

Social Interaction of Japanese Elderly in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aimed to study the social interactions of Japanese elderly staying long-term in Chiang Mai. The key informants were nine Japanese, 60 years of age and up, staying for long-term in Chiang Mai, selected by purposive sampling. The informants holding Non-Immigration Visa, code O-A (long-stay), and staying in Chiang Mai for more than five years provided clear information on the studied issues. Data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews and using triangulation data testing and analyzed by using content analysis and theme analysis for summarizing the research results. The results found that the Japanese elderly regularly interacted with people in the community via daily life and social activities in daily face-to-face conversation. The Thai language was used in communications with community members. The interactions' scope, frequency, and intensity were in the neighborhood. The key informants spent time building familiarity with people and limited special physical areas with the capacity to create social interactions. Long-term residence in Chiang Mai for more than three years was found to have caused elderly Japanese informants to have interactions with the environment while connecting the micro-system, the mesosystem, the exo-system, and the macro-system, causing elderly Japanese informants to have broad social networks, resulting in good learning and understanding of community cultures, laws, rules, norms and values in addition to enabling behaviors consistent with community culture, creating understanding and respect for cultural differences and ability to live in harmony in Thai society.

Keywords: Japanese elderly, long-stay, migration, social interaction

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INTRODUCTION

The global transition to aging societies has increased international migration in the context of the elderly population, particularly in developed countries. This

new phenomenon is increasing in the 21st century and is a migration for a better life abroad. Most elderly foreigners opt to migrate to destinations in developing countries with fewer amenities and smaller economies. Thailand has been a country in the target group for supporting retired elderly people from abroad since 1990, and Thailand is one of the top countries of interest for elderly foreigners (Williams et al., 2000). In 2019, 1,875,368 retired foreign tourists came to stay in Thailand. Of this number, 181,656 were elderly Japanese tourists aged 65 years and up (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2019). Japan has the highest ratio of elderly citizens in the world, with the population aged over 60 years making up 43 million of the country's 126.9 million-strong population or 34.0% of the population (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019).

Many elderly Japanese people have come to live in Thailand, particularly in Chiang Mai. The province with the most Japanese people in Thailand is Bangkok, followed by Chonburi and Chiang Mai, respectively. Most of the Japanese people living in Bangkok and Chonburi are working-aged people. Therefore, it differs from Chiang Mai, where most elderly people have come to stay for a long time after retirement. In addition, the number of elderly Japanese people holding non-immigrant visas (Code O-A) in Chiang Mai was 3,130 people, divided into 1,690 people aged 55–59 years, 692 people aged 60–69 years, 635 people aged 70–79 years, 98 people aged 80–89 years and 15 people aged 90 years and up (Nishikito, 2020).

Old age is a biological phenomenon with the most difficult adaptation and environmental interaction (Duangkaew, 2015). Therefore, international migration by elderly Japanese people to spend the remainder of their lives in Chiang Mai, Thailand, a different country with sociocultural differences, is not easy. 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, laws enforced by Thailand, values, and ideas. 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 (Koshiji, 2012).

Social interactions are human behaviors in society and a lifelong learning process for members of society (Talcott, 1965). A person's balance is usually created by regular interactions with the environment and good adaptation to the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Therefore, social interactions are relationships among members linked to community culture, comparable to a rule for community members to behave and live together happily. Sydenham (1960) stated that social interactions are a key social process in connecting across societies and cultures, particularly for societies in the age of globalization where people of many ethnicities live in the same area.

The phenomenon of many elderly Japanese people residing long term in Chiang

Mai province addressed earlier is very significant. Therefore, the researcher was interested in studying the social interactions of elderly Japanese people living in Chiang Mai to create new knowledge on how elderly Japanese people socially interact when living with Thais in society. The results might be useful guidelines for the agencies whose obligations concern developing and promoting long-stay tourism for the elderly Japanese people in Chiang Mai province to support them in living happily in different social and cultural contexts.

Research Objective

The research objective is to study the social interactions of elderly Japanese people staying long-term in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Literature Review

Long-Term Residence Tourism Concepts.

The Long Stay Tourism Development Promotion Committee defines “long-stay tourists” as tourists who stay for one month and up. Initially, a focus was placed on retired tourists who wanted to travel to live and tour as an additional activity (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018). The general characteristics of long stays include longer than ordinary stays in a foreign country to perform activities for relaxation or recreation and a greater focus on staying in place rather than traveling in addition to having a residence or rented lodgings abroad for residence without living in a hotel along with sufficient funds for living abroad (Intaratat et al., 2006). In 1992, Japan created the Japanese Long Stay Foundation

to survey the feasibility of long-stay tourism with appropriate living costs and maintain the quality of life (Miyazaki, 2008). From 2008-2010, the Japanese government supported elderly Japanese people traveling outside the country under the Visit World Campaign. Thailand was supported as one of the nine countries where elderly Japanese people should travel for long stays.

When considering the consistency between Japanese government policies and Thai tourism policies in 2001, the Thai government supported Thailand as a destination for long-stay tourists aged 50 years and up with a focus on working-age retirees with high spending power to bring currency into the country and strengthen the Thai economy. The National Long Stay Tourism Promotion and Development Committee designated five provinces and areas to support long-stay tourists in the target group in the initial stage consisting of Chiang Mai, Sukhothai, Hua Hin-Cha-am, Kanchanaburi, and Nong Khai (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018). The province of Chiang Mai made a development goal to become a center of tourism and international services as a City of Life and Prosperity, a city that gives happiness and a valued life to residents and guests as a pleasant world-class tourism city, a center of trade, investment, and transportation, a Medical and Health Hub and a city with a diversity of nature and culture (Chiang Mai Provincial Office, 2020).

Social Interaction Concept. Social interactions are a basic system of human actions in living together and are behaviors

that indicate relationships between elderly Japanese people as community members. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) was applied as a broad guideline for conducting field studies and building an in-depth understanding of social interactions between elderly Japanese people and community members in environments with continual interactions throughout long stays in Chiang Mai. The environment was divided into the following four systems: (1) The microsystem, which is the system closest to elderly Japanese people with regular interactions, (2) The mesosystem, which is a system of interactions related to groups of persons, networks, and organizations, (3) The exo-system, which is a system of interactions with outside environments in the physical area, in the areas of economic systems, residence, communications, public utilities, and public health without directly interacting while influencing the lives of elderly Japanese people, and (4) The macro system, which is a system of elderly people's interactions with social environments, cultures, values, laws, attitudes, and religions that can have effects on elderly Japanese people when in a long stay under sociocultural differences between Thailand and Japan.

The human quality of life is not only viewed as an external material factor, and consideration is also given to relationships between humans and abstract psychological quality (Bentham, 1789). Humans are social animals that need to live with others as a group, community, and society, particularly

in the age of globalization when migrations across borders are widespread (Appadurai, 2002). Social interactions among people of different and diverse ethnicities, languages, and cultures caused people to communicate, exchange, understand, and accept sociocultural differences and diversity (Maluhan, 1964) to live with others in destination countries appropriately.

METHODS

This study is a qualitative research conducted in a purposively selected area in Muang District, Chiang Mai Province, in Huay Kaew, Nimmanhemmin, and Chang Klaan. The criteria for selecting the study were areas with many elderly Japanese people who came on long stays and areas with social activities capable of clearly reflecting social interactions. The key informants were nine elderly Japanese people on long stays in Chiang Mai, consisting of three women and six men. The sample was purposively selected and comprised Japanese people aged 60 who were holding non-immigrant visas (Code O-A; long stay) and living in Chiang Mai for five years and up. The sample stood out from the view of local people in the area of social interactions with Thais, participated in social activities regularly, was able to adapt to a different culture well, and was willing and consented to participate in the project through recommendations from various organizations, e.g., City Municipality, Subdistrict Administrative Organization and their acquaintances close to the sample. In addition, five stakeholders, namely

three representatives from the Chiang Mai community, the community leader, and the head of the tourism development and promotion department of Chiang Mai Municipality, were included. This study received confirmation for human research ethics from the Institutional Review Board, Department of Social Sciences, Mahidol University.

The researcher collected data using an in-depth interview form parallel with non-participant observation and a focus group discussion. It took four months to collect data. First, the researcher collected data herself via a Japanese language interpreter and a Thai interpreter to have data accuracy and language translation. Then, interviews were conducted individually with nine key informants using no more than 50 minutes per interview. After conducting the interviews and non-participant observation, a focus group discussion consisting of nine elderly Japanese people, three representatives of the community in Chiang Mai Province, the community leader, and the head of the tourism development and promotion department of Chiang Mai Municipality was conducted and moderated by the researcher with Thai and Japanese interpreters to translate the language for one day to verify and to confirm the accuracy of the data quality of the research results. Finally, data were collected until saturated to cover all the required information for the research objective.

Data collection instruments included a question guide for the in-depth interviews with content divided into two parts. Part 1

covered the demographic data and long-stay characteristics of elderly Japanese people in communities, and Part 2 covered data on social interactions with local people in all four areas of the environment. In addition, non-participatory observation forms were used to record the data from observations to support data from the in-depth interviews with greater coverage and clarity. Observation guidelines were used to observe the results of social interactions with others and activities in which elderly Japanese people participated in communities. The focus group discussion involved an organized discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences for obtaining several perspectives on the social interactions of the elderly Japanese people in Chiang Mai.

Data from the field were analyzed by drawing conclusions and performing content analysis based on descriptions from the in-depth interviews. The triangulation method was used to test data for accuracy and reliability before compiling a report on the findings.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of the Key Informants

Nine key informants comprised six men and three women with a mean age of 69.1 years; three subjects came from Tokyo, one from Kanagawa, one from Hyogo, and one from Saitama. Seven samples had graduated with bachelor's degrees, master's degrees (one participant), and levels lower than bachelor's degrees (one participant).

Before retirement, five samples worked as private company employees, three were civil servants, and one was a housewife.

The key informants had a mean income of 106,775 Baht per month. The average expenditure was 62,200 Baht per month. Major incomes were from the pension and savings. In terms of living conditions, most of them lived alone (five subjects), followed by the subjects who lived with spouses (four subjects). The key informants had a mean long stay of 6.6 years and preferred to live in the town center of Muang District, Chiang Mai, in the areas of Nimmanhemmin, Huay Kaew, and Chang Klahan.

In coming on long stays, three subjects were recommended by Japanese friends who came for long stays, four subjects had come to travel in Chiang Mai several times before deciding to stay in Chiang Mai on long stays, and one subject worked in Bangkok for ten years before opting for long stays in Chiang Mai. In addition, one subject contacted a government agency and consulted with an elderly Japanese persons' club upon arriving in Thailand. The subjects selected Chiang Mai due to the province's world-class reputation in tourism, preference for nature and the environment in Chiang Mai, amenities, easy travel from Japan, availability of Japanese products, low cost of living, freedom, and the friendly local attitude toward Japanese people. Furthermore, Thai social, religious, and cultural contexts differ greatly from Japan.

Based on the general demographic characteristics of the key informants,

their socioeconomic backgrounds were demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2 by using personal codes JP1-JP9 instead of real names.

General Characteristics of Long-Term Residence in Chiang Mai

In Residential Aspects. The elderly Japanese people who came for long stays were found to live in condominiums and serviced apartments in Huay Kaew, Nimmanhemmin, and Chang Klahan with emphasis on convenience, cleanliness, peace in residential areas, natural environments, surrounding shade, and lights on paths. The communities had green parks for relaxation with a residence price of 20,000–8,000 baht per month and an approximate living area of 80–200 square meters—the sample selected residences near department stores, supermarkets, hospitals, restaurants, airports, and railroads. Chiang Mai Province has an attractive physical environment without extreme cold or hot weather conditions or severe disasters. Furthermore, activities can be performed throughout the year.

In Social Aspects. Chiang Mai has suitable social characteristics for the lifestyles of elderly foreigners. Chiang Mai's society is based on mutual dependence, and the key informants were confident of receiving aid in a crisis. The community was warm, strong, and not selfish; thus, the sample had a sense of belonging to the community. The residents were friendly, kind, respectful of the elderly Japanese people as older relatives,

Table 1
Socioeconomic backgrounds of the nine key informants staying long-term in Chiang Mai

Key informants	Age	Gender	Marital status	Educational background	Domicile	Occupation prior to retirement	Living conditions in Chiangmai	Period of stay in Chiangmai
JP 1	66	Male	Married	Master's degrees	Osaka	Engineer	Living with spouse	5 Years
JP 2	67	Male	Single	Bachelor's degrees	Tokyo	Government official	Living alone	6 Years
JP 3	65	Female	Married	Bachelor's degrees	Osaka	Housewife	Living with spouse	5 Years
JP 4	68	Female	Married	Bachelor's degrees	Tokyo	Accountant at a private company	Living with spouse	7 Years
JP 5	70	Female	Married	Bachelor's degrees	Tokyo	Government official	Living with spouse	7 Years
JP 6	71	Male	Single	Bachelor's degrees	Kanagawa	Government official	Living alone	7 Years
JP 7	70	Male	Not specified	Bachelor's degrees	Hyogo	Lawyer	Living alone	7 Years
JP 8	69	Male	Single	Bachelor's degrees	Saitama	Economist at a private company	Living alone	8 Years
JP 9	76	Male	Not specify	Under Bachelor's degrees	Osaka	Transportation company	Living alone	8 Years

Table 2
Socioeconomic backgrounds of the nine key informants staying long-term in Chiang Mai

Key informants	Income/Month	Source of income	Approximated expenditure for long-term stay/ month
JP 1	115,000 Baht	Pension, Savings, Stock investment	74,000 Baht
JP 2	107,175 Baht	Pension, Savings	59,800 Baht
JP 3	92,000 Baht	Pension, Savings	62,255 Baht
JP 4	99,200 Baht	Pension, Savings	59,000 Baht
JP 5	99,000 Baht	Pension, Savings	71,000 Baht
JP 6	106,800 Baht	Pension, Savings	58,000 Baht
JP 7	125,000 Baht	Pension, Savings, Additional income from legal consulting	59,000 Baht
JP 8	106,300 Baht	Pension, Savings, Dividends	59,250 Baht
JP 9	110,500 Baht	Pension, Savings, Housing Rent	57,500 Baht

concerned, generous, and respected the values of the elderly Japanese people. The elderly Japanese people also had good relationships with community members. They participated in community activities such as annual local cultural activities, volunteering in foundations for the support of underprivileged children, volunteering as Japanese language interpreters, teaching Japanese language and culture at schools and universities, participating in sporting activities, and interacting with community members along with building connections leading to happiness during their long stays.

In Health Aspects. The findings revealed that elderly Japanese people could care for their health by exercising regularly, eating organic foods, using Thai herbs in healthcare, having no chronic illnesses as barriers, having annual health examinations, and having Thai insurance and health insurance policies. The elderly Japanese people preferred to use healthcare services at Chiang Mai-Ram Hospital and Lanna Hospital, which are always among the most modern private hospitals in Chiang Mai with Japanese language interpreters available. Furthermore, the key informants preferred using traditional Thai medical services such as Thai massage and spa services. Nearby residential neighborhoods and areas had sufficient indoor and outdoor exercise space, with ten golf courses not far from their residences. In the elderly Japanese people's decisions in favor of long stays, healthcare service readiness was

important. Chiang Mai is a medical tourism hub with five major hospitals, namely Lanna Hospital, McCormick Hospital, Chiang Mai-Ram Hospital, Maharaj Nakorn Chiang Mai Hospital, and Ruam Paet Hospital. Elderly people are fragile with physical deterioration. Therefore, good healthcare and facilities are necessary for the elderly Japanese people who have stayed longer than five years.

In Economic Aspects. The findings revealed that Chiang Mai Province offers goods and services capable of meeting the needs of the elderly Japanese people with a low cost of living. As a result, the elderly Japanese people did not have to worry about income, could live comfortably, and could plan the use of savings or pensions without difficulty. The main costs were food-related expenses, followed by the cost of lodgings, goods and services, including healthcare services, and expenses from traveling to nearby provinces.

Social Interactions of Elderly Japanese Persons in Chiang Mai

Social Interactions in the Micro-System. According to the findings, the elderly Japanese people did not live alone in the destination country. Normally living each day caused the elderly Japanese people to be always involved in the community, particularly people closest to the elderly Japanese people with direct interactions. Neighbors living in the same neighborhood met each other nearly every day until the elderly Japanese people became familiar with

their neighbors with a regular frequency of social interactions. In addition to neighbors, the elderly Japanese people interacted with acquaintances such as vendors, service employees, Thai language teachers, drivers, and barbers. According to an interview, one of the subjects (JP1) stated,

“I have a close friend who is Thai and my neighbor in the same condominium complex. At first, I didn't speak much because I didn't feel confident about living abroad. I didn't trust people much and had to take care of myself. Living near others and meeting frequently helped build familiarity until we became close neighbors.”

Concerning the characteristics of micro-system interactions, interactions were found to be informal, focusing on two-way communication. Speaking directly face-to-face was the best method and essential for creating social interactions among community members. Speaking connected thoughts and feelings while helping describe daily lifestyles and social activities. Conversations connected the roles and duties of the elderly Japanese people with community members in addition to creating exchanges, learning, and assistance for the elderly Japanese people to understand the Thai language, lifestyles, habits, and values of community members, leading to more learning and a better understanding of Thai sociocultural systems. The more the elderly Japanese people learned, the better they elderly Japanese people were able

to adapt to living abroad. In an interview, an elderly Japanese person (JP3) stated, “Speaking face-to-face remains necessary in day-to-day meetings. I have to speak and meet with Thais and do activities together. Speaking frequently helped me to learn the Thai language and culture better. It also gave me more friends.”

In micro-system interactions, most Japanese elderly used Thai and some English to achieve communication goals and build understanding. The elderly Japanese people sometimes used Japanese with Thais, who could communicate in Japanese. Therefore, social interactions to achieve the highest goal require a combination of verbal communication, non-verbal communication, and technology with language translation applications. It enabled the elderly Japanese people to interact well with community members.

In terms of time and social interactions in the micro-system, time was a driver of social interactions and natural familiarity between people who did not know one another until they became close friends. When the elderly Japanese people first came for long stays in Chiang Mai, they spent almost one-year creating interactions with people in the neighborhood. The elderly Japanese viewed social interactions not only as conversations counted only in minutes and hours of conversation as indicators of interactions. However, the elderly Japanese people recognized these conversations as building friendships and not only greetings, meaning social interactions were close until the elderly Japanese people and

their neighbors became good neighbors. According to an interview with an elderly person (JP5),

I spent almost a year building interactions with local people before we became friends. Japanese people are quiet and speak little. The Thais I meet are my neighbors. Time made us become familiar with and trust in each other until we became close friends.

The elderly Japanese people had excellent social interactions with the environment in the micro-system, which led to participation in social activities until the elderly Japanese people had new roles in the community with opportunities to participate in a broad range of activities linked with interactions with the environment in other systems including the mesosystem, the exo-system, and the macro-system.

Social Interactions in the Meso-System.

The elderly Japanese people were found to have interacted with close Thai friends in the micro-system, causing relationships to be expanded and leading to new interactions with a diverse group of persons and other organizations through recommendations from Thai friends. Furthermore, performing social activities caused interactions to be expanded, leading to meetings and associations with a diverse group of people. Thus, the elderly Japanese people built wider networks and created social integration by forming social groups and a long-stay elderly persons' club in Chiang Mai. This

mechanism helped the elderly Japanese and community members cooperate and have closer relationships.

In the area of social activities, most of the elderly Japanese people participated in social activities related to local traditions at the familial, local, and provincial levels. Moreover, the elderly Japanese people performed activities with Thai community groups, such as sports and recreation groups, education groups, social volunteer groups, Thai arts and crafts groups, Thai music groups, and health clubs freely. One elderly person (JP2) stated, "The people I frequently communicate with are baseball players. I'm a volunteer sports teacher for secondary school students in Chiang Mai. I know the kids on the baseball team and their parents well."

Regarding social interactions in the mesosystem, all three models (informal, semi-formal, and formal) depended on current activities, roles, duties, and types of relationships. Formal interactions usually took place with task groups the elderly Japanese people had to contact in the government, state enterprises, and private sectors such as the Immigration Bureau, doctors and nurses at the hospital, public health agencies, training, and seminar networks.

According to the findings, elderly Japanese people reflected another view. They showed the province of Chiang Mai as lacking a physical area with a collection of activities with the capacity or power to attract social interactions in the mesosystem between elderly Japanese people and

community members. Therefore, the scope of contact was mainly limited to residential neighborhoods or areas with activities at specific times without a specific place or area that is a center for elective activities. In the interviews, one of the elderly persons (JP3) provided data similar to others and stated, "I have no regular place for meeting Thai people. I mostly meet Thai people in the neighborhood if there is an area like a little Japanese town as a center for cultural exchange activities to share with people in the community."

However, social interactions in the mesosystem are most closely connected to the micro-system. Both systems led to learning and interactions in other environments in the exo-system and the micro-system under the environment in every system of Thai society, thereby creating social harmony. Social interactions made integration seamless without conflict and caused the elderly Japanese people a sense of belonging in the community.

Social Interactions in the Exo-System.

Social interactions take place in ordinary outside environments, most of which are physical places and environments influencing life in Chiang Mai among the elderly Japanese people, even when the elderly Japanese people had indirect interactions such as geographic and natural environments, public utility systems, transportation systems, and housing systems. According to the findings, the elderly Japanese people adapted to the exo-system well, particularly in convenient and

suitable housing. Most elderly Japanese people live in condominiums in the city centers of Chiang Mai Province.

According to the study, Chiang Mai is completely reading to provide services. Chiang Mai is not crowded and has a high level of safety with attractive geographical characteristics, convenient transportation systems, a public health system with readiness for supporting tourists, a hospital with quality, and a patient ward for Japanese people with Japanese language interpreters at all times. The economy in Chiang Mai has a low cost of living compared to Japan. According to the interviews, most elderly Japanese people came from provinces with high living costs in Japan, such as Tokyo and Osaka. Costs of housing, living, and medical treatment are high, and expenses must be planned well. The cost of living in Chiang Mai is much lower than in Japan. This low cost of living has attracted many elderly Japanese people to move to spend life after retirement in Chiang Mai with no plans to return to Japan. According to the interviews, one of the elderly persons (JP6) stated,

I've lived in Chiang Mai for seven years. I live in Huay Kaew, which is a major economic road in Chiang Mai. Travel is convenient and I'm close to the hospital with goods and services to meet my needs. The geography is beautiful with mountains and hot springs. The cost of living in Chiang Mai is not high and I don't have to worry about whether my income will be sufficient for expenses. I can live

happily in Thailand. I'm very happy to spend my life after retirement in Chiang Mai.

Interactions in the exo-system took place in ordinary environments that were not direct communications but indirect interactions from a long stay in Chiang Mai's environmental contexts. With a more convenient environment, elderly Japanese people were happier during long stays.

Interactions in the Macro-System.

According to the findings, the elderly Japanese people had interactions with Thai sociocultural environments and the local culture of Chiang Mai, such as language, religion, traditions, social norms, and laws. The elderly Japanese people were able to learn values, lifestyles, language, traditions, and local culture from the environment of Chiang Mai through interactions with community members in the micro-system and activities with groups of persons and networks in the mesosystem for five years. Social interactions created exchanges of learning about traditions and cultures. They helped increase behavioral capacity in line with local social models and cultures, such as language, values, norms, traditions, laws, rules, regulations, and manners. They also enabled elderly Japanese people to live peacefully with Thais in the community.

According to the findings, most elderly Japanese people had planned to study Thai inside and outside classrooms since when the elderly Japanese people moved to Chiang Mai for long stays. However, the elderly Japanese people provided interesting

data. Although the elderly Japanese people moved to stay in Chiang Mai for more than five years, the Thai language was vital for living in a community in the destination country. The Thai language was important in reducing barriers in daily life, communicating for daily living, building friendships, and performing activities with various community members, including online channels. The Thai language was important for continual development to create smooth communication, learning, and knowledge transfer to the community. An elderly person (JP4) stated,

I've lived in Chiang Mai for seven years. At first, I couldn't speak Thai, listen to Thai or read Thai. I had to have help from Japanese friends in the beginning. I studied Thai in a Thai language course organized by an elderly Japanese citizen's club with Thai and Japanese teachers. These days, my Thai has improved. I'm able to communicate and achieve my goals. However, I'd like to be good at the language because I want to spread knowledge online to perform an in-depth analysis of information such as information on the economy and politics.

The elderly Japanese people effectively interact with people in the community and environment in various dimensions in Chiang Mai. However, they expressed that Thai and Japanese cultures were different. Therefore, they had two stages for coping with cultural differences: In the first stage,

they provided all information from the internet to learn and understand basic Thai culture in various aspects, preparing themselves by learning the Thai language and examining the possibility of long-term stay by visiting Chiang Mai more than two times before deciding to stay long-term; the second stage was during the long stay in Chiang Mai which was found that the elderly Japanese people continued to learn the Thai language both formally and informally, and combined both Thai and Japanese cultures for living in Chiang Mai.

As for adaptation, the elderly Japanese people were not too difficult to adapt themselves to Thai culture because they were familiar with the contexts of Chiang Mai province before coming to stay long term. One important way of adaptation to different cultures was establishing regular interactions with neighbors and people in the community, adjusting their ways of thinking, being open-minded, flexible, accepting of cultural differences, and willing to be invited to attend traditional family activities of neighbors such as weddings, ordination ceremony in Buddhism, and housewarming ceremony.

The elderly Japanese people praised and admired unique characteristics of Thai culture, such as respect for the elderly and priority given to foreigners. The characteristics of Thai people create a good atmosphere for social interactions. This society is generous. People in society are ready to help each other, and Thai society is where people can depend on one another. The elderly Japanese people were

confident about receiving help in a crisis. Thai communities are warm, strong, and not selfish. The elderly Japanese people felt social harmony and no differences, describing Thai society as suitable for elderly foreigners to come on long stays. According to an interview with one of the elderly people (JP3),

Thais are generous and respectful of the elderly. I live alone. My Thai friends usually visit me and give me Thai food. They also invite me to go to other provinces with their families. Thais make society pleasant, and they create a good and friendly atmosphere for foreigners.

The globalization age is when people migrate across nations to live together in societies with different and diverse ethnicities, languages, and religions as a global society. Therefore, social interactions are a basic and important behavior in living together for guests and hosts to live happily based on diversity. Moreover, regular interactions with people and the environment help to create learning, absorption of new experiences into old experiences, and understanding of the social systems and cultures of countries where people migrate to live in destination countries with balance and acceptance among community members.

DISCUSSION

The study's results revealed that the social interaction of the Japanese elderly people in the community placed a special emphasis

on the micro level, in which there were the frequency and concentration of regular interaction in the residential area. The basis of familiarity, personal relationships, and time was used to drive the social interaction process resulting in friendship, which was consistent with the concept of the interactive behavior proposed by Bronfenbrenner (2005), who described that social interaction in the micro level was a small society with a personal interaction system creating a relationship in one area. The time factor also affected social interaction, which conferred with the study of Alkhazraji (1997), stating that the length of time was a factor that influenced social interaction at the level of cultural adjustment. The interaction in the microsystem focused on face-to-face communication, similar to foreign migrants in other regions around the world. Lustig and Koester (1993) demonstrated that most migrants always applied intercultural communication processes by focusing on face-to-face communication with people from different cultures. They mainly communicated using the host's language to communicate and interact with each other. Wiemann and Backlund (1980) stated that communication was the ability to create social interaction because the level of interpersonal communication was linked to social processes that were a method or procedure that humans used for management, creating stability, and improving their lifestyle in the destination country.

Concerning the macro system, the Japanese elderly reflected the identity of

individuals in a multicultural society whose essential characteristic was the coexistence of people in a diverse society with harmony through regularly participating in joint activities with people in Chiang Mai at various levels, including individuality, family, and province resulting in having good friendships and helping each other. Additionally, one of the most effective ways the Japanese elderly used as a tool for cultural adjustment was learning the Thai language because they perceived the language as an important medium of communication that helped them to reduce the barrier to long-term stay in Chiang Mai. From the point of view of the elderly Japanese, Thailand is a dependable, caring, and friendly society, not a centralized society. Additionally, Thai culture respects the elderly and treats foreigners as important guests. According to the study, the results were consistent with Delahoutre (2022) stated that Thailand was the world's 5th most desirable city for retirement in the world because Thailand was a friendly country in which the elderly foreigners had no difficulty in adjustability and had cultural heritages of valuable materials and non-materials. In addition, Thai people were friendly and suitable for living and long-term stay. Therefore, the study's results reflected that Thai society still maintained a cultural context that emphasizes interdependence, social harmony, acceptance, respect, and enjoyment (Chanchalor et al., 2017; Hongsaranakorn, 2015; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2001). Furthermore, Asian society is considered a collective society focusing

on social harmony and relationship. The Japanese elderly, therefore, could successfully adapt to living with the Thai people in society by having a variety of cultures.

CONCLUSION

The interactions between the elderly Japanese people and community members were divided as follows: 1) In the micro-system, neighborhood interactions mainly used conversations in the Thai language, time for building familiarity, and lacked only specific physical space with the capacity to attract and create social interactions, in which the elderly Japanese people regularly engaged in social interactions with people in the community through daily life and social activities in terms of face-to-face communication, leading to learning and understanding of Thai social and cultural systems, which resulted in an understanding of culture, laws, regulations, norms, and values of the community enabling harmonious coexistence in society; 2) In the mesosystem, interactions were through social activities and networks with recommendations from Thai friends in the microsystem leading to participating in various group activities in the community and other organizations. Three types of interactions in the mesosystem included informal interaction, semi-formal interaction, and formal interaction, depending on the current activities and roles in the group with which they were interacting. The mesosystem was closely related to micro-systems; 3) In the

exo-system, the environment did not have direct interactions and facilitated life with quality and safety. Chiang Mai is a city with various services and accommodations. The city is not crowded, has high security and beautiful landscape, convenient systems of transportation utilities, accommodation, and public health available to facilitate tourists for staying long term. In addition, the low cost of living has attracted more and more Japanese elderly to immigrate for stay long-term; and 4) In the macro-system, the elderly Japanese system had regular social interactions with close friends in the microsystem and social networks in the mesosystem, causing elderly Japanese people to learn Thai culture, norms, and values. Elderly Japanese people understood and respected cultural differences, enabling elderly Japanese to be in harmony in Thai society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study offers the following recommendations: (1) a process should be created to use the capacity of elderly Japanese people to create activities that link people in the community as a guideline for creating social interactions, and (2) specific areas or neighborhoods should be developed to organize cultural exchange activities as an important instrument leading to social interactions between elderly Japanese people and local Thais. For the benefit of potential development and the quality of life of Japanese elderly tourists staying for a long term in Thailand, further research

should (1) study through comparative research the lifestyle characteristics of the Japanese elderly staying for a long term in the context of other provinces in Thailand, (2) study problems, obstacles, and the need for the assistance of the Japanese elderly who have entered a long-term stay in the first 1–2 years, and (3) study the model of cooperation policy between the Thai and Japanese governments to exchange knowledge on social and cultural aspects, health technology, and emerging diseases.

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