



INTERNATIONAL RETIREMENT MIGRATION FOR JAPANESE RETIREES MOTIVATIONAL PUSH-PULL FACTORS AND BEHAVIORAL PHENOMENA TOWARDS CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Siti Hajar Binti Rosli^a 

^a Yamaguchi University (Yamaguchi, Japan), Graduate School of East Asian Studies; <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2496-358X>;
e-mail: b504snv@yamaguchi-u.ac.jp

How to cite (APA style): Rosli, S.H.B. (2024). International retirement migration for Japanese retirees: Motivational push-pull factors and behavioral phenomena towards cultural assimilation. *Turyzm/Tourism*, 34(1), 67–78. <https://doi.org/10.18778/0867-5856.34.1.07>

ABSTRACT

This article examines push and pull factors for Japanese retirees in Thailand as part of international retirement migration (IRM). Additionally, it studies levels of social integration, subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction, cultural assimilation and factors that hinder it. It examines the moderating and mediating effect of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. A quantitative method using a questionnaire was used and found that economic, health and social factors are significant in influencing retirees' push and pull motivations. As for social integration, subjective well-being, life satisfaction and cultural assimilation, there is positive feedback from retirees. Factors that hinder cultural assimilation are language barriers and cultural differences. The results show a positive and strong association between language acquisition and social integration, between social integration and cultural assimilation, and between attitudes and cultural assimilation. There is a moderating effect between language acquisition and cultural assimilation. The results also show that there is no mediating effect for local support on the relationship between attitudes and social integration.

KEYWORDS

international migration, Japanese retirees, push and pull factors, cultural assimilation

ARTICLE INFORMATION DETAILS

Received:
12 December 2023
Accepted:
1 March 2024
Published:
22 May 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

Between the 1960s and 1970s, mobility among retirees and high-income earners to seek a better environment and live abroad, increased. This is known as international retirement migration (IRM) and is defined as long-term or permanent migration rather than leisure as for short term holidays or business trips (Hall & Müller, 2004). IRM started as countryside recreation and part of a lifestyle and leisure culture, especially

in Nordic countries (Lipkina, 2013), becoming popular with the purchase or rental of property in foreign destinations (Nouza et al., 2018). Later it contributed to regional economies in most tourism destinations (Hall & Müller, 2004). Retirees from the USA, Europe and Japan move to Southeast Asia, including Malaysia and Thailand, for a better quality of life after their retirement (Howard, 2008; Ono, 2008, 2010), an opportunity in fact for a second life, setting new goals, activities, the experience of living in foreign destinations

and doing volunteer work (Williams et al., 2000). Before 2000, Japanese had a desire to stay in English-speaking countries like the USA, Canada and Australia, but since 2000, Southeast Asian countries, like Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines have become more popular because of the warm weather and cheaper cost of living than their country of origin. Statistics revealed that long-stay arrivals in the region increased steadily between 2011 and 2015 and within those five years, arrivals increased from 81.3 million to 108.9 million (Siew, 2017). Thailand offers a 'non-migrant type O' visa to foreigners who are aged over 50 with at least 800,000 Thai Baht in a savings account in a Thailand bank. They need to report to immigration authorities every time they spend a night outside Thailand, or every 90 days, as the purpose of their stay may not be income generation, and the visa must be extended annually.

Japan's population is ageing faster than that of any other nation (D.M., 2014). In 2014, 26% were estimated to be 65 or older, and the Health and Welfare Ministry has estimated that over-65s will account for 40% of the population by 2060 ("Japan population to shrink by a third by 2060", 2012). The demographic shift in Japan's age profile has triggered concerns about the nation's economic future and the viability of its welfare state. This demographic crisis is the consequence of the combination of two elements: a high life expectancy and a low fertility rate.

In 2018, Japan had the second highest life expectancy in the world and meanwhile, since the 1970s the country has failed to raise its fertility rate to replacement level. The working culture, a deterioration of employment opportunities for young men and the traditional gender division of labour, are possible explanations for this trend. The consequences of the country's ageing and shrinking population include economic crisis, budgetary challenges, pressure on job markets and depopulation of rural areas. The increasing proportion of the elderly has resulted in an increasing demand for IRM and second homes. Retiree migration has become more popular as its intention is to search for a more affordable living environment and a second home retirement destination. This is a new form of international human mobility, where the movement of elderly people in their later lives to places that offer more favorable features and a better quality of life (Balkir & Kirkulak, 2009). For Japanese retirees who utilise this, the primary purpose of living abroad is to enjoy a warm climate, to explore the cultural and natural attractions that a country offers, and to take advantage of the relatively inexpensive living costs. Therefore, use by those over 65 has increased rapidly, while for those aged less than 65 it is in decline (Hongsranganon, 2005). The purpose of this research is to study the motivational push-pull factors that

lead Japanese retirees to live abroad. This research also investigates whether behavioral phenomena like well-being, social integration and life satisfaction play an important role in cultural assimilation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

International retirement migration normally occurs on a temporary or semi-permanent basis depending on previous experience, time spent in the country of origin and the host destination, and the ownership of property (Mason, 2002; O'Reilly, 2000). Through globalization, according to Warnes (2009), international second homes (ISH) have become a residential strategy for retirees upon leaving their careers and changes in their personal and social conditions (Abellán Garcia, 1993; King et al., 1998). It is worthwhile noting that the term 'second home' may not necessarily refer to the ownership of property in a different country or to permanently leaving their country of origin to reside overseas. Thus, in general, researchers have termed an ISH as a destination on a long-term basis which acts as a residence for someone who comes from a different location (McIntyre, 2014; Visser, 2006). Generally, all motivations can be divided into push and pull factors.

According to Müller (2011), an increasing number of retirees have begun to invest in recreational second homes with the aim to migrate permanently. Retired migrants are presented as a relatively privileged group with few serious problems (Gustafson, 2008), financially better off, immune from economic downturns and less destructive or seasonal than tourists (Rodríguez, 2001). Though less than 0.25% of retirees are estimated to spend their retirement overseas (Banks, 2004), this trend is expected to strengthen with an increasing elderly population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2022). Cross-border residential mobility has become a growing facet in the broad sphere of lifestyle migration (O'Reilly & Benson, 2009) due to a combination of increasing longevity, thriving international mobility, burgeoning telecommunications and a widening disparity in post-work incomes (Warnes & Williams, 2006).

This shows that there is demand in the second home industry from this specific cohort of the elderly and from retirees from around the globe (Vanhove, 2005). Second homes have become a new preference for retirees due to an increase in wealth, income, mobility and the availability of long-term tourism (Müller, 2006). Among the impacts of an ageing population on a society, particularly in the developing nations, is the increase in financial pressure on a social

security system which will eventually be passed on to those younger and making it increasingly expensive for those citizens. As a result, the demand for overseas second home retirement has increased, urging retirees to search for a more affordable living environment which offers a better quality of life and fulfills their 'self-actualization' needs (Wong & Musa, 2014).

2.1. LONG-STAY INTERNATIONAL RETIREMENT MIGRATION (IRM): JAPANESE RETIREES IN THAILAND

Nowadays, many Japanese retirees choose Thailand for long-stay tourism, the second most popular long-stay destination after Malaysia (Long Stay Foundation, 2018). The Thai government, particularly the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), has been actively promoting long-stay tourism since 2001 as part of a national development strategy (Toyota & Xiang, 2012). Long-stay is regarded as staying in a country for more than 30 days and not for sightseeing or work but with the purpose of living but with the intention to return to their home countries (Hongsrnagon, 2005). As retirees are the main target group, a special renewable one-year visa is provided for people aged 50 and above who fulfill certain financial criteria. The Thai government has designated Japan as a primary target country and the idea of second home or long-stay was proposed by TAT and approved by the government in 1998. The registration data from 2017 for overseas residents shows that the number of Japanese expatriates had doubled in the previous decade, reaching around 81,000 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2022).

2.2. MIGRATION: LEE'S PUSH-PULL THEORY

Everett Lee proposed a comprehensive theory of migration in 1966 to study floating populations and immigrants (Lee, 1966). The theory holds that the reasons are because people can improve their living conditions through migration. Lee states that each place possesses a set of positive and negative factors: positive factors are the circumstances that act to hold people, or attract those from other areas, negative factors tend to repel them (Figure 1).

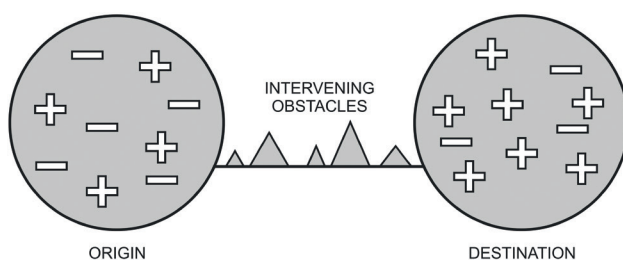


Figure 1. Lee's push-pull theory
Source: Lee (1966)

2.3. SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

Social exchange theory is a behavioral theory (Lee & Back, 2006) that attempts to illustrate how individuals' actions are contingent upon rewards from others (Emerson, 1976). From a tourism perspective, social exchange theory attempts to measure and explain social assimilation among retirees toward local society. The theory focuses on the interaction between residents and tourists where the goal of the exchange is to benefit both parties (Mukherjee & Bhal, 2017).

2.4. RETIREMENT MIGRATION MODEL

Schiamberg and McKinney (2003) and Wiseman (1980) considered retirement migration as a process and an event that is influenced by several factors such as personal resources, community and housing, along with social factors and support networks. Haas and Serow (1993) believe that retirees often do not stay permanently in the same retirement location, but then decide to move elsewhere. Guided by Haas and Serow's (1993) retirement migration model, this research predicts that retirees demonstrate transnational behavior which affects their ties both with their place of origin and the retirement location. This behavior may either enhance or reduce their overall experience in the retirement destination.

2.5. CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Keefe and Padilla (1987) define assimilation as the social, economic and political integration of an ethnic minority group into mainstream society (Mukherji, 2005). The process involves taking on the traits of the dominant culture to such a degree that the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of that society.

2.6. SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Social integration can be explained as "the process of promoting the values, relations and institutions that enable all people to participate in social, economic and political life on the basis of equality of rights and opportunity, equity and dignity" (Ferguson, 2008). Social integration refers to the extent to which newcomers experience cooperative social interaction with members of the host society, satisfaction with them, and attraction (Wang & Kim, 2013).

2.7. LANGUAGE VIS-À-VIS SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Krumm and Plutzar (2008) argue that it is important for immigrants to develop their national language skills so as to integrate and participate in the society; this

is critical because at the end of the process they live under the same legal, social and financial conditions as the natives. Language learning can thus be seen as a qualification for achieving social integration.

2.8. SOCIAL INTEGRATION VIS-À-VIS CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Social integration is very important whereby individuals from different groups gain equal access to resources and opportunities. This makes societies more cohesive and culturally diverse by promoting understanding and acceptance. Social integration is the process during which newcomers or minorities are incorporated into the social structure of the host society. In this research, it is believed that good social integration leads to good cultural assimilation among retirees.

2.9. SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING VIS-À-VIS CULTURE ASSIMILATION

Research by Angelini et al. (2015) on the 'Life satisfaction of immigrants: does cultural assimilation matter?' indicated a direct association between subjective well-being and cultural assimilation, unmediated by labor market outcomes (e.g. employment status, wages), time-invariant unobserved individual characteristics, or regional controls that capture the external social conditions of migrants. The findings show a strong association between a direct measure of immigrants' subjective well-being and assimilation with a host culture.

2.10. ATTITUDE

Positive attitudes can have a significant impact on culture assimilation. When individuals possess positive attitudes toward different cultures, it fosters an environment of acceptance, openness and understanding. This respect creates an atmosphere where individuals from different backgrounds feel welcomed and included. It also encourages a willingness to learn about other cultures.

2.11. LANGUAGE BARRIER

A language barrier can be defined as the difficulty in expressing oneself, difficulty in obtaining directions, difficulty in explaining expectations, poor performance and ineffective communication (McIntire, 2014). Barker and Härtel support this notion, proclaiming that occurrence of ignorance due to differences in communication can prevent immigrants from interacting with locals. Consequently, understanding of the local language is of great importance (Barker & Härtel, 2004).

2.12. EXTERNAL SOCIAL CONDITIONS

External social conditions refer to the contextual factors and circumstances within a society or community that influence individuals' experiences, interactions and well-being. These conditions are external to the individual and encompass various aspects of the social environment including cultural norms, societal values, institutional structures and social relationships. They can significantly shape people's lives and impact their behavior, opportunities and overall quality of life.

3. METHODOLOGY

The primary data for this research was collected through a questionnaire that was distributed from January to March 2023. In the questionnaire the respondents were required to fill in their demographic profile as well as to mark each item according to a five-point Likert scale (1 – *strongly disagree*, 2 – *disagree*, 3 – *neither disagree nor agree*, 4 – *agree* or 5 – *strongly agree*), which was inspired by and partially developed from Marjavaara (2008) and Opačić (2009). There will also be some self-constructed items in the form of open-ended questions and it was translated into English from Japanese. Cross-sectional design has been implemented so that the author will collect data over a certain time period in order to be able to identify patterns in the collected data (Bryman, 2012). Since there is limited time for the collecting of data, a cross-sectional design gives a better understanding of the situation at given times (Bryman, 2012). Purposive sampling methods were used in which respondents were recruited on a voluntary basis in cooperation with three Japanese self-help clubs. For the questionnaire, the author managed to find 200 respondents who live in Thailand under IRM. In terms of age, respondents from 55 onwards were involved coming from an older generation (baby boomers) who were born between 1946 and 1964. They are currently between 55–75 years old. For this research, dependent and independent variables, along with moderating and mediating variables were used. Figure 2 is the conceptual framework for this article.

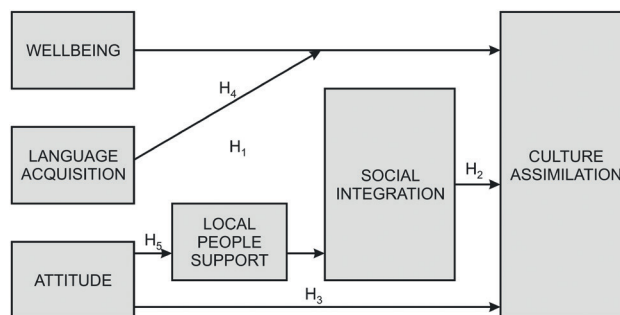


Figure 2. Conceptual framework
Source: author

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Altogether there were 107 male retirees, representing 53.5% of respondents, and almost 70% are above 65. Most were married, followed by widowed, and then single and divorced. Most had graduated from university with 75 holding a bachelor level degree, accounting for 37.5%. About 37.5% have a monthly income between USD 5500 and USD 6499 (Table 1).

Table 1. Respondents' profiles

Characteristic	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	107	53.5
	Female	93	46.5
Age	55–60	52	26.0
	61–64	10	5.0
	65–69	62	31.0
	Over 70	76	38.0
Marital status	Single	24	12.0
	Married	98	49.0
	Widowed	58	29.0
	Divorced	20	10.0
Educational background	Diploma	21	10.5
	Bachelor's-level degree	75	37.5
	Master's-level degree	65	32.5
	Doctoral degree	39	19.5
Income	USD 3500–4499	16	8.0
	USD 4500–5499	54	27.0
	USD 5500–6499	75	37.5
	Above USD 6500	55	27.5

Source: author.

In this article, the pull and push factors have been divided into economic, health and social such as high-income tax, poor living conditions (economic factors), emerging infectious diseases, expensive medical services (health factors), and increased disaster risks and urban sprawl (social factors), scoring the highest means (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean scores for push and pull factors for Japanese retirees

Motivational items		Mean
Push factors from Japan		
Economic factors	Tax code – high income tax to take from pension	4.65
	Poor living conditions – tiny rooms, confining spaces, overcrowding, poverty etc.	4.56
	High pace of lifestyle	4.38
	High cost of living leading to unsatisfactory financial conditions	4.28
Health factors	Emerging infectious diseases – dengue, chikungunya, zika, Ebola, hemorrhagic and yellow fever, avian influenza, respiratory infectious diseases, etc.	4.34
	High cost for medical services	4.33
	Low quality of life due to poor health facilities – lack of hospitals and clinics, poor medical care, lack of space to exercise etc.	4.08
Social factors	Growing disaster risks like earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis and repeated floods	4.53
	Poorly planned urban sprawl leads to congestion and overcrowding as well as having negative effects on people's well-being	4.21
	Extreme weather and seasonal changes	4.19
	Poor social networks for the elderly	4.00
Pull factors to Thailand		
Economic factors	Low cost of living (affordability of housing rent, food etc.)	4.45
	Cheaper labour and service (domestic staff: maid, gardener, etc.)	4.42
	Improving living standards e.g. spacious house, better living, better leisure activities, better well-being etc.	4.35
	Excellent infrastructure and facilities	4.27
	Efficient tax and visa system	4.21
Health factors	Good self-care (yoga, bike-rides, vacation, meditate, spa, wellness therapies)	4.51
	Availability of carers for the elderly	4.39
	Subtropical climate with warm weather and mild temperatures for better health and well-being	4.35
	More rejuvenating wellness retreats	4.32
	Quality medical service and health care at an affordable price	4.27
	Good surrounding and living environment ex. clean air, less pollution and clean water	4.19

Table 2 (cont.)

Motivational items		Mean
Social factors	Existence of Japanese communities and clubs to socialize with	4.50
	Satisfaction from ikigai (living meaningfully, pleasure and enjoyable) activities that promote well-being and improve the quality of life	4.34
	Good communication networks	4.27
	Sheltered life: feeling calm, resilient, safe and secure	4.26
	Available entertainment for leisure (e.g. parks, theatres, clubs, temples, restaurants, shopping malls, street foods, traditional performances etc.)	4.20
	Affordable and hassle-free transportation	4.10
	Friendly and tolerant communities who live harmoniously	4.03

Source: author.

Additional motivational factors that influence retirees to reside in Thailand can be divided into those that include support from local people and government and external social condition. A good supply of skilled care workers at affordable prices, acknowledgment by local government (support from local people and government), direct flights to Japan and a world class education system (external social conditions) score highest (Table 3).

Table 3. Mean scores for other motivational factors for Japanese retirees

Other motivational items	Mean
Support from local people and government	
Good supply of skilled care workers (maids) at an affordable price	4.32
Acknowledgment of Japanese people by the government, e.g. special events held like the biennial Bon Odori Festival for Thai-Japanese relations	4.31
Helpful, supportive and empathetic residents	4.28
Encouraging attitudes from Thai people to foreigners	4.26
External social conditions	
Direct flights to Japan makes it easy for families and friends to visit	4.35
World class education system	4.32

No social isolation and good social connection among retirees and local people, retirees can mix well with friends and local people and practice Japanese culture freely	4.27
Full freedom of religion and places of worship for all religions	4.20

Source: author.

To study the level of social integration the questionnaires have been divided into attitudes and socialization. Under attitudes, the statements that score highly are that retirees are willing to socialize with local people through festivals and participate with local activities to understand the culture. The mean for attitude is 4.262 which shows a high level of social integration between the retirees and local people. Good socialization with the locals ensures friendliness with local people and promotes healthy lives, encouraging an environment of respect where people respect different cultures and mix well, scoring the highest. The mean under socialization is 4.286 indicating a high level of social integration (Table 4).

Table 4. Mean scores for social integration among Japanese retirees

Level of social integration	Mean
Attitudes	
Retirees are willing to socialize with local people through festivals and parties	4.53
Retirees participate in local Thai activities to understand the culture	4.41
Retirees are open-minded about learning new cultures and find it simpler to adapt to their new surroundings	4.37
Retirees feel welcome due to high level of social and emotional support from local people	4.34
Retirees build resilience and can cope with the new environment due to interaction and socialization with local people	4.15
Retirees mix well and share experience with local Thai community to improve social aspects	4.08
Socialization	
Good socialization ensures friendliness with local people and promotes healthy lives	4.29
Good socialization encourages an environment of respect where people respect different cultures and can mix well	4.26
Retirees take part in the local activities, making local friends, attending social groups, clubs and events where possible	4.28

Retirees gradually feel more comfortable with the new culture, social lifestyle and the new surroundings, and begin to feel less alien	4.18
Retirees avoid culture shock by exposing themselves to the alien environment and culture to avoid feeling anxiety and nervousness	4.15

Source: author.

Under 'level of well-being', the impact of the new environment in Thailand has improved retirees' psychological wellbeing and social integration. They have more positive emotions and intend to engage in spiritual practices with local people, and these score the highest means. The average mean of subjective wellbeing is 4.3129 which shows a high level (Table 5).

Table 5. Mean scores for subjective wellbeing among Japanese retirees

Level of subjective well-being	Mean
Impact of new environment in Thailand has improved retiree psychological wellbeing and social integration	4.37
Retirees have more positive emotions and intend to engage in spiritual practices with the local people	4.36
Physical wellness of the retirees improves due to the good external social conditions being given by local people	4.30
Retirees feel accepted by local people and therefore happier and healthier	4.23
Retirees experience a good quality of life with better climate, weather and surroundings while mixing well with the locals	4.20
Positive wellbeing motivates retirees to become active and undergo positive ageing	4.08
Retirees enhance wellbeing by sticking to a healthy sleep schedule, choosing nutritious meals, and taking part in stress management techniques such as meditation or yoga	4.00

Source: author.

Under 'cultural assimilation', among the highest mean scores are assimilation into the local society helping the retiree to appreciate culture and get over the hesitation of something different, and assimilation experiences leading to a higher quality of living and better mental health. The mean for cultural assimilation is 4.152 which indicates a high level of cultural assimilation (Table 6).

Table 6. Mean scores for cultural assimilation among Japanese retirees

Level of cultural assimilation	Mean
Assimilation into local society helps the retiree to appreciate culture and get over the fear or hesitation of something different	4.31
Assimilation experiences in Thailand lead to a higher quality of living and better mental health among retirees	4.25
Conducive and efficient facilities provided by Thai authorities have enabled retirees to perform cultural assimilation smoothly	4.21
Retirees are comfortable in making new friends and attending cultural events	4.17
To assimilate well with the local culture, retirees make an effort to learn the local language and become part of that culture	4.13
Retirees tend to adapt to local culture	4.04

Source: author.

To study the factors that hinder cultural assimilation among Japanese retirees, the researcher has divided the questionnaires into language acquisition and culture differences. Under 'language barriers', among the items that receive high scores are retirees experiencing difficulty in their efforts to integrate and communicate in Thailand. The mean for factors that hinder cultural assimilation under language barrier is 4.364 which is very high. Under 'culture differences', among the items that receive high scores are local people eating using fingers, but retirees often use chopsticks or spoon and fork while eating. The mean for factors that hinder cultural assimilation under culture differences is 4.9508 which is very high (Table 7).

Table 7. Mean scores for factors hinder cultural assimilation

Factors that hinder cultural assimilation	Mean
Language acquisition	
Retirees experience difficulty in their efforts to integrate and communicate in Thai	4.61
The native language is very hard to learn and retirees struggle with low confidence when trying to talk in public	4.51
Inability to communicate in Thai leads to problems assimilating to Thai culture among Japanese retirees	4.46
Inability to understand Thai limits retiree opportunities to interact with local people	4.43
Language barriers prohibit retirees from mixing with Thais efficiently	4.27

Table 7 (cont.)

Factors that hinder cultural assimilation	Mean
Inability to communicate with locals makes the retiree feel isolated and alienated	4.15
Culture differences	
Local people eat using fingers but retirees often use chopsticks, or spoon and fork	4.51
Masculinity: Japanese retirees were aggressive and competitive especially while working, but local people are passive and less aggressive. This can cause Japanese and Thais not to understand each other	4.46
Japanese retirees are very punctual as it is a cardinal rule for them but locals are less concerned about punctuality	4.45
Some cultural practices in Thailand do not suit Japanese retirees	4.15
Body language: local people like to smile no matter where they are even in a serious business deal. Japanese retirees are used to having serious talks with serious facial expressions	4.10

Source: author.

To examine the relationship between variables, correlation tests have been conducted using SPSS. Table 8 is the normality test results for skewness and kurtosis for each variable. The distribution of data is normal because values for both are between -1.96 and +1.96 (Table 8).

Table 8. Skewness and kurtosis results for each variable

Factor	Skewness	Kurtosis
Push	0.157	0.554
Pull	-0.327	-0.695
Other	-0.528	-0.612
Level social integration	-0.151	-0.700
Level well-being	-0.943	-0.467
Level life satisfaction	-0.397	-0.045
Level cultural assimilation	-0.285	0.473
Factor hinders cultural assimilation	-0.435	0.720

Source: author.

To understand the relationship between language acquisition and retiree social integration, social integration and retiree cultural assimilation, and retiree attitude and cultural assimilation, correlation tests have been carried out.

Table 9 shows that there is a positive significant relationship between language acquisition and social integration for Japanese retirees who reside in Thailand under IRM, with a Pearson correlation of 0.485

(moderate) and p value (0.000 significant as $p < 0.05$). Secondly, it shows that there is positive significant relationship between social integration and retiree cultural assimilation with a Pearson correlation of 0.503 (strong) and p value (0.000 significant, as $p < 0.05$). Finally, the table shows there is a positive significant relationship between retiree attitude and retiree cultural assimilation with a Pearson correlation of 0.482 (moderate) and p value (0.000 significant, as $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, to understand the moderating effect of language acquisition on the relationship between well-being and cultural assimilation, a multiple regression test has been carried out. The results are shown in Table 10 and Table 11.

Table 9. Correlation test results ($n = 200$)

Character	1	2	3	4
Attitude	1	-	-	-
Social integration	0.562**	1	-	-
Language	0.254**	0.485**	1	-
Cultural assimilation	0.482**	0.503**	0.472**	1

Note: ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: author.

Table 10. Regression analysis (moderating effect of language acquisition on wellbeing and culture assimilation)

Coefficient	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	4.4268	0.0456	96.977	0.000	4.3368
WB	0.2307	0.0475	4.8523	0.000	0.2392
LA	0.3277	0.0449	7.3037	0.000	0.2392
Int_1	-0.0873	0.0439	-1.9902	0.048	-0.1738
Focal predict: WB					
Mod var: LA					

Note: SE – standard error, t – test of statistical significance, p – probability, LLCI – lower limit confidence interval, ULCI – upper limit confidence interval, WB – well-being, LA – language acquisition, Int_1 – interaction value

Source: author.

Table 11. Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s)

LA	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-1.0287	0.3205	0.0612	5.2349	0.0000	0.1998	0.4413
0.0000	0.2307	0.0475	4.8523	0.0000	0.1369	0.3245
0.9550	0.1473	0.0673	2.1907	0.0297	0.0147	0.2800

Note: LA – language acquisition, SE – standard error, t – test of statistical significance, p – probability, LLCI – lower limit confidence interval, ULCI – upper limit confidence interval.

Source: author.

Table 12. Regression analysis (mediating effect of local support on attitude and social integration)

Effect	Path	β	SE	95% CI		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
				lower	upper		
Total	Attitude → social integration	0.4250	0.0549	0.3166	0.5333	7.7350	0.0000
Indirect	Attitude → support local people → social integration	0.0102	0.0091	-0.0029	0.0320	–	–
Direct	Attitude → social integration	0.4148	0.0557	0.3053	0.5243	7.4698	0.0000
Complete standardized indirect effect	Attitude → support local people → social integration	0.0115	0.0102	-0.0033	0.0356	–	–

Note: β – coefficient, SE – standard error, CI – confidence interval, *t* – test of significance, *p* – probability.

Source: author.

The hypothesized moderated model was tested using multiple regression analysis via PROCESS macro model number 1. The hypotheses proposed that language acquisition moderates the relationship between wellbeing and culture assimilation. As can be seen in Table 10, the coefficient value for language acquisition moderation on wellbeing and cultural assimilation is -0.0873 , which means a negative moderation effect and the *p*-value is 0.0480, which is lower than 0.05. Therefore, the effect is significant and the hypothesis is supported. In conclusion, Table 10 yielded significant results, therefore language acquisition negatively moderates the relationship between wellbeing and culture assimilation. When language acquisition is low ($b = -1.0287$, $p < 0.001$) and medium ($b = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$), wellbeing is associated with higher levels of culture assimilation. However, when the language acquisition is high, $b = 0.9550$, $p < 0.05$, it weakens the relationship between wellbeing and culture assimilation.

In addition, the article also examines the moderating effect of support from local people between attitude and social integration. Table 12 is the result of the multiple regression analysis.

The hypothesis proposed that local support mediates the relationship between attitude and social integration. The hypothesis (indirect effect) was tested using a percentile bootstrap estimation approach with 5000 re-samples. As shown in Table 12, it was observed that the indirect effect of local support on attitude and social integration was not significant (indirect effect = 0.0102, 95% CI = -0.0033 , 0.0356). Because the 95% bootstrap confidence interval includes zero, therefore a high level of support from the locals does mediate the association between attitudes and social integration.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results show the complex interplay of push and pull factors driving Japanese retirees to migrate to Thailand. On the push side, economic factors like poor living

conditions in Japan discourage retirees from staying in their home country. Health concerns, such as high medical costs, as well as the threat of natural disasters, also contribute to their motivation to leave. Social factors, including poorly planned urban development and a lack of social networks for the elderly, further encourage them to seek a better life abroad. On the pull side, Thailand offers a range of economic incentives, including a lower cost of living and affordable housing. Health-related attractions include a favorable climate and quality healthcare at affordable prices. Socially, Japanese retirees are drawn to Thailand by the presence of Japanese communities, the concept of *ikigai*, a strong communication network and numerous entertainment options. According to Wong and Musa (2014), retirees search for a more affordable living environment which offers a better quality of life and fulfils their 'self-actualization' needs.

The passage also highlights the essential role of local support, with Thai residents offering skilled care workers, recognition of Japanese culture by the government, and a generally helpful and empathetic attitude towards Japanese retirees. Additionally, external social conditions, such as direct flights to Japan, a quality education system, strong social connections and religious freedom, further enhance Thailand's appeal as a retirement destination. This exchange provides opportunities to improve the local economy so the interaction between locals and retirees is of benefit to both parties (Mukherjee & Bhal, 2017).

Japanese retirees in Thailand express a strong willingness to engage with the local population through festivals and parties, and actively participate in local activities to better understand Thai culture. They report good socialization with locals, which fosters friendliness and promotes healthy relationships. This positive socialization encourages an environment of respect for different cultures, enabling individuals to mix well and feel comfortable in various social settings. This is shown by the overall mean scores for both attitudes and socialization, indicating a high level of social integration between Japanese retirees

and the local population. These findings indicate that the retiree experiences cooperative social interaction, satisfaction and attraction to local society (Wang & Kim, 2013).

Old age is a biological phenomenon with difficult adaptation and environmental interaction (Duangkaew, 2019). Therefore, international migration by elderly Japanese to spend the remainder of their lives in Bangkok or Chiang Mai, in a different country with sociocultural differences, is not easy as Thailand and Japan each have their own cultures. According to the study, problems during long stays by elderly Japanese people in Chiang Mai are mostly due to the absence of smooth participation in social activities due to barriers caused by cultural differences in language, values and ideas as well as laws enforced by Thailand. However, elderly Japanese people have tried finding guidelines for improving relationships with community members to gain acceptance from Thai society and residents in Chiang Mai, but this takes time as social integration is human behavior in a society and a lifelong learning process.

Mental wellbeing is about life satisfaction, optimism, self-esteem, feeling in control, having a purpose and a sense of belonging and support. Older people, including those living in care homes, often experience depression, loneliness and low levels of satisfaction and wellbeing. Taking part in meaningful activities, maintaining and developing personal identity, and getting the right help for any health conditions or sensory impairments have been identified as key to improving mental wellbeing. Each person should feel valued and be offered opportunities and support to express themselves. Therefore, pull factors like helpful, supportive and empathetic residents and good nursing home carers are factors to wellbeing. In Thailand, care staff provide all the support needed to help retirees maintain existing relationships and to develop new ones, to help with activities that motivate them, to learn new skills and increase independence so that they can keep healthy and feel satisfied with life.

The inability to converse in Thai is parallel to research about the effect of language towards cultural assimilation conducted at Ramkhamhaeng University in 2013. The findings came out with some suggestions: promoting assimilation, strengthening relationships and social ties, and improving English speaking skills. It also agreed with Krumm and Plutzar (2008) that it is important for migrants to develop their language skills so as to integrate and participate in the society. Difficulty in living in unfamiliar cultures is caused by differences in patterns of thinking, points of view and physical actions. Learning to understand these different styles is one solution that may help people to live together despite their differences. From previous research, individualism is very different between Thais

and Japanese because Japanese people do not live in a large group like Thais. Although both countries share some similarities in terms of practices in society, Thais and Japanese often put harmony in a group over individuals.

The correlation analysis shows that there is a positive, strong association between language acquisition and retiree social integration, a positive, strong association between social integration and retiree cultural assimilation, a positive, strong association between subjective wellbeing and retiree cultural assimilation and a positive, strong association between retiree attitude and cultural assimilation. Furthermore, regression analysis shows language acquisition has a moderating effect on the relationship between cultural assimilation and wellbeing, a dependent variable. However, there is no moderating effect of support from local people towards attitude and social integration.

6. SUGGESTION

From the study, the researchers would like to suggest a few improvements that could increase the number of participants and also improve the assimilation and wellbeing of the retiree. Firstly, local government could provide incentives towards retirees to encourage them to study Thai such as rewarding the retiree once they able to show that they can communicate in the language. Besides, for the local community, the government could encourage the local language provider to give an attractive package for retirees. As for the Japanese club, it could initiate more collaboration with local higher education or local communities to establish an adoption program for a retiree and a local family. This enables the retiree and local community to get a better understanding of both cultures. Lastly, both Japanese local government or prefecture and Thailand local government or province should do more in order to promote IRM in Thailand to attract and provide necessary information regarding second homes.

7. LIMITATION

The study's limitations include the use of a purposive sampling method. As this study involves international retirees who perform extensive mobility, the respondents are chosen only from those who migrate to Thailand which may limit the generalizability of the results to Japanese retirees in other areas. Future research could involve a comparative study of Japanese retirees to other destinations for validation.

REFERENCES

- Abellán García, A. (1993). La decisión de emigrar en las personas de edad [The decision to migrate among elderly people]. *Estudios Geográficos*, 54(210), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.3989/egoeogr.1993.i210.5>
- Angelini, V., Casi, L., & Corazzini, L. (2015). Life satisfaction of immigrants: Does cultural assimilation matter? *Journal of Population Economics*, 28, 817–844. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-015-0552-1>
- Balkir, C., & Kirkulak, B. (2009). Turkey, the new destination for international retirement migration. In H. Fassmann, M. Haller & D. Lane (Eds.), *Migration and mobility in Europe* (pp. 123–143). Edward Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781849802017.00015>
- Banks, S.P. (2004). Identity narratives by American and Canadian retirees in Mexico. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 19, 361–381. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JCCG.0000044689.63820.5c>
- Barker, S., & Härtel, C.E.J. (2004). Intercultural service encounters: An exploratory study of customer experiences. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 11(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13527600410797710>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.
- D.M. (2014, March 25). The incredible shrinking country. *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/banyan/2014/03/25/the-incredible-shrinking-country>
- Duangkaew, S. (2019). Cross cultural interaction of Japanese retirees through clubs in Thailand. *International Journal of Crime, Law and Social Issues*, 6(2), 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3546351>
- Emerson, R.M. (1976). Social exchange theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2, 335–362. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.02.080176.002003>
- Ferguson, C. (2008). *Expert group meeting: Promoting social integration: Helsinki, Finland 8–10 July 2008* [Background paper for discussion]. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/social/meetings/egm6_social_integration/documents/backgroundpaper_Clare_Ferguson.pdf
- Gustafson, P. (2008). Transnationalism in retirement migration: The case of North European retirees in Spain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31(3), 451–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701492000>
- Haas, W.H., & Serow, W.J. (1993). Amenity retirement migration process: A model and preliminary evidence. *The Gerontologist*, 33(2), 212–220. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/33.2.212>
- Hall, C.M., & Müller, D.K. (2004). *Tourism, mobility, and second homes: Between elite landscape and common ground*. Channel View Publications.
- Hongsrananong, P. (2005). Advisory facilities for long-stay Japanese senior travellers in Chiangmai. *Manusya: Journal of Humanities*, 8(2), 58–66. <https://doi.org/10.1163/26659077-00802005>
- Howard, R.W. (2008). Western retirees in Thailand: Motives, experiences, wellbeing, assimilation and future needs. *Ageing & Society*, 28(2), 145–163. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X07006290>
- Japan population to shrink by a third by 2060. (2012, January 30). *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/30/japan-population-shrink-third>
- King, R., Warnes, A.M., & Williams, A.M. (1998). International retirement migration in Europe. *International Journal of Population Geography*, 4(2), 91–111. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1220\(199806\)4:2<91::AID-IJPG97>3.0.CO;2-S](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1220(199806)4:2<91::AID-IJPG97>3.0.CO;2-S)
- Krumm, H.-J., & Plutzar, V. (2008). *Tailoring language provision and requirements to the needs and capacities of adult migrants*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1c8>
- Lee, C.-K., & Back, K.-J. (2006). Examining structural relationships among perceived impact, benefit, and support for casino development based on 4 year longitudinal data. *Tourism Management*, 27(3), 466–480. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2004.11.009>
- Lee, E.S. (1966). A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2060063>
- Lipkina, O. (2013). Motives for Russian second home ownership in Finland. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 13(4), 299–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2013.863039>
- Long Stay Foundation. (2018, April 2). [2018 Top 10 “Long stay preferred countries/regions 2017” announced] [in Japanese]. <https://www.longstay.or.jp/releaselist/entry-3023.html>
- Marjjavaara, R. (2008). *Second home tourism: The root to displacement in Sweden?* [Doctoral thesis, Umeå University, Department of Social and Economic Geography]. DiVa Digitala Vetenskapliga Arkivet. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:141659>
- Mason, P.A. (2002). Sunset lives: British retirement migration to the Mediterranean. By Russell King, Tony Warnes and Allan Williams. Berg Publisher (70 Washington Square, New York NY 10012, USA) 2000, xii+235 pp, \$19.50 Pbk. ISBN 1-85973-362-X [Book review]. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(2), 579–580. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(01\)00063-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(01)00063-9)
- McIntire, M. (2014, June 3). *How to overcome language and cultural barriers in the workplace* [Post]. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140603143206-20499125-how-to-overcome-language-and-cultural-barriers-in-the-workplace>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2022). *Japan-Thailand relations (basic data)*. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/thailand/data.html>
- Mukherjee, T., & Bhal, K.T. (2017). Understanding promotional service interactions through social exchange theory of affect. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 23(5), 689–707. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2017.1297985>
- Mukherji, J. (2005). Is cultural assimilation related to environmental attitudes and behaviors? In G. Menon & A.R. Rao (Eds.), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research: Vol. 32* (pp. 415–421). Association for Consumer Research. <https://www.tcrwebsite.org/volumes/9111/volumes/v32/NA-32>
- Müller, D.K. (2006). The attractiveness of second home areas in Sweden: A quantitative analysis. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 9(4–5), 335–350. <https://doi.org/10.2167/cit269.0>
- Müller, D.K. (2011). The internationalization of rural municipalities: Norwegian second home owners in northern Bohuslän, Sweden. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 8(4), 433–445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2011.605384>
- Nouza, M., Ólafsdóttir, R., & Sæþórsdóttir, A.D. (2018). Motives and behaviour of second home owners in Iceland reflected by place attachment. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 21(2), 225–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2015.1072139>
- Ono, M. (2008). Long-stay tourism and international retirement migration: Japanese retirees in Malaysia. *Transnational Migration in East Asia Senri Ethnological Reports*, 77, 151–162. <https://doi.org/10.15021/00001277>
- Ono, M. (2010). Long-stay tourism: Elderly Japanese tourists in the Cameron Highlands, Malaysia. *Senri Ethnological Studies*, 76, 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.15021/00002545>
- Opačić, V.T. (2009). Recent characteristics of the second home phenomenon in the Croatian littoral. *Hrvatski geografski glasnik / Croatian Geographical Bulletin*, 71(1), 33–64. <https://doi.org/10.21861/HGG.2009.71.01.03>
- O’Reilly, K. (2000). *The British on the Costa Del Sol: Transnational identities and local communities*. Routledge.
- O’Reilly, K.B., & Benson, M. (2009). Lifestyle migration: Escaping to the good life? In M. Benson & K. O’Reilly (Eds.), *Lifestyle migration: Expectations, aspirations and experiences* (pp. 1–13). Routledge.

- Rodriguez, V. (2001). Tourism as a recruiting post for retirement migration. *Tourism Geographies: An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment*, 3(1), 52–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616680010008702>
- Schiamberg, L.B., & McKinney, K.G. (2003). Factors influencing expectations to move or age in place at retirement among 40- to 65-year-olds. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 22(1), 19–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0733464802250043>
- Siew, R. (2017, September 22). Making Southeast Asia your second home. *The ASEAN Post*. <https://theaseanpost.com/article/making-southeast-asia-your-second-home>
- Toyota, M., & Xiang, B. (2012). The emerging transnational “retirement industry” in Southeast Asia. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32(11/12), 708–719. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01443331211280737>
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2022). *World population prospects 2022*. <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>
- Vanhove, N. (2005). Tourism demand. In N. Vanhove (Ed.), *Economics of tourism destinations* (pp. 50–74). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-7506-6637-4.50007-7>
- Visser, G. (2006). South Africa has second homes too! An exploration of the unexplored. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 9(4–5), 351–383. <https://doi.org/10.2167/cit266.0>
- Wang, J., & Kim, T.-Y. (2013). Proactive socialization behavior in China: The mediating role of perceived insider status and the moderating role of supervisors’ traditionalism. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 34(3), 389–406. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1811>
- Warnes, A.M., & Williams, A. (2006). Older migrants in Europe: A new focus for migration studies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32(8), 1257–1281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830600927617>
- Warnes, T.(A.M.). (2009). International retirement migration. In P. Uhlenberg (Ed.), *International handbook of population aging* (pp. 341–363). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8356-3_15
- Williams, A.M., King, R., Warnes, A., & Patterson, G. (2000). Tourism and international retirement migration: New forms of an old relationship in southern Europe. *Tourism Geographies: An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment*, 2(1), 28–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/146166800363439>
- Wiseman, R.F. (1980). Why older people move: Theoretical issues. *Research on Aging*, 2(2), 141–154. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016402758022003>
- Wong, K.M., & Musa, G. (2014). Retirement motivation among “Malaysia my second home” participants. *Tourism Management*, 40, 141–154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.06.002>