

Japanese Expatriates' Management in Global Assignments: A Review and Research Agenda

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Executive Summary

Japanese firms and their management practices (including those related to expatriate management) have been of interest to international business researchers for decades. The international human resource management (IHRM) literature highlights the critical role expatriates' family play in the success or failure of global assignments. However, this issue has not been prominent in the literature on Japanese expatriates, despite the emphasis on collectivism and culture. This study uses the integrative literature review method to consolidate the research on Japanese work practices and expatriation issues in Japanese MNEs, with emphasis on Japanese family issues in expatriate management. Using family systems theory as the analytical lens, we identify themes that have been covered in the literature on Japanese global assignees and their families. Current gaps in the literature are highlighted, and we provide a future research agenda with broad themes that can contribute to the academic writing and practices of Japanese expatriate management.

Keywords: *expatriate; expatriate family; Japan; Human Resource Management; family systems theory; integrative literature review*

INTRODUCTION

Expatriates play a vital role in the transfer of organizational knowledge, coordination, and integration of global operations and control of local subsidiaries (Bonache, Brewster, & Suutari, 2001). As such, expatriate assignments serve both individual functions, such as developing managerial and professional capabilities, and organizational functions that are deemed critical to the success of corporate strategies (Lämsä, Heikkinen, Smith, & Tornikoski, 2016). The success of the assignments depends on the ability of expatriates to achieve work and social adjustment in the host-country (Furusawa & Brewster, 2016), and the family has been found to play a critical role in the adjustment process and can influence the success (Avril & Magnini,

2007) or failure of expatriates (Feng & Pearson, 1999). This is especially true in collectivist societies, where the family tends to have a significant influence on all aspects of an individual's life (Triandis, 1997). Despite the importance of the family, the existing literature is unsystematic. It lacks a consolidated perspective on the role the families play in the decision, adjustment, and performance of expatriates from highly collectivist countries.

In this study, we review and integrate the literature on expatriates and their families in the context of Japanese work and societal cultures. We chose Japan for this study because of the country's role in the global economy and its unique context for international human resource management (IHRM) literature. As the world's third-largest economy (Worldbank, 2016b), Japan is a key economic player and an important trading partner to many countries (Fang, Jiang, Makino, & Beamish, 2010). Over the last three decades, Japan's outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) has increased rapidly. Japan had the third-largest FDI outflows of any country in the world (Worldbank, 2016a), reaching an all-time high in September 2016 (Trading Economics, 2016). This trend is not just confined to large multinational enterprises (MNEs), with Japanese small and medium enterprises (SMEs) also increasingly looking at international markets for sales (Japan External Trade Organization, 2015).

Japan is comparable with many developed countries in the West in terms of the stage of their economic development. However, culturally, Japan is more aligned with countries in the East, such as China and South Korea. Japan is clustered as a member of Confucian Asia, which includes countries such as China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). As such, there are fundamental values and beliefs that these countries share. Specifically, these cultures are characterized by high power distance and collectivism (Scarborough, 1998). The high power distance in these societies is shown in unequal relationships between the junior and the senior members of a group, both at work or in the family or societal systems (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). The junior members are expected to show respect and obedience to the seniors, while the seniors are meant to take care of and protect the junior. Also, members in collectivistic cultures are interdependent in the groups in which they

belong, and groups' harmony is important (Goncalo & Staw, 2006). Another salient principle of Confucianism is its emphasis on family. Family is the basic model of all Confucianism social organizations (Hofstede & Bond, 1988), where the members should show love, respect, and care for each other, and paternalism and kinship are highlighted as critical values in these societies (Xing, 1995). Additionally, each person in a family is strongly referred to as a member of their family (Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

However, some unique characteristics of Japan make it stand out from other countries. Japan has an aging population and low population growth and has been dealing with the social and economic challenges related to this issue (Naito & Gielen, 2002). Japanese workers also have a reputation for prioritizing work over their well-being (Rebick & Takenaka, 2006). The Japanese government has commenced the implementation of policies to address these issues, including providing economic benefits to parents to help boost birth rates (The Economist, 2018b), and capping the maximum number of overtime hours employees can work to improve the well-being of the Japanese population (The Economist, 2018a).

Japanese firms have historically adopted the ethnocentric staffing approach, where home country nationals are used to fill important positions in overseas subsidiaries (Sekiguchi, Froese, & Iguchi, 2016). Therefore, the success of foreign operations relies heavily on the ability of the Japanese expatriates to adjust and perform in the host country.

The family has been highlighted as having a significant influence on the work domain of Japanese staff in various aspects. In the study by Besser (1993), 34 percent of Japanese workers attributed their hard-working behavior to their family's expectations in comparison with 17 percent of American workers. Hence, the integration of the literature on the Japanese work culture and the influence of the family on workers can provide insights into Japanese expatriates and their families.

Studying Japanese enterprises, especially their international human resource management practices can help generate greater understanding of expatriate families and the role they play in

global assignments in other traditional, collectivist societies and with a strong emphasis on work centrality that one may relate to aspects of a masculine cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1983). In addition, the uniqueness of Japanese society and the workplace also provides an interesting context for the application and examination of theories derived from Western management practices or indeed proposes new theories that can facilitate the integration of national cultures in management studies (Sekiguchi et al., 2016).

In this study, we attempt to advance the research on Japanese expatriates on global assignments and their family by undertaking a review of the literature on expatriate families and the role they play in global assignments in general, and in Japanese society in particular. Thus, our study attempts to answer the following question:

“How does the literature look at the work and family interface of Japanese workers at home and during global assignments?”

Using the integrative review method, we identify research streams related to Japanese expatriates and their families in the international human resource management literature and use them to highlight directions for future research. This paper, therefore, contributes to the current conversation on the convergence (or divergence) of human resource management (HRM) practices across countries (Zhu & Warner, 2017). Furthermore, the insights from Japanese expatriate management practices contribute to the literature on global talent management.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a detailed explanation of the review method followed in this study. The paper then details the key features of the family systems theory, which is used in this study as a lens to reflect on the emergent themes from the literature. This is followed by the findings from the review of the literature on Japanese HRM and IHRM practices. Next, insights about Japan’s cultural contexts, which include work and family culture, and Japanese expatriates and their families are presented. The paper concludes by discussing the key themes identified in the review and provides directions for future research on Japanese global assignees and their family as well as implications for practice.

REVIEW METHOD

We follow the integrative review method (Torraco, 2005) to study the literature on the Japanese work culture in general and the literature on the role and influence of the family on Japanese workers at home and Japanese expatriates in particular. The family systems theory is used as a guiding theory in this study (Torraco, 2005), which helps us to integrate the various streams of literature (Yorks, 2008), structure the analysis, and suggest directions for future studies. We undertook an extensive search of different online databases, including ABI/INFORM Global, Ebscohost, Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, and Web of Science for relevant publications. The use of the various databases ensured that all related studies published in various journals were covered. We limited our search to English language journals as that is the language of the leading journals in the field. Since the author team did not include a native Japanese speaker, we approached two leading Japanese HRM scholars, who confirmed that the Japanese language journals did not cover the chosen topic of this study. Hence, by searching these databases and consulting with Japanese colleagues, we ensured that all the studies related to this topic were covered.

The cross-referencing approach was also used to yield a comprehensive data set by investigating the reference list of all publications found. In the first stage of our review, we identified keywords from the literature and searched for publications that covered the areas of Japanese families, Japanese work culture. Our keyword search terms included “*Japanese work culture*”, “*Japanese family culture*”, “*Japanese work-family culture*”, “*work-family interface*”, “*work-life balance*” and “*Japan*”. Then, we reviewed the literature for Japanese expatriates/global assignees and their families by searching for the keywords “*Japanese expatriates/ global assignees*”, “*expatriates/global assignees*” and “*Japan*”, “*short-term international assignees*” and “*Japan*”, “*Japanese expatriates/ global assignees and family*”, “*Japanese expatriate family*”, “*Japanese expatriate/ global assignees and spouse/partner*”, “*international assignment*” and “*Japanese family*”, “*Japanese expatriate children*” and “*Japanese MNCs*” and “*expatriates/ expatriation*”. This search returned a large number of studies. We then examined the titles and abstracts of the publications to finalize eligible works.

The criteria for our selection of relevant works was that the focus of the research needed to be wholly or in part related to Japanese expatriates/global assignees, and the works had to be related to the international human resource management area. The reference lists of these works were also checked to ensure that no other relevant studies were ignored in our search. However, no further studies were found. At the end of this process, 75 publications related to Japanese expatriates were identified. This included six articles, a book, and a book chapter that specifically looked at the issue of expatriates and families. This small number of studies on family issues is somewhat surprising when one compares this to the broader literature on HR management in Japan. It is for this reason that we integrate the research on HR practices in Japan and in Japanese MNEs to provide a broader context for expatriation and their families.

FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

We use the family systems theory as the theoretical lens to investigate the issues related to Japanese global assignees and their families. The origin of the *family systems theory* can be traced back to the *general systems theory*, which was introduced in the 1950s (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). According to the theory, a system consists of elements and components that interact with each other (Rosenbusch, 2010). Due to these interactions, the elements influence and shape each other and create a whole system (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). Therefore, while each element cannot be defined and studied independently, one should take into account the interactions with other elements in the system to understand it (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). Systems theory also focuses on interactions between a system's elements and their environment (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000).

In line with the broader *systems theory*, most studies covering *family systems theory* assume that people in a family are interdependent with reciprocal relationships between them (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). Members of the family (who can be described as elements in the systems theory) establish and maintain their relationships by communicating with and exerting influence on each other (Miller, Ryan, Keitner, Bishop, & Epstein, 2000). In other words, the actions of an individual are affected by those of other primary people in the family system

(Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998). Therefore, family systems theory not only examines individual members but also focuses on the social dynamics occurring at the family level (Konopaske, Robie, & Ivancevich, 2009). To understand an individual in the family system, one has to take into account other primary stakeholders of that system as well (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000; Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Furthermore, the family as a whole and each individual member can be influenced by the external environment, including the work-domain (Broderick, 1993). Hence, in collectivist societies, an individual's identity is linked to their group membership. The difference between general group memberships and the family is the familial ties and a higher level of loyalty and a stronger bond between the family members in terms of obligations. Global assignments trigger changes in the external environment for expatriate families. Thus, from the family systems theory perspective, it is vital for expatriate management studies to not only look at the expatriates but also their family members to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the interaction in global assignments.

The application of the family systems theory has been mostly in the Western context and samples, even though the theory is said to be sensitive to different ethnic and cultural groups (Olson, 2000). Therefore, by applying the theory, we are able to highlight issues that relate to the way Japanese expatriates and the family manage the global assignment process.

JAPANESE HRM PRACTICES

In order to identify the areas for future research on Japanese expatriates and their families, it is important to understand the context in which this literature is embedded. Figure 1 highlights the two streams of literature covered in this section, namely research on work and family culture and HRM practices of Japanese enterprises.

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Our review of the main characteristics of human resource management (HRM) practices in Japan covers the period from the 1970s to 2019. We chose the 1970s as the starting point, as this is the period in which Japan became an economic powerhouse in the world (Endo, Delbridge, & Morris, 2015). The growth of the Japanese economy in the period from the 1970s until the 1990s provided the motivation for researchers to investigate the sources of competitive advantages of Japanese firms (Sekiguchi et al., 2016), and ideas such as Theory Z leadership style were proposed to help American firms compete with their Japanese counterparts (Ouchi, 1981). Some characteristics of the Japanese HRM practices that were observed by researchers during that period included:

1) Gender imbalance in managerial positions in Japanese firms (Hashimoto & Raisian, 1985; Ishida, 1986);

2) Long-term oriented HRM practices (Pascale & Athos, 1981), such as lifetime employment relationships (Bird & Beechler, 1995; Brown, Reich, Ulman, & Nakata, 1998; Hashimoto, 1979; Hashimoto & Raisian, 1985) long-term investment in training (Tung, 1984), and promotion and compensation based on seniority (Hill, 1995; Ishida, 1986; Jones & Kato, 1995; Munchus, 1983);

3) Relying on current employees and new recruits, such as school leavers or graduates (Aoki, 1990; Boisot, 1983). The effects of the Japanese economic bubble bursting in the 1990s and the financial crisis of 1997 on the HRM practices of enterprises in this country were also investigated, especially their layoff actions (Kang & Shivdasani, 1997; Lee, 1997).

Change to Japan's HRM practices was the theme of research in the aftermath of the Asian and global financial crises (2000-2018), and emphasis has been on High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) – the practice that is adopted in many Japanese firms (Endo et al., 2015). Examples of these changes and innovation were observed in the compensation and promotion practices (merit or performance-based systems replacing traditional seniority-based systems) (Keizer, 2011; Sekiguchi, 2013), employment relationship (more flexible employment

arrangements replacing lifetime employment) (MacVaugh & Evans, 2012), employee voice (Bae, Chuma, Kato, Kim, & Ohashi, 2011), employees' behaviors (Chaudhuri, 2009) and employees' attitudes (Takeuchi, Chen, & Lepak, 2009).

Another area of emerging interest relates to comparative studies that investigate the HRM practices of Japan with those of other countries (Carr & Pudelko, 2006; Endo et al., 2015). With Japan facing the challenges of an aging population, the make-up of the workforce, and the available pool of potential expatriates have also changed. These changes and conversations make it more relevant to study the current state of knowledge about IHRM in the Japanese context, the management of expatriates and their family to further advance the research and practice of Japanese firms in this area. The experience of Japan can serve as an example for firms in other countries that are poised to face an aging domestic population (Chand & Tung, 2014; Kulik, Ryan, Harper, & George, 2014).

To set the background for the focus on the management of expatriates and their families, we have to examine the state of knowledge about the IHRM system in Japanese MNEs. A summary of the key themes from the literature on Japanese expatriates and the publications in each theme is presented in Table 1.

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There are 11 major themes that emerged from our review of the literature on Japanese expatriates. The three most popular themes are *interpersonal relationships between Japanese expatriates and host-country nationals*, *expatriate staffing of Japanese firms*, and *expatriation or repatriation adjustment/adaptation*. These three themes started attracted academic interest when the first studies on Japanese expatriates were conducted and have still had some interest in recent years (Bassino, DAVIS, & van der Eng, 2015; Bebenroth & Froese, 2019). However, the themes such as *roles of expatriates*, *expatriate work outcomes and work-related consequences* are

comparatively more recent (Cordeiro, Ogasavara, & Masiero, 2017; Furusawa & Brewster, 2016; Hong, Snell, & Mak, 2016), even though these themes were also initiated long time ago (Fukuda & Chu, 1994; Smetanka & Murray, 1985). This is understandable because, at any time, the roles and performance of expatriates are always of the highest importance to firms. The other themes that have been studied in relation to Japanese expatriates are *managerial styles of expatriate managers, expatriate management of Japanese firms, learning of Japanese expatriates, perceptions of expatriation and expatriation lives, life values and work values of expatriates and Japanese expatriates' skills* (Nukaga, 2013). However, there have been fewer studies lately on these themes in the Japanese context, partly due to the fact that research on the Asian region has increasingly focused on China and India.

WORK AND FAMILY IN JAPAN

Work is considered to be central to the lives of the Japanese workforce (Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009), with the average working week of 47.6 hours being much higher than what people from other countries such as the USA, Israel, and Belgium work in a week (Snir, Harpaz, Burke, Snir, & Harpaz, 2006). One explanation for these differences in attitude towards work is that social harmony is embedded in the psyche of the Japanese population (Schaufeli et al., 2009), and the well-being of the group or organization takes precedence over those of an individual. Hence, working long hours is a way for an individual to reaffirm their commitment to the group.

A consequence of work centrality is the increase in work-family conflicts when pressures from work and family domains are not compatible. Similar conflicts have also been observed in Japan; however, the tendency in the society is to link the negative influence to the family on their work rather than workplace influences on their family life (Kanai, 2009; Shimada, Shimazu, Bakker, Demerouti, & Kawakami, 2010). These feelings have been identified in Japan, where employees tend to have hostile feelings toward their family if it affects their work (Kanai, 2009). The relationship between the work and family domains raises a need to understand Japanese

culture and Japanese family culture to set a context for studies of Japanese workers and their families.

Japan, like many countries in Asia, is classified as a high-context culture where communication is implicit in nature. As such, the harmony in groups, such as families, is protected, and any negative feelings or individual wants and desires are not prioritized (Rothbaum, Rosen, Ujiie, & Uchida, 2002). Japanese parents preserve social harmony of their family and encourage their children to do the same through psychological and physical relatedness with their parents and their siblings (Bell, 2015; Rothbaum et al., 2002). Therefore, an individual in Japan is considered to be part of interconnected networks such as family, and they are identified by their family's reputation (Tamura & Lau, 1992).

The boundary separating the obligations of different members in a family in Japan is usually blurred (Caudill & Weinstein, 1974 cited in Schneider & Asakawa, 1995). However, it should be noted that the salience of different relationships inside a family in Japan is distinct from those found in other countries. Highly individualistic societies, as found in the Western world, tend to emphasize spousal relationship, whereas, in collectivist societies like Japan, the relationship between mother and children is seen as being more important even if it reduces the time that the couple spends together (Rothbaum et al., 2002). Nevertheless, there have been profound changes in family life in Japan over recent decades (Rothbaum et al., 2002), with some Western values such as respect for individual differentiation and freedom exerting a degree of influence on the Japanese society and families (Tamura & Lau, 1992). As a result, many people in Japan are caught in the duality of value systems (Tamura & Lau, 1992). Therefore, another contribution of future studies on Japanese workers and their families is to provide a picture of family life in current Japanese society.

JAPANESE EXPATRIATES AND THEIR FAMILIES

The area of global assignees and their families is one that has received much attention from researchers. However, most of these studies emphasize the outcomes of the assignments for

expatriates, thereby ignoring how the process influences, or is influenced by the family or view the issue from the perspective of Western expatriates who are from countries that are classified as individualistic societies. The emphasis of this study is on collectivist societies, in particular, Japan. We summarize our review of studies on global assignees and their families according to the three phases of expatriation: pre-assignment, during assignment and post-assignment, and present it in Table 2.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Reviewing the literature on Japanese expatriates and their families, we find that the most salient theme is the adjustment of the expatriate family. One of the earliest published papers by Fukuda and Chu (1994) used a mixed-method approach by surveying personnel managers from Japanese firms operating in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The study found that family issues are the most significant factor contributing to the failure of Japanese expatriates. While the spouse's inability to adjust was considered as the most important reason by U.S. firms, it was ranked as the least important by Japanese firms (Fukuda & Chu, 1994). Among all family issues, the social life of the spouses and the education of the children are seen as the most stressing problems (Fukuda & Chu, 1994). The study highlights the significant role the expatriate family plays in the expatriation process and the ignorance of Japanese firms regarding this role. As such, the study is considered to be influential not only in the Japanese context but also in the expatriate management literature.

Simeon and Fujiu (2000) undertook a study involving Japanese expatriate spouses in Silicon Valley, USA, and investigated their cross-cultural adjustment strategies. The study concluded that the adjustment of the spouses was significantly affected by the pre-departure preparations they made and their attitude towards the assignment. In addition, Japanese spouses were found to be quite active in seeking information and taking advantage of various sources of

support, including other expatriate spouses (Simeon & Fujiu, 2000). Hence, the antecedent of the adjustment process and strategies employed by Japanese spouses emphasizes the importance of organizational, social, and personal resources.

Takeuchi, Yun, and Russell (2002) examined the cross-cultural adjustment of Japanese expatriates and their spouses. The study's results strongly confirm the spillover effects between the work and non-work domains and crossover effects between expatriates and their spouses. Expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment is positively related to their life and job satisfaction, and these two variables are negatively related to expatriates' intentions to prematurely terminating the assignments. Role ambiguity negatively relates to expatriates' work adjustment, and it also spills over to general adjustment. Meanwhile, work adjustment does not have spillover effects on general adjustment. In summary, strong reciprocal relationships are found between expatriates and their spouses.

Ben-Ari (2005) studied the career and family life of expatriates and their family during expatriation and the community of expatriates in Singapore. Based on data from 93 interviews with expatriates and a six-month ethnographic study (participant observation) in the expatriate community, the family was found to provide balance to expatriates' work life. In particular, expatriates' pursuit of career goals was strongly related to their family's dynamics, which included their children's education, caring for their parents, and the role of their wife's career concerns.

Martin's (2007) study used participant observation and informal interviews to collect data on Japanese housewives who accompanied their husbands on expatriate assignments in the UK. The research investigated different aspects: the meanings of international assignments to contemporary Japanese wives, the expectation about what role the wives would play in the host country including their responsibility to take care of their family in the UK and to maintain links with things back in their home country, their life beyond their family domain, and the effects of global assignments on them. The findings of the study show that Japanese wives not only cared

about their husbands in the family domain but also in the work domain by undertaking tasks such as managing their husband's business relationships.

Takeuchi, Lepak, Marinova, and Yun (2007) surveyed 170 matched couples of Japanese expatriates and their spouses living in the US. The variables that were investigated were parental demands, general adjustment, and perceived culture novelty. The findings of this study showed that parental demands were not related to expatriate adjustment, but only to spousal adjustment (Takeuchi et al., 2007). This finding is distinct from what has been found among Western expatriates, proving that more research should be conducted to examine expatriates from Japan.

Japanese sojourner women were approached for a qualitative study by Saint Arnault and Roles (2012) that examined their social relationships. Two-waves of semi-structured ethnographic interviews were conducted. In the first wave conducted in 1998, 25 Japanese spouses were recruited via a snowball sampling technique. The second wave started in 2007, and 24 Japanese spouses were interviewed with the random sampling technique. The purpose of the two-wave study was to increase the validity of the findings by comparing the results over time. It was found that there are strong relationships among the wives of Japanese expatriates, and these relationships are complicated, highly regulated, and obligatory. The group of Japanese housewives were considered as the primary social group for the members and acted as a pseudo-family. There were complicated rules and expectations for these women and even a certain level of social control from the group. This type of control from the group could make the Japanese housewives feel distressed and unable to seek help from outside the group (Saint Arnault & Roles, 2012).

The recent study by Furusawa and Brewster (2016) also highlights how the Japanese context on adjustment and family differs from studies on Western expatriates. The authors surveyed 149 Japanese repatriates and found no relationship between adjustment or performance of expatriates and considerations for their family situations. This finding highlights the lack of concern for expatriates' family in Japanese companies and reinforces what has been found previously. The study also confirms the view that Japanese work practices have remained

consistent over time. However, this finding does not support the recommendations of many authors that employers should take the family into consideration to improve the effectiveness and possibility of success of the expatriation assignment (Lämsä et al., 2016; Shen & Darby, 2006).

Table 3 provides a summary of the studies on Japanese global assignees and family issues.

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To surmise, in light of family systems theory, this review has integrated the literature on Japanese HRM practices, work, and family interface in Japan and Japanese expatriates and their family. The review of Japanese HRM practices highlights that Japanese HRM practices were historically unique in various features. However, recently, there have been prominent debates about the convergence or divergence of these practices and those of other Asian or Western countries. With regard to the arguments of family systems theory, it could be seen that Japanese HRM practices rarely consider workers as part of their family systems. Meanwhile, the investigation into work and family interface in Japan revealed that although Japanese workers are highly dedicated, they have a strong loyalty to their family. Our review of the literature on Japanese expatriates highlights a lack of consideration for the expatriate families and expatriates as members of their family systems. Whereas, it could be identified in the global assignees and their family literature in general that the assignees and their family members are immensely connected and influence each other in their family systems in global assignments. The next section details the suggestions for future studies.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This integrative review of the literature on Japanese global assignees and their families highlights certain trends and themes. In this section, we highlight the key points of the literature and identify future research directions.

As discussed earlier, the IHRM practices of Japanese MNEs have relevance for firms from other collectivist societies where the family plays an important role, making it necessary to consider the expatriates' family in both practice and research related to expatriation (Endo et al., 2015). In addition, from the organizations' perspective, paying attention to the family and reducing conflicts can improve the well-being of expatriates and can help limit the negative consequences, including work-family tensions and *karoshi*. The strong influence of family and family culture in Japan is even reflected in the suggestion to employ the Japanese family as the base of institutional logic for Japanese management practices and corporate networks (Bhappu, 2000). In a country like Japan, where family plays such an influential role, the interest of expatriate families should be more stressed.

There are some general observations that we highlight in the review. First, in terms of *research methodology*, the literature on Japanese expatriates in general, and on expatriates and their families in particular, have primarily relied on quantitative-based analysis. Only 10 out of 75 studies that we covered in our review adopted qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis. This suggests that while we may have a better understanding of outcomes of expatriation assignments and what are some of the challenges, we know little about how the expatriate family responds to the demands of the assignment. As highlighted in the literature, cultural norms and practices differ worldwide (Hall, 1996), and therefore to deepen our understanding of the expatriate family, we suggest that more qualitative studies are needed to investigate the field of expatriates and their families in Japanese culture.

Second, while there have been some attempts made to compare the experiences of Japanese and non-Japanese expatriates and identify differences (Kopp, 1994; Schneider &

Asakawa, 1995; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2010), the issues of and those faced by Japanese expatriate families have not been compared (McNulty & Brewster, 2016). Hence, we encourage *future comparative studies* on Japanese and non-Japanese expatriates and their families. In a related vein, as we summarized in Table 2, there has been more research on global assignees and family issues in other country contexts. Therefore, it would be fruitful to identify *organizations' best practices* with regards to expatriates and their families and investigate whether these practices could be applied to Japan context, under which conditions and the barriers for such applications.

In the following sections, we build on these areas and identify specific areas for future research that are related to the different phases of the expatriation process: the pre-expatriation phase; the expatriation phase; and the post-expatriation phase. By reviewing the IHRM literature in the Japanese context, we have highlighted the similarities with others as well as the uniqueness of this context. We suggest that being sensitive to cultural and social characteristics, research on global assignees could untangle contradictions and avoid possible deviation. Consequently, the literature could benefit from insights gained from the application of potential new theories. We summarize the literature on Japanese global assignees and their families and the suggestions for future research directions in Figure 2.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Research areas for the pre-expatriation phase: One issue that has not been examined in the context of Japanese expatriates is the influence of family on their willingness or the decision to undertake global assignments. The selection of and the capability to attract the right candidates is critical to successful expatriation (Kandogan, 2018). Given the context of global war for talent and boundary-less labor market, it is important to understand how families can influence the Japanese expatriates' decision-making process of expatriation so that practitioners can act upon the findings. As highlighted in our review, family cohesion in Japan is strong not only inside

nuclear families but also in the extended families, including elderly parents (Martin, 2007). Moreover, cultural expectations, as well as policies and regulations in Japan, place more responsibilities on adults to provide care for their elderly parents (Izuhara, 2006). This added responsibility means that individuals may refuse opportunities to undertake international assignments, and such issues warrant further investigation. In addition, the answers to these questions also contribute to the academic literature because they provide insights into a new cultural perspective from a country that is considered to be unique not only in general but also in the family culture. We, therefore, suggest the following research questions:

How do the family and associated responsibilities influence the willingness and decision of Japanese employees to undertake international assignments?

One important pre-assignment practice of firms in relation to expatriates and their families is training. Japanese firms have historically been known for long-term investment in training (Tung, 1984). Training is also suggested to positively influence organizational performance and human resource management outcomes (Tharenou, Saks, & Moore, 2007). Firms are encouraged to include family in the training process of international assignments (Kupka, Everett, & Cathro, 2008; Malek, Budhwar, & Reiche, 2015), but specific insights about this process have been nascent. Therefore, future studies could investigate Japanese firms' training practices for expatriates and their families and the implications of these practices on expatriate families' adjustment, expatriate performance, and firm performance. However, what is unique to the Japanese workplace is the extreme commitment to the work of Japanese people. Therefore, examples of research questions could be: '*What are the Japanese firms' training practices and their implications for Japanese expatriates and their family?*'. These studies could contribute to both the literature of training and development and international human resource management.

Research areas for expatriation phase: There are many potential dynamics in the work and family domains during international assignments, but there has been limited focus on these in studies on Japanese global assignees. For example, the influence of family on the well-being of Japanese expatriates raises several questions that have not yet been explored. Through the family

systems theory lens, some of the following questions could be addressed in future studies: *To what extent does family exert any influence on the well-being of Japanese expatriates working abroad?* It is more common among Japanese expatriates to undertake international assignments without family accompanying them than it is for expatriates from other countries (Fukuda & Chu, 1994). Hence, another research question we raise is: *Are there any differences in the well-being of the expatriates depending on whether they are in a split or accompanying family situation during global assignments?*

Furthermore, although there are a few studies examining the influence of family on Japanese expatriate's adjustment and failure, inconsistencies in the findings of these relationships in previous literature provide the motivation for further studies in this area. Some questions, such as the following, could be asked to understand the relationship between the family influence and performance: *'How does the family influence Japanese expatriates' performance?'* Through the lens of family systems theory, the moderating effects of variables such as environmental factors (including organizational support and national culture and policies) that are outside the family's control could also be integrated to investigate the relationship between family and expatriates' performance and success. A potential question that could be addressed is: *'What factors moderate the relationship between family and expatriates' performance and success?'* The answer to this question is not only important in the Japanese context, but also to the field of research on global assignees and their family in general because they can help elucidate and explain conflict findings in previous studies.

Since Japanese firms continue to favor the ethnocentric staffing approach for international assignments (Pudelko & Tenzer, 2013), salient questions remain as to their practices in relation to expatriate families. Extended family members should also be included in these questions. Some related questions in this topic that require further investigation include: *'What are the policies and practices of Japanese firms that relate to expatriate families?'*; *'How do organizational practices related to the expatriate families influence the performance of Japanese expatriates?'*

Another area of research that is worthy of investigation is the consequences of international assignments for expatriate families. The fact that Japanese expatriate families have received limited attention in academic research is perhaps due to the fact that the family does not usually accompany the expatriate, and remain in Japan (Fukuda & Chu, 1994). However, even in such instances, the expatriation process impacts the family whose members are living separately from each other. The question of what the impacts of such split family settings have not yet been answered. Hence, we highlight the following question for possible future research:

'What are the personal or familial consequences of overseas split assignments?'

The work-life balance of expatriates has been emphasized in the general literature (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2011), but not much has been written on Japanese expatriates and their families. As highlighted earlier, the high work-centrality in Japan means that the family may play second fiddle to an individual's work commitments. Hence, future research could address questions such as *'How do Japanese global assignees balance their work and family domains?'*. The answer to this question can potentially extend the theme of the expatriate work outcomes and work-related consequences. Although this was one of the major themes in the literature of Japanese expatriates, apart from the influence of family on expatriates' failure, the links between family domain and Japanese expatriates' work outcomes (and vice versa) have not been highlighted. Therefore, this area deserves more attention.

Furthermore, although children and their education seem to be of central concern in Japanese families (Rothbaum et al., 2002), they have not been examined adequately from an expatriate management perspective. The general literature has looked at expatriate children's adjustment and influence on expatriates' adjustment, and the adjustment in education strategies of expatriate children (Farrer & Green Span, 2015). Given the important roles of children in Japanese families, it is worth exploring *'What are the determinants and consequences of expatriate children's adjustment?'*. Additionally, since the focus of relationships in Japanese families was identified to be possibly different from many other countries, one could compare the influence of different members and relationships in expatriate families.

Research areas for the post-expatriation phase: After being located in a foreign country for some time, the potential for reverse culture shock upon repatriation remains high as there could be changes in the general and working environments that expatriate families have to readjust. Therefore, questions remain as to ‘*How do expatriate families readjust after returning to Japan?*’; ‘*How does the family influence the readjustment process of Japanese expatriates?*’. Furthermore, the education system and curriculum in Japan are said to be quite unique while children’s education is one of the top priority of expatriate children (Nukaga, 2013), it would be interesting to investigate ‘*How do Japanese expatriate children readjust with Japanese education programs?*’. In the context of increasing dual-career couples (Kierner & Suutari, 2018), especially in Japan, it would be promising to explore ‘*How do Japanese dual-career couples experience the resettlement of each person’s career?*’.

CONCLUSION

Practical implications

This review not only contributes to advance academic research but also brings insightful implications for Japanese firms. Although with limited literature, the story about Japanese expatriates’ families during international assignments is fragmented, there are many lessons for Japanese firms, particularly Japanese managers who are in charge of managing expatriates, to pay attention to. Workaholism and *karoshi* are serious issues that could affect the Japanese expatriates; however, the families of these expatriates could help them achieve a better balance between work and family domains. The recommendations from this study are detailed below.

First, during the pre-assignment stage, the interests and concerns of expatriate families should be considered and included in the selection, training, and preparation processes. For example, the pre-departure training programs could be tailored to include expatriate family members (i.e., expatriate spouse or children). During the assignment, Japanese firms need to provide support for spouse adjustment, spouses’ careers, and children’s education. Japanese

spouses have been found to influence the adjustment, performance as well as business relationships of expatriates, and Japanese expatriate parents put a lot of emphasis on their children's education. Furthermore, our review highlighted the importance and influence of the social network communities of Japanese expatriate families. While these groups provide support for new expatriates and their families, they can also control the behavior of the expatriate spouse and are more complex than other similar expatriate groups organized by other communities. Hence, Japanese firms could provide social networking support for Japanese expatriate families and work closely with related communities to improve expatriating experiences of these families.

The well-being and stability of families are extremely important in the context of Japan because family-related issues significantly contribute to Japanese expatriates' failure. Therefore, while many Japanese expatriates undertake international assignments without their families accompanying them, firms should still consider these families' needs and support both sides to maintain their well-being instead of taking an "out of sight, out of mind" perspective. The imparting of knowledge related to what to expect and what are potential challenges for expatriates and for expatriate families when living apart during international assignments would be helpful. Furthermore, organizations could consider providing a budget for expatriate families to allocate for extra support, such as helpers when the expatriates are working internationally. By doing so, the challenges associated with day-to-day activities for expatriate families could be reduced.

Last, the influence of extended family members, especially expatriates' elderly parents on expatriation decisions and the responsibility to take care of them adds to the unique socio-cultural characteristics and policies in Japan. When looking for potential candidates, organizations should consider whether they have responsibilities related to the care of elderly parents and to what extent these responsibilities influences the possibility to undertake international assignments or work performance. As a result, it is hoped that the organizations still select the best candidates and provide appropriate support for the expatriates.

Concluding remarks

This study provides an overview of the literature on global assignees and their families in general and Japanese assignees in particular. Our review of the literature highlights inconsistencies in the literature where the influence of the family on expatriates is not clear. We also find that the issue has received limited attention in the Japanese context.

Japan is unique due to the work and cultural reasons discussed previously, but there is an opportunity to learn from its experience. The issues of the aging population, a negative population growth, and traditional collectivist society has similarities with many other countries. Hence, studying Japanese experiences can help inform human resource practices in other countries with similar social structures that are facing the same challenges. In addition, the tension between traditional culture and the adoption of Western values provides an interesting context for future studies. The answers to the questions identified in this study will contribute to the literature of expatriate management in general, and Japanese expatriate and their families in particular. Moreover, it is hoped that these answers will be valuable to the practices of expatriate management.

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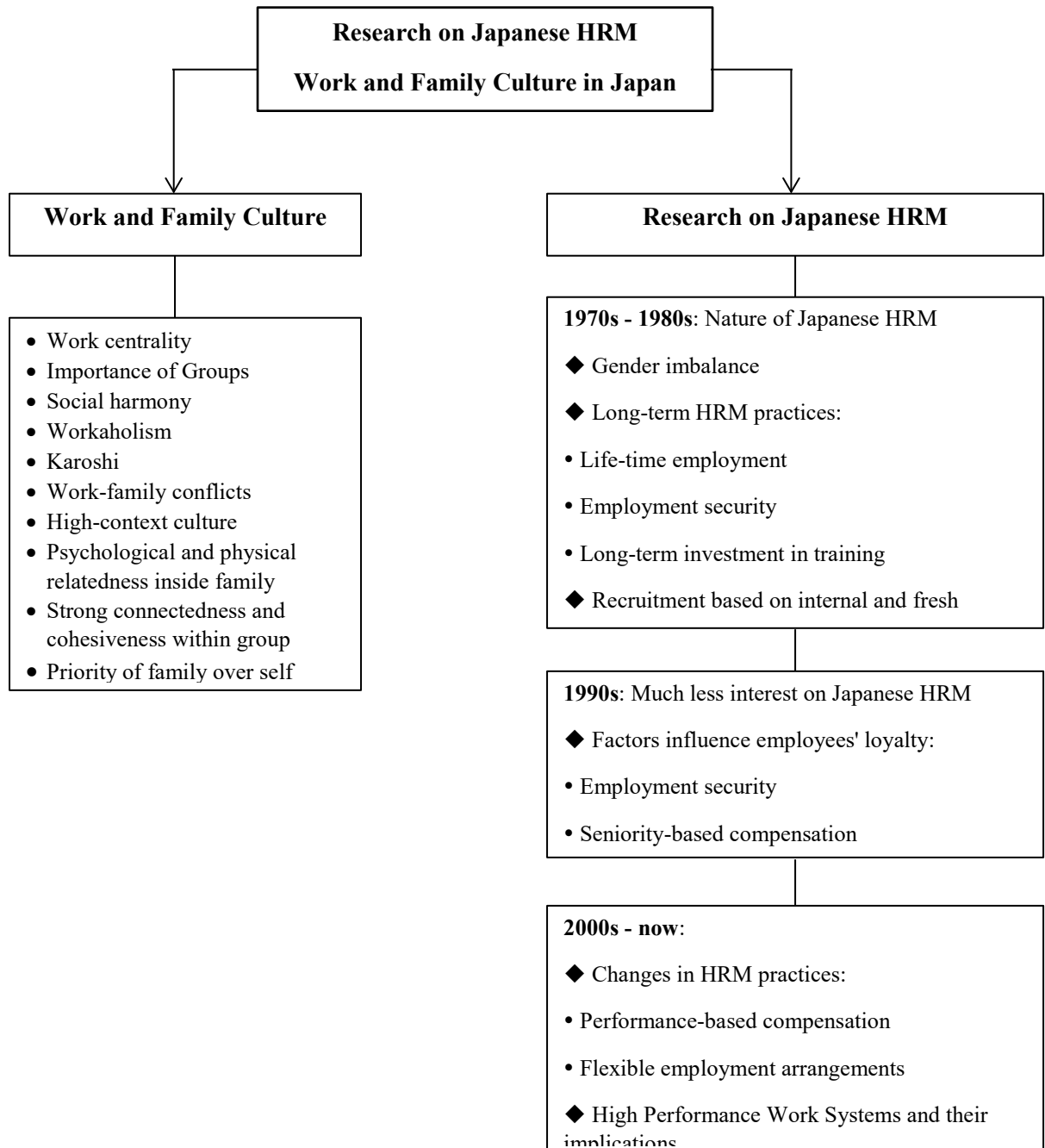


Figure 1: Research on Japanese HRM and Work and Family Culture in Japan

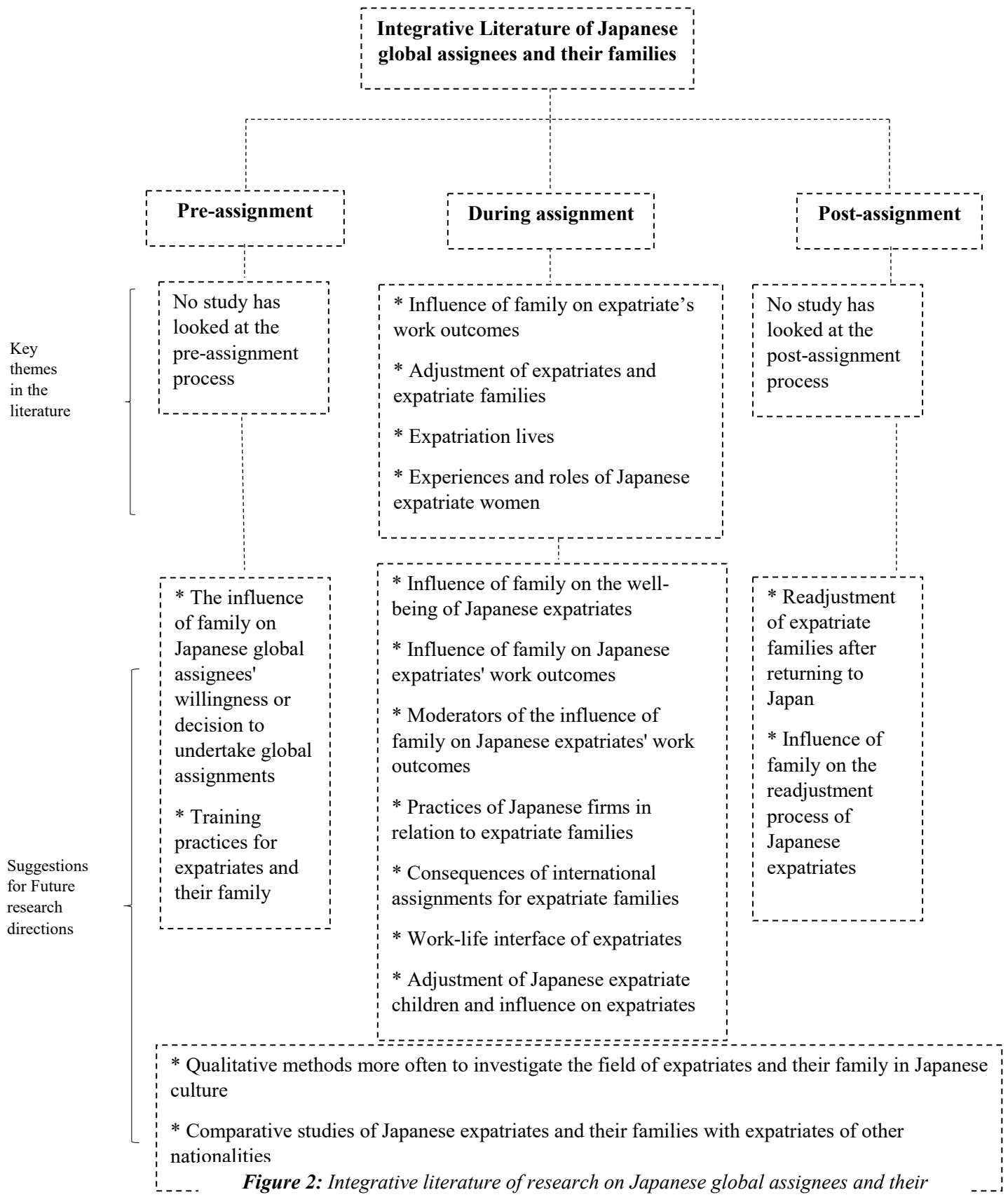


Figure 2: Integrative literature of research on Japanese global assignees and their families and suggestions for future research

Table 1: Thematic overview of literature on Japanese expatriates

Themes	Publications
1. Interpersonal relationships between expatriates and host-country nationals	<i>Stening and Everett (1980), Stening, Everett, and Longton (1983), Everett and Stening (1983), Stening and Everett (1984), March (1993), Thomas and Toyne (1995), Watanabe and Yamaguchi (1995), Wingrove (1995), Yeh (1995), Rao and Hashimoto (1996), Selmer (1996), Selmer (1997), Watanabe (1998), Leung, Wang, and Smith (2001), Yu and Meyer-Ohle (2008), Shimoda (2013), Ng, Ang, and Tee (2015)</i>
2. Managerial styles of expatriate managers	<i>Everett, Stening, and Longton (1982), Negandhi, Eshghi, and Yuen (1985), Rao, Hashimoto, and Rao (1997)</i>
3. Roles of expatriates	<i>Smetanka and Murray (1985), Delios and Bjorkman (2000), Paik and Sohn (2004), Hébert, Very, and Beamish (2005), Dutta and Beamish (2013), Pudelko and Tenzer (2013), Hong et al. (2016), Cordeiro et al. (2017)</i>
4. Expatriation/Repatriation/Adjustment/Adaptation	<i>Black (1990), Stening and Hammer (1992), Nicholson and Imaizumi (1993), Black (1994), Schneider and Asakawa (1995), Kanno (2000), Simeon and Fujiu (2000), Miyamoto and Kuhlman (2001), Takeuchi, Yun, and Russell (2002), Takeuchi, Yun, and Tesluk (2002), Takeuchi et al. (2007), Zhou and Qin (2009), Yamazaki (2010)</i>
5. Expatriate staffing of Japanese firms	<i>(Kopp, 1994), Beamish and Inkpen (1998), Matsuo (2000), Legewie (2002), Beechler, Pucik, Stephan, and Campbell (2005), Belderbos and Heijltjes (2005), Chung and Beamish (2005), Widmier, Brouthers, and Beamish (2008), Fang et al. (2010), Black and Morrison (2012), Peng (2012), Oki (2013), Schaaper, Amann, Jaussaud, Nakamura, and Mizoguchi (2013), Ando and Paik (2013), Bassino et al. (2015), (Bebenroth & Froese, 2019)</i>
6. Expatriate management of Japanese firms	<i>Osman-Gani (2000), Tungli and Peiperl (2009)</i>
7. Expatriate work outcomes and work-related consequences	<i>Fukuda and Chu (1994), Gregersen and Black (1996), Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, and Ferzandi (2006), Lu and Lee (2008), Ishii (2012), Okamoto and Teo (2012), Kawai and Strange (2014), Furusawa and Brewster (2016)</i>
8. Learning of Japanese expatriates	<i>Wong (2001), Wong (2005), Yamazaki and Kayes (2007), Yamazaki and Kayes (2010)</i>
9. Perceptions of expatriation and expatriation lives	<i>Ben-Ari (2005), Martin (2007), Fry (2009), Langager (2010), Liu, Tan, and Nakazawa (2011), Saint Arnault and Roles (2012), Nukaga (2013)</i>
10. Life values and work values of expatriates	<i>Choo, Hendrik, and Keng-Howe (2009),</i>
11. Skills of Japanese expatriates	<i>Furuya, Stevens, Bird, Oddou, and Mendenhall (2009), Kubota (2013)</i>

Table 2: Overview of Literature on Global Assignees and their Family

Pre-assignment

Opportunities, willingness, expatriation decisions

Influence of family on expatriates' willingness

Influence of family on opportunities, expatriation willingness and decisions

Expatriation's expectations

International assignments' expectations of dual-career couples

During assignment

Influence of family on expatriates' withdrawal decisions

Adaptation

Expatriation lives:

Satisfaction of dual-career couples

Education of expatriate children

Lives of expatriate spouses

Social relationships among expatriate spouses

Expatriation success, failure and other work outcomes:

Antecedents: family

Influence of family on expatriates' performance and well-being

Adjustment:

Adjustment of expatriate spouse:

Antecedents

Influence of spouse adjustment on expatriate adjustment

Relationship between adjustment of family and work adjustment of expatriate

Adjustment of dual-career couples

Adjustment process of expatriate families:

determinants

Adjustment of expatriate children and influence on expatriates' adjustment

Adjustment in education strategies of expatriate children

Challenges of expatriation:

Challenges for female expatriates and male spouses

Managing dual-career expatriate families:

Impact of dual-career families on international assignments

Challenges in managing female expatriates and male spouses of dual-career families

Mentoring dual-career families

Support of family for expatriates:

General support

Social roles of expatriate spouses

Work-life interface:

Work-family balance

Work-family conflict

Work-family conflict: antecedents and consequences

Work-family conflict of female expatriates

Positive perspective of work-family interface

Work-family conflicts of different types of assignments

Consequences of international assignments:

Consequences in general

Positive consequences

Expatriate management practices:

Inclusion of expatriate spouses in expatriate management practices
Support for expatriate families

Post assignment

Adjustment: Repatriation adjustment of expatriates and spouses: antecedents

Table 3: Summary of studies about Japanese global assignees and family issues

Study	Title	Outlet	Sample	Host country(ies)	Methodology	Topic Area	Focus
Fukuda and Chu (1994)	Wrestling with expatriate family problems: Japanese experience in East Asia	<i>International Studies of Management & Organization</i>	Personnel managers of Japanese firms	Hong Kong and Taiwan	Mixed-method: Survey (118) and interviews	The influence of family on expatriate's work outcomes	Impact of relocation on expatriate families Causes and effects of problems contributing to expatriation's failure
Simeon and Fujii (2000)	Cross-cultural adjustment strategies of Japanese spouses in Silicon Valley	<i>Employee Relations</i>	Japanese expatriate spouses	United States of America	Mixed-method: Questionnaires (57) and interviews	The adjustment of expatriates and expatriate families	Cross-cultural adjustment of Japanese expatriate spouses
Takeuchi, Yun, and Russell (2002)	Antecedents and consequences of the perceived adjustment of Japanese expatriates in the USA	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	Japanese expatriates and expatriate spouses, expatriates' supervisors	United States of America	Mixed-method: Survey (170 couples) and interviews (expatriates' supervisors)	The adjustment of expatriates and expatriate families	Cross-cultural adjustment of Japanese expatriates and their spouses: crossover and spillover effects; influence on work outcomes
Ben-Ari (2005)	The dynamics of an expatriate community	<i>Global Japan: The Experience of Japan's New Immigrant and Overseas Communities</i>	Expatriates and expatriate families	Singapore	Qualitative method: interviews (93) and participant observation	Expatriation lives	Career life and family life during expatriation and the expatriate community
Takeuchi et al. (2007)	Antecedents and consequences of the perceived adjustment of Japanese expatriates in the USA	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	Japanese expatriates and spouses	United States of America	Quantitative method: survey (170 couples)	The adjustment of expatriates and expatriate families	Stressors during expatriate life of Japanese expatriate and their spouses and influences on general adjustment
Martin (2007)	The Japanese Housewife Overseas: Adapting to change of culture and status	<i>The Japanese Housewife Overseas: Adapting to change of culture and status</i>	Japanese expatriate spouses	United Kingdom	Qualitative: participant observation and interviews	Experiences and roles of Japanese expatriate women	Perceptions about expatriation, expatriation lives and roles of Japanese expatriate women

Saint Arnault and Roles (2012)	Social Networks and the Maintenance of Conformity: Japanese sojourner women	<i>International Journal of Culture and Mental Health</i>	Japanese expatriate spouses	United States of America	Qualitative: interviews (24 in the first wave and 25 in the second wave)	Expatriation lives	Social relationship during expatriation: Social networks of Japanese sojourner women
Furusawa and Brewster (2016)	IHRM and expatriation in Japanese MNCs: HRM practices and their impact on adjustment and job performance	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources</i>	Japanese repatriates	China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, North America and Europe	Quantitative: surveys (149)	The influence of family on expatriate's work outcomes	Relationship between organizational considerations for expatriate family situations and expatriate adjustment and performance