in the 1980s, supported by the bubble economy. The Working Holiday Program (see below) also started during this time. Yasuhiro NAKASONE, the Prime Minister who initiated the Program, emphasized the “internationalization” (kokusai-ka) of Japan as a governmental slogan. It was only after the burst of “bubble,” however, that participants in the Working Holiday Program rapidly increased. An increasing number of Japanese youths, especially women, who were originally sojourners, also began to immigrate to their host countries. Thus, when the path of mass sojourning paved in the 1980s and the economic recession in the early 1990 were combined, a new Japanese migration pattern—sliding from sojourning to immigrating—emerged. The development of mass transportation, mass media, and the internet also promoted such cross-national searching for jobs and lifestyles.

The new kind of Japanese migrants in search for better lives are called “spiritual migrants” (seishin imin or “lifestyle migrants” by SATO (1993, 2001). However, I prefer to call my participants “self-searching migrants,” to emphasize their uncertainty of life goals and their relatively “young” age, or post-adolescence.

Japanese Self-Work Identification

Japanese post-adolescent youth, as well as those from any (post-)industrialized society, can now go overseas and search for new lives and work. According to my observation and interviews with young Japanese migrants in Vancouver, however, there seems to be a certain characteristic in the Japanese way of searching for work and life: identification of work with self. In other words, the Japanese search for “what I really am” is almost synonymous with the search for “the work I really want to do.”

This does not mean that Japanese youth value work(ing) more than any other things in life. In fact, many of my interviewees say that the Japanese are exhausted from overwork and are deeply impressed by certain Canadian ways of work-life balance—specifically that Canadians do not work overtime and value private life. As my interviewees put it, “Canadians work to live, not live to work,” “Japan is a happy place for customers, but a sad place for workers. Canada is the other way around.” These reasons motivate many Japanese sojourners to immigrate to Canada.

At the same time, however, several of them are surprised at and critical about Canadian people’s, especially young people’s, low motivation to work. According to a few informants, “My Canadian friends don’t think about life in a long span, and lack a sense of crisis,” “I am so surprised that so many young [Canadians] are begging for cigarettes or change on the street. Too many are dependent on unemployment benefits.” My interviewees’ narratives on feelings of “uneasiness” are also suggestive: “I feel uneasy that I am not working here [in
Canada, and I find this feeling Japanese (Nihonjin-teki) [laughter]." Or "I feel [uneasy] that I am becoming lazy, feel as if I am dragged into the majority of Canadians."

The differing perception of work in Japan and the West was observed and pointed out by LÉVI-STRAUSS in his lecture "Representations of Labor," which he gave on his visit to Japan in 1977. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, according to him, work has been a kind of punishment from God to human beings since the time that Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise, where they once did not have to work to eat. This negative connotation of work is symbolized by the French word "travail" (work/labor), which originally meant "torture tools" in vernacular Latin, and later "painful efforts" or "pains in giving birth" (LÉVI-STRAUSS 2008 [1977]: 102). The same applies to the English word "labor." Therefore, to Westerners, for whom work is essentially a pain, "the truly important part of life exists outside labor, that is, in leisure. Meanwhile, for the Japanese, there is no discrepancy between the two, and it is not uncommon for them that work is their raison de être (ikigai in Japanese translation)" (LÉVI-STRAUSS 2008 [1977]: 97).

Japanese anthropologist NAKAZAWA Shin'ichi agrees with LÉVI-STRAUSS, pointing out that in the Edo period, highly respected people named "myōkō-nin," or "people with profound experience" in a Buddhist (Jōdo-shinshū) sense, were all workers. An artisan of Japanese clogs (geta), for example, carved his products with full spiritual commitment (kokoro wo komete), since he believed that "clogs are Buddha." NAKAZAWA then argues that

For the Japanese, to work is a kind of self-realization and creation. It is so from peasants to artisans, from technicians of a small town factory to salaried office workers (sararī man). They hold this view of labor in the bottom of their hearts. In modern times, [the concept of] industrial labor, which encourages us to work hard to achieve set goals, was introduced [to Japanese society]. Still, the Japanese themselves do not find working as painful as Westerners would. The Japanese would never think themselves as workaholics (NAKAZAWA 2006: 15).

Some customs that can be seen in Europe and North America today but are less popular in Japan, such as paying a tip or parents’ paying their children for helping household chores, suggest that a broader range of services are considered as “labor” and therefore worth compensation in the former societies, while in the latter a broader range of services are considered in a pedagogic way as “means of personal growth.” The contrasts between the West and Japan made by LÉVI-STRAUSS and NAKAZAWA may be explained more exactly as the contrasts between Judeo-Christian and Confucian-Buddhist views on work; therefore the characteristics they attribute to Japan may apply more generally to East Asia, including China and Korea, although such argument requires further research.

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5 The English title is my own translation from the Japanese title, “rōdō no shōchō,” which appears in the collection of the scholar's lectures in Japan published in 1979. This particular lecture was originally given in French on November 11, 1977.
Besides these possible religious-cultural factors, differences in the socio-political meanings of the workplace between Japan and the West are also suggestive. According to MIYAMOTO, Europe and North America share a historical background in which “coming of age” means obtaining citizenship—that is, entering into a contractual or reciprocal relationship with the state. In this part of the world, being an adult signifies a person who owes “duties” toward the state such as tax paying and voting, while in turn holding “rights” to receive benefits from the state. The Canadian youth mentioned above, for example, who are receiving unemployment benefits seemingly without embarrassment or feelings of guilt, might consider receiving this payment as their right. Meanwhile, Japanese society did not historically develop the ideas of a “contract with state” or of citizenship; instead, it has developed an idea of adulthood as “getting a job” and “becoming a member of a workplace.” The concept of the workplace instills in a young worker “full participation in society,” which consists of economic independence and affiliation. For youth (especially men), therefore, society and workplace are synonymous (MIYAMOTO 2002: 274, 280). Thus, according to a 2005 survey on 4,087 women and men between 15 and 29 years old, working is the most important, if not only, factor that affects Japanese youth's identity as adults. To the question “What moment made you recognize your reaching adulthood,” the most popular answer was “When I started working,” overshadowing “When I reached 20 years old” (KUKIMOTO 2009: 203-5).

Japanese university students' long-time, desperate commitment to job hunting also suggests the importance of work for reaching adulthood. Both employers and students consider it “natural” that only those “fresh-from-school” are the most valuable. Both sides share a perception of the workplace as almost the only place where the “blank” personalities of youth are colored or shaped, throughout a long time or even over a lifetime. This situation clearly contrasts to North America, where there is no job season for new graduates. The employers hire workers not because they are “blank and fresh,” but because they have desired skills and are available at a desired time.

In summary, for Japanese youth today, getting a job is the only and a sacred “rite of passage” to reaching adulthood. Now that marriage, another index of adulthood, has lost its absolute value, and youth (especially men) need to have economic capital before getting married, work is a must. In addition, with the Japanese tendency to identify work and self as interrelated, work serves as not only a marker for Japanese youth in reaching adulthood, but also a marker in their lifetime searches for “what I really am.”

Recent sociological works on Japanese youth, especially on “furitā” (young and free part-timers), have elucidated how work and identity are interrelated for youth under the phrase “yuritai koto” (what I want to do). It has been pointed out that not a few youth postpone fulltime commitment to a job while continuing to search for what they really want to do (KOSUGI 2003). Some youth try to combine their hobbies (e.g., automobile riding) with dangerous or unstable work (e.g., food delivery) to keep doing what they want to do (ABE

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* “furitā” is an abbreviation of Japanese-English-German idiom, “free arubaitā.” The idiom was invented in 1987 by the editor in chief of a job-posting magazine, *From A.*
Searching for Self and Work in Canada: Working Holiday as a "Dream Visa"

Among the Japanese youth searching for work and self, thousands fly to Canada each year to sojourn. Why Canada? Although most of my informants say they “had no particular image of Canada” when they chose the country, its attractiveness is summarized by them as follows: safety (unlike the “gun society” of the US), not excessively high living expenses (unlike the UK), and accent-free English (unlike Australia). The two major groups of young Japanese sojourners in the country are ESL students and Working Holiday makers.7 Here the Working Holiday program deserves special attention, for it is a major factor that attracts young Japanese to Canada rather than to its more popular neighbor, the USA.

Working Holiday is a youth exchange program based on bilateral agreements between two national governments. The Japanese government started the program first with Australia in 1981, then established a program with New Zealand in 1985, followed by Canada in 1986; and, after 1999, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Norway, and Taiwan joined the list. The quota for the program, the applicable ages, the maximum length of stay, and other details vary according to country and year. There is an agreement between Japan and Canada in which those from 18 to 30 years old of age are entitled to stay in the other country for up to 12 months.

Among the countries that have a Working Holiday partnership with Japan, Canada is the second most popular destination among Japanese youth, outdone only by Australia, which accepts more than 10,000 Japanese applicants every year. Due to the exceeding number of Japanese wishing to go to Canada, the quota was increased from 5,000 to 9,500 in 2008, then to 10,000 in 2009. In 2010, the quota was decreased to 7,260, reflecting the actual number of applicants in the past two years.8

During their stay in Canada, Working Holiday makers are qualified to work temporarily to complement their living expenses, and to go to school for up to 6 months. With no screening for applicants' language skills, motivation, income, savings, or anything else, this flexible,

7 According to the statistical data and personal communication with the Canadian Embassy in Japan, about 70% of 4,596 student visas issued in 2006 are for those who are supposed to enroll in ESL schools or ESL courses in Canada.
8 All the information on the Working Holiday Program here is obtained from the Japan Association for Working Holiday Makers (JAWHM) and the Canadian Embassy in Japan. JAWHM was terminated in July 2010.
multi-purpose program is considered to be the easiest route for young Japanese to experience life overseas. The visa is ideal for those who want to search for what they really want to do but are not sure what exactly she or he should do. It is a “dream visa,” as an interviewee put it.

Although governments emphasize that the Working Holiday program is essentially a “holiday” program in which working is not the purpose but only a means of complementing living expenses, several Japanese are using the program as a starter to obtain regular jobs and regular work visas that are valid for more than one year, or even as a stepping stone to apply for permanent resident status in Canada. Canada’s relative openness to receiving temporary foreign workers distinguishes it from the US, and it is attracting young Japanese to Canada, many of whom are actually interested in the US. Because they are more interested in work-related benefits than the country itself, the young Japanese do not necessarily have a special attachment to Canada, even if they want to “immigrate” to the country. Some wish to keep moving around the globe to find what they really want to do, as will be explained later.

Gendered Migration: Young Women and Work in the Economic “Ice Age”

As discussed above, the economic “Ice Age” in Japan that lasted from the early 1990s until around 2005, damaged young people’s employment prospects tremendously. But did the damage affect women and men equally? If so, there should be almost the same number of women and men who leave Japan in search of new life opportunities overseas.

Data from Canada does not suggest this to be the case. According to the Canadian Embassy in Japan, 69.1% of the 4,598 student visas issued by Canada in 2006 were to Japanese women. Eighty-two percent of the 4,991 visas issued in 2007 by the Working Holiday were to women. It is known that Working Holiday program, in general, tends to attract more Japanese female than male applicants. Canada, in particular, seems to be a popular destination for Japanese women, which can be presumed from a 2005 questionnaire survey conducted on returnee Working Holiday makers from all partner countries by the Japan Association for Working Holiday Makers: 80.2% of 81 volunteer respondents who returned from Canada were women, while overall, women constitute 67.2% of the 235 respondents.

The dominant number of female Japanese migrants to Canada is even more conspicuous when compared with migrants from other countries. Korea and China, major source countries of students, along with Japan, send almost the same number of women and men to Canada. In terms of temporary workers, most of the major source countries such as the US and those within Latin America and Europe send more men than women to Canada. Furthermore, besides Japan, only the Philippines, which “exports” female labor force to the world as a state policy, sends more female than male workers to Canada.9

There might be two paradoxical, work-related reasons that motivate more Japanese

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9 Argument here is based on the 2006 and 2008 statistical data “Facts and Figures” obtained from Citizenship and Immigration Canada website (http://www.cic.gc.ca).
women than men to emigrate to Canada or overseas. First, in Japan women tend to be more marginalized than men in terms of employment, as is often pointed out in both academic and general discourses—which nonetheless often draw too sharp a dichotomy between “centralized men” and “marginalized women” (see the later discussion on KEILSKY 2002). Second, due to this very marginality, women have a kind of freedom to search outside of Japan for their true selves and what they really want to do.

Among the people I interviewed from 2001 to 2008, whose ages ranged from their late teens to their early 40s, the two major age groups were people in their late 20s and early 30s. These groups finished school and/or worked for several years during the economic recession from the early 1990s to around 2005. The “Ice Age” clearly facilitated marginalization of young women in labor force. During recruitment, companies gave priority to young men to fill the limited fulltime positions: young women, as a result, were more likely to become part-time workers (pāto or arubaito), temporary workers (keiyaku shain) or dispatched workers (haken shain). As of 1997, for example, 58% of pāto and arubaito workers of ages between 15 and 34 (excluding students and married women) were women; pāto and arubaito also comprised 16% among women as a whole, while they comprised 6% among men. Moreover, women had more difficulties than men in getting out of the part-time status (TAGA 2006: 81, partly citing HONDA 2002 and KOSUGI 2002). Unstable working conditions, low incomes, lack of welfare, and lack of career opportunities made more women than men unable to envision their futures. As an interviewee put it: “I couldn’t envision my own life after 30 years old.” Also notable is that in Japanese society, age 30 marks a more critical moment of self-reflection for women than for men because, although the norm is rather outdated, there still exists a social belief that (especially non-career-track) women’s prime age for marriage is before 30. Unable to envision careers after 30, while not wanting to marry (yet), women decide to leave Japan. The Working Holiday program’s age limit of 30 for applying is another factor pushing these women.

Thus, women seek a chance to “reset their lives” by leaving Japan. This act means a variety of activities—from going to school to working; from returning to Japan with some overseas experiences to staying overseas; from working as a visa worker to emigrating. In numerous cases, women move from one activity to another, often unexpectedly, as will be shown in their narratives below.

**Narratives of Women Searching for Self and Work**

Several of my female interviewees mentioned “learning English” and/or “work in which I can use English” as what they really wanted to do. Some had a concrete occupation in mind, such as translator, interpreter, English teacher, or trade secretary, while others had vaguer ideas. The association between women and English in Japan dates back to the Meiji period, when women missionaries from North America started English classes for girls (for details, see KATO 2009: 205-11). Men interviewees, meanwhile, tended to mention their primary interest as international trade rather than “English.” What follow are narratives of three
Japanese women who vary in backgrounds but share the experience of searching for what they really want to do in Canada, having learned English as a springboard.

Maiko (33 years old at 2001 interview)

Maiko finished her two-year college degree in the late 1980s and worked for a stock exchange company for 12 years. During the economic recession in Japan in the early 1990s, all of her colleagues, first women and then men, were fired. When she married in 1999, her boss asked her to move to another section in the company that would have been inconvenient to her married life. Her hesitation “gave the company a good reason to fire me. Married women are easy to be fired.” She, however, divorced the next year. Before starting a new job, she treated herself with a trip to Vancouver. She liked the city, and in 2001 she returned with a student visa, “thinking almost nothing but about immigrating.” Her plan is to obtain a qualification as a translator after finishing ESL school. “I will never ever think about going back to Japan to be an OL again,” she says. Then she states, as described at the beginning of this paper: “Japanese society was too harsh for me. Being an OL drives me mad...I really feel that I live in a transition period [in Japanese history]. I regret my ending up being just an OL.” When contacted later, she was not yet successful in obtaining a translator’s qualification.

Maiko’s frequent self-identification as an “OL” tells the very paradox of OLs depicted in Ogasawara (1998). As a marginalized collective body in companies, clerical female workers do not have a chance to be promoted like men, but at the same time are freer from the mainstream track. In Maiko’s case, her marginality gave her a break from the company and the freedom to come to Canada without hesitation. Although it is uncertain if she can actually be a professional using the English language, her marginalized position in a company and in Japanese society ironically gave her a chance to at least try.

Megumi (32 years old at 2008 interview)

Megumi graduated from a university in Japan in 1998. She worked part-time in a department store for a year, then as a temporary worker for six years; she finally quit her job to go to Vancouver. When asked why she was a temporary worker, she replied:

Because of the economic recession [laughter]. They did not want full-time workers. When I was working as a part-time worker, I heard that someone in the past was promoted from a part-timer to a temporary worker. I was encouraged by the story and in a year, became a temporary worker myself. Then, I heard that someone in the past was promoted from a temporary worker to a full-time worker... But it seemed too difficult...so I thought about quitting the job and getting another job. I thought I should improve my English before that, because it would be difficult to learn a foreign language once I re-started working.

For Megumi, going to Vancouver was originally intended as a preparation for future job
hunting in Japan. After finishing her ESL course, however, she studied tourism with the hope to “work here [in Canada].” She expressed her wish to work in Canada for several years and then emigrate there.

Maiko’s and Megumi’s cases show that “learning English” is not only a popular initial motivation for marginalized women to leave Japan, but also a source of their living for longer periods and leading more work-oriented lives overseas. Both interviewees are prolonging their stays in Vancouver after completing a period of learning English in the hopes of gaining work. Considering that both “English” and/or “the work in which I can use English” are what women often mention as what they really want to do, the gradual shift or merger between the two is understandable.

Motoko (28 years old at 2008 interview)

It is interesting that, like marginalized women, mainstream women workers who are capable of choosing the same path as men also refer to the marginality and freedom of women, and mention learning English as their initial reason for leaving Japan. Motoko was an economics major at university. She obtained a job in sales at a financial corporation in 2002. “I found sales too tough. When I was thinking about changing my job, I found that the work I wanted to do [interior planning of restaurants] required English skills.” So she went to Toronto as a Working Holiday maker. There she was unexpectedly recruited by a Korean-Canadian business; she also started meeting with a man from Southern Europe who wanted to emigrate to Canada. All these experiences gradually motivated her to emigrate herself.

When asked if she would not want to stay in the same job in Japan for life, she replied, “I knew several ‘first women managers.’ But their work is decades of repetition of the same thing. I don’t want to stay there.” When asked if she had wanted to be “the first woman” in a position, she said, “Not quite: 2002 was the year when the corporation began to put women workers in managerial jobs. Clerical women workers were forced to write the exam [to be promoted to managerial jobs].” As is clear in her narratives, Motoko perceived the company-run, gender equality promotion program to be a nuisance.

For women workers like Motoko, who finds the workplace itself unattractive, “men-like” positions are not attractive either. For these women, being like men means overwork and excessive self-sacrifice. It seems no wonder, therefore, that even (potentially) mainstream women would rather make use of their marginality and freedom to leave their jobs or Japan rather than trying to be on the same track as men.

Young Men and Work in Japanese Societal Patriarchy

The narratives of these women help us understand how Japanese society functions for the more marginalized gender. Discussing only women, however, leaves the other gender unexplored. Are Japanese men, especially young men, all happy at home? Do young men find
their "true selves" and the "work they really want to do" at home in Japan more easily than young women do?

As already mentioned, Korea and China, the top two source countries of international students in Canada, send equal numbers of women and men. Therefore, rather than the presence of Japanese women, one can problematize the fact that there exists a dearth of Japanese men among migrants in Canada. In other words, we must ask, "Why do more young Japanese men not come out of Japan?"

One possible answer is that young Japanese men are more deeply involved in patriarchy at home, physically and mentally, than are women. Here, patriarchy is defined as "a system that enables older men to manage women in general and younger men," based on several definitions of patriarchy and chiefdom introduced in UENO (1990: 65, 57, 78). Unlike the term "male-centrism," which presupposes men to constitute a monolithic superior group to women, patriarchy as defined above entails unequal power distribution among men based on seniority. Here younger men (sons, younger brothers, young male students, or young male workers) are similar to women in that older men (fathers, older brothers, senior male students, or senior male workers) hold power over both. At the same time, however, younger men are essentially different from women in that, once they reach a certain age, they can be power-holders themselves (though this is not true for all). Thus, young men have a double-sided, "half-disadvantageous and half-advantageous," status in Japanese society.

Whether a young man is interested in leaving Japan or not depends on how he regards the ambiguous status that would result. More men than women presumably choose to stay in Japan, knowing that one day their age will put them in a power-holding position, and thus finding no reason to undertake the disadvantages of being a foreign worker overseas. For young men who have more or less internalized senior men's values, being in mainstream Japanese society and being a man are identical. Meanwhile, they consider men who quit their jobs and/or leave Japan as "escapers" or "underachievers." In fact, a male sojourner told my female interviewee, "You were able to come to Canada in your 30s because you are a woman. If you were a man, you would be considered as an escaper."

Then, what happens to those young men who do not or cannot adjust themselves to the older men's values? Recent research elucidates the stratification between extremely hard-working men who are willing to stay in the workplace and men who cannot or do not want to perform such work:

Once the institutional equality between men and women is achieved, men's rule in corporate society sustains itself by favoring men who can work in a "manly" fashion as corporate society defines and a tiny group of women who can work "like men." Meanwhile, the system marginalizes most of women, who cannot work "like men," and those men who cannot work in "manly" terms (TAGA 2006: 119).

If those "manly" workers stay in their workplaces in Japan, then are the men who leave
Japan considered “non-manly” workers? Also, are the “manly” workers content with their current work and life, and do they not reflect on what they really want to do?

**Narratives of Men Searching for Self-Identification and Work**

The male informants I met in Vancouver, despite only constituting about 20% of the 109 interviewees, include both of the types described above: those who cannot or do not want to work in a “manly” way and those who can but do not want to work that way in Japan. Some seem to have had a greater degree of hesitation or turmoil than women when quitting their jobs. Yet, men with neither type of attitude are content with their work and life back home, and both came to Canada to seek for what they really wanted to do. Following are narratives of three such men.

**Saku (29 years old at 2008 interview)**

Saku, a Working Holiday maker, says he had “too many disadvantages for a man (otoko ni shite wa fur i na yōso ga ōi)” After quitting high school, he became a construction worker, a college student, then a part-time (arubaito) Web designer at a company, which he quit after quarreling with his boss. However, he hesitated to leave Japan for two years even after learning about the Working Holiday program because “I thought there might be more things I must do in Japan.” Finally, he decided to go to Canada, and is now employed by a Japanese-Canadian company. Looking back, he says that Japanese society is too strict (kiritusu tadashi sugiru), declaring himself to be a dropout. He also states that Japanese society is harsher on men than on women in a certain sense:

I think men are more wanted [than women] by companies...Women will give birth and be away from the workplace. So companies can constrain men more easily...Women can easily move horizontally [to another company, to another place, or to marriage] while it is difficult for them to move vertically [to be promoted in a company]. Men have chances to move vertically, but not quite horizontally. If he does, that means dropping out.

Saying that he needed to drop out of Japanese society, Saku is now applying for permanent resident status as a Web designer in Canada. Yet, his real wish is not to live in Canada permanently as a full-time Web designer. Rather, “I love drawing and I want to live on that” as “a sojourner in many different countries throughout my life.”

**Haruyuki (30 years old at 2005 interview)**

Compared to Saku, Haruyuki, a Work Holiday maker, seems to be more on the mainstream side. Haruyuki’s statements are similar to those of women interviewees in that his initial interest was in English. An international relations major at university, Haruyuki was unsatisfied with a job that did not require him to use English skills. So, he decided to quit and go to Canada to improve his English, first by acquiring a student visa. After that, he
moved between Japan, Canada, and the US, as a dispatched worker and a full-time worker, a student and a job hunter, gradually shifting his goal from being “to do some work for which I can use English” to “to work overseas.” He is now looking for a job in Canada, and beginning to hope to emigrate. Asked why he wanted to work overseas, Haruyuki replied:

Because it’s fun. Attractive...Stimulating. Also I find Japanese society questionable. At high school, junior students excessively respect senior students. Ridiculous. At companies, too, [junior workers] pour alcohol for bosses. I hate that. Since I was 18 or 19 years old, I always hated the custom of pouring alcohol for each other...I want [Japanese society] to respect individuality and privacy a bit more. I want it to stop valuing group[ism].

Like Saku, Haruyuki pointed out how much harsher Japanese corporate society is on men than on women. According to him, men who have moved from one job to another “are questioned more severely [tsukkomaneru] in job interviews than are women. Women can say that they were fired because the company was not doing a good business or because their contract expired. Then they are excused. Men, however, are severely questioned, like I was [laughter].”

Shin’ichi (26 years old at 2005 interview)

Last, Shin’ichi, an applicant for Canadian permanent residency, exemplifies the fact that even the most “manly” workers could leave Japan in search of their true self-work. An active tennis player at university, he obtained a job at a major trading company after graduation. He found the work worthwhile, but quit when he applied for the Working Holiday visa. Asked why, he related, in addition to his long-time wish to live overseas that

The work was harsh. I came home after midnight three or four times a month. Senior workers, who are the future me in 10 or 20 years, hardly came home before midnight as well. That lowered my motivation...[When I told him about quitting] my boss said, “You know, it’s hard to come back once you quit.” I immediately answered, “What happens if I continue this work? To me, there is no future.” I didn’t find the life built on that rail attractive: get a raise, marry, and buy a house. And, going overseas in my 50s or 60s would limit my activities there.

In Vancouver, Shin’ichi worked as a part-time translator, often performing unpaid overtime work, under an Asian-Canadian business owner. The owner liked Shin’ichi and promised to sponsor Shin’ichi’s immigration. It is ironic that the Japanese work style, which Shin’ichi wanted to escape from, “sold” him on emigrating to Canada. But Shin’ichi does not find any contradiction or irony in this because he is sure that “In Canada, they work to enjoy their pastime, to enjoy their own life, while in Japan they work to buy things;” that is, the meaning of working is different in the two countries.
With regard to the kind of work he wants to do, however, Shin'ichi was not sure. “I want to be a specialist who works worldwide,” he says, and when asked in what specialty, he answered, “I don’t have anything particular in mind. I must think.” It seems that, like any other migrant, his self-work search will continue for another decade—in Canada or some other place in the world.

Discussion and Conclusion:
Japanese “Male Problem” in the Age of Globalization

This study's discussion is twofold: First, it suggests that “young” Japanese share the same struggles as post-adolescent “youth” in any other post-industrial society in their search for their true self, or what they really are, in an increasingly prolonged life period and in increasingly global settings; at the same time, young Japanese, in a high degree, identify their true self by the work they really want to do. Second, it claims that among such young Japanese, more women than men experience relative societal marginality and the freedom to search for self-work overseas; or rather, more men than women are too bound, physically and mentally, by the societal patriarchy at home to be able to pursue their personal quests overseas.

The last point is especially important as far as Japanese women's migration to North America has caught North American (women) researchers' eyes and has been explained as an escape from patriarchy at home. KOBAYASHI (2002), for example, interviewed two different age groups of Japanese women who immigrated to Canada after World War II and married men in there (about half of the younger group are former Working Holiday makers, according to the author). The author then explains their common motivation to leave Japan as follows:

Those who choose migration as a form of resistance are small in number, but for the most part they leave because they reject the specific ways in which Japanese patriarchy is manifested (KOBAYASHI 2002: 207).

KOBAYASHI emphasizes this point by naming two sections in the same paper “Escaping Japanese Patriarchy.” KELSKY (2001) interviewed young Japanese women who visited or stayed in the West (especially the US) in the 1980s and 1990s seeking relationships with “white men.” She argues in similar fashion that

[White Western men as potential lovers or husbands become one of the most alluring means, for heterosexual Japanese women so inclined, to effect a potential escape from Japanese social constraints into the embrace of the “outside” world... For ironically, internationally active Japanese women explain their marginality by reference to patriarchal Japanese tradition itself (KELSKY 2001: 8-9).
However, only interviewing Japanese women overseas but not Japanese (young) men leaves out another important side of patriarchy, and ends up reproducing a monolithic description of “Japanese men” as oppressors.

Also, the above discussions, especially the latter, may lead to two overly simplistic views: First, that Japanese women choose Western men in order to avoid Japanese men. In fact, I have hardly heard from any of my female interviewees that they prefer Canadian men to Japanese men; some even say that they are willing to date with Canadian men but want to marry Japanese men. My Japanese female interviewees are certainly critical about Japanese society, like my male interviewees, but this does not mean they avoid or exclude Japanese young men as partners (I had only one case that was similar to what KELSKY's description of the preference for Western men). The visibility of intercultural couples consisting of Japanese women and local men, which I myself observe in Canada, therefore, must result from the gender imbalance among single Japanese sojourners in the first place. In other words, if equal numbers of single Japanese women and men were sojourning overseas, marriage among Japanese would be far more popular.

The second simplistic view that may be derived from the above research is that Japanese women marry overseas in order to escape from working in Japan. But as this study has indicated, many of my female informants left Japan to search for their true self-work, often wishing to work overseas. If marriage or any relationship is chosen, it is because of the interaction of several factors in their search for life’s possibilities (KATO 2009: 191). An ethnographic study of young Japanese artistic sojourners in New York and London also argues that Japanese female sojourners' relationship with local men, including “Black” men, is a result of negotiation and interaction with local people and situations (FUJITA 2008: 150, 165-6).

More specific interviews with young women and men in Japan by MATHEWS (2004) reveal the work-related commonality between the two as follows:

[Generational difference seems finally more pivotal than gender difference in explaining why young people fail to stay in their career-track jobs...[M]en and women in common, felt a distinct discontentment: the corporate world they now worked within was not where they wanted to spend their lives...[T]he ideal for a plurality of men and women in common was to become neither salaryman nor spouse, but an independent professional” (MATHEWS 2004: 127-8).

In the nexus of the post-industrial and post-modern ages urging both young Japanese women and men to search for their self-work beyond national borders, while their home society hinders men from doing so, young men are more trapped and troubled than are women. Japanese young men are, so to speak, pressured towards national self-enclosure (hikikomori). China and Korea, whose citizens, Japanese people often say, maintain stronger forms of Confucian patriarchy as well as stronger nationalist sentiments than do the
Japanese, are sending far greater numbers of male students and immigrants to Canada and the US than does Japan. If this is the case, one may well say that Japan is maintaining a peculiar combination of patriarchy and nationalism that binds its men to their homeland. Narratives of young Japanese female and male migrants in Canada are shedding light on this “male problem” back home.

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