

*Effect of Singapore's Language Education Policy on Chinese Singaporeans' Identity -
From a Survey of new University Graduates-*

Yuki Yokohama, Kanto Gakuin University, Japan

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Abstract

In Singapore bilingual education is being promoted due to the influence of globalization, English driven lifestyle and culture have become widespread, especially among young people. On the other hand, some are concerned about the situation in which the younger generation is gradually moving away from their ethnic language, culture, and traditions. Therefore, I conducted a survey with the aim of considering how the current language education in Singapore is affecting the younger generation of Chinese Singaporeans. The survey was conducted on five National University of Singapore graduates in 2019. I conducted a semi-structured interview survey on (1) the status of the language being used, (2) the activities of Chinese clan association, and (3) their own identity. The survey revealed that young Chinese Singaporeans have an English-driven lifestyle. As a symbol of that, few young Chinese Singaporeans knew the existence and activities of the Chinese clan association, which had been the emotional supports of Chinese Singaporeans. On the other hand, some people were worried about the current situation in which the Chinese dialect is declining as Mandarin is becoming more widespread due to the influence of the Speak Mandarin campaign. Young Chinese Singaporeans are still interested in dialects, languages of their ancestors. Regarding Singlish, which is used daily in Singaporean society, speaking Singlish seems to be related to their identity. I can clearly say that the identity of young Chinese Singaporeans is being established as a Singaporean from a "Chinese" identity, however the "Chinese" identity is not all gone, nevertheless ambivalent.

Keywords: Bilingual Education in Singapore, Identities of Young Chinese Singaporean, Chinese Clan Association, Chinese Immigrants, Singlish

Introduction

The economic powerhouse in Southeast Asia, Singapore population is about 5.7 million as of 2019, including migrant workers, having foreigners to account for about 40% of the population and the characteristics of a multi-ethnic nation. According to the Singaporean government, the ethnic groups in the nation consist of 74% Chinese, 14% Malay, 9% Indian, and others. The main language of Singapore is Malay as the official national language, nevertheless the official languages are English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil, used by the ethnic group comprising the nations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019) .

The world is paying attention to Singapore's remarkable economic development in recent years despite of a small country in Southeast Asia. According to IMF (2019), Singapore's GDP per capital in 2020 ranks 8th in the world ranking and stays in the high ranking in comparison with developed countries in Europe (e.g., Sweden (12th), Germany (16th) and developed countries in Asia (e.g., Japan (23th), South Korea (27th)) This high position of Singapore has always been in the top 10 of the worlds in the last ten years.

The strong economic and social policies led by the state has largely contributed to such rapid economic development for more than 55 years since Singapore foundation in 1965. In addition to that, the human resource development through language education policy led by the state has done so in our view. Singapore has consistently adopted a bilingual education from elementary schools, having been rapidly developing human resources in response to the global society since its foundation (Ishikawa, 2001) .

The bilingual education is based on a policy of learning two languages, English, and the mother tongue of each ethnic group. For example, Chinese Singaporean students are learning English and Mandarin. While this bilingual education is being promoted, in recent years, due to the influence of globalization, English driven lifestyle habit and culture have become widespread, especially among young people. On the other hand, some are concerned about the situation in which the younger generation is gradually moving away from their ethnic language, culture, and traditions (Shimura, 2018) .

In the future, how will the multicultural society, one of Singapore's attractions, be transformed by such a change in an English driven lifestyle? Therefore, to consider the language education of Singapore and the transformation of people's identities, we have examined their language and identity situation.

Previous Survey on the Language and Identity of Chinese Singaporeans

Language Education Policy and Identity

There are several fact-finding surveys on the identities of Chinese Singaporeans in Singapore, including a survey on language education and a survey on the activities of the oversea Chinese clan association. In this chapter, we would like to consider their identities by reviewing their findings. The Singaporean government has repeatedly examined the ideal form of bilingual education and continued to this day since its founding in 1965. The ethnic Chinese schools, which many ethnic Chinese children attend, have gradually changed to an English school according to the needs of the times.

On the other hand, while school educations in English are becoming the mainstream, they are also educating Mandarin, their ethnic language. In that situation, there is a problem of in what language teachers teach Chinese as an ethnic language, and in what language students understand it. Takahashi (2003) surveyed the status of language education at a public elementary school in Singapore. As a result, he points out as a preparation for educational activities in elementary school as follows:

"All classes are educated in English except for the ethnic languages. Therefore, children must become able to understand English spoken not only in their daily lives but also in classes by the time of their entering elementary school."

Children in Singapore are learning two languages (English and Mandarin) in kindergartens and nursery schools, and they are naturally learning English very hard especially because it is a measure of language for taking classes. In Singapore, elementary school children take the National Examination (PSLE: Primary School Leaving Examination) at the end of the sixth grade of elementary school, and the examination results lead to in junior high schools, three courses activities, Special Course, Express Course, Normal Course to be carried out dividedly.

Since the examination subjects for this course division always include not only English but also ethnic language examinations, it is not always necessary for elementary school students to reach a high level only in English language. After that, it is necessary to acquire both English and ethnic languages to clear high hurdles of taking several examinations for Singapore students and to receive a higher level of higher education.

Essential is Takahashi's following point (Takahashi, 2003) about the declination of culture, traditions and events that the Chinese ancestry have continuously inherited from their ancestors along with the development of the language education system, when it comes to future Singapore's language education system and social policy, whilst the ability of Chinese Singaporeans consist of the majority of Singapore, to speak Mandarin as well as English is based on the bilingual education necessary to contribute to Singapore's human resource development and national development.

"From the perspective of biculturalism and multiculturalism, the bilingual education needs to be considered further in consideration of a language as a means of communication as well as a means of socializing individual identities, cultures, and regions and larger communities."

Next, to pay attention to Okumura's survey result, Okumura conducted a survey of students at National University of Singapore (NUS) in 2002 through questionnaires and free-form descriptions of the languages used in their daily lives and their identities. In the survey, most response to the questions about the languages showed that both the students themselves and their parents spoke three languages, English, Chinese, and dialects, followed by four languages (Okumura, 2009). Students in Singapore must be able to have a perfect command of English and Chinese to survive the fierce competition for entrance examinations starting from elementary school, which is also a condition for receiving a higher level of higher education. From this, we consider that many Chinese students at National University of Singapore can naturally use both English and Chinese without any problem.

What is noteworthy in this survey is existence of Singlish. The English language used in Singapore has its own language culture, as if it were ridiculed as Singlish. Okumura considers the student's response to Singlish from the survey results as follows (Okumura, 2009).

"For example, some students clearly state that the Singlish is a core part of their national identity, however, it is worth noting that none of the 280 responses state positively that the Singlish should be used as a national language for the official government documents, parliamentary exchanges, or school language of instruction. "

Okumura pointed out that a Chinese Singaporean society consists of not only some Chinese Singaporeans who speak all English fluently, but also some Chinese Singaporeans who speak Singlish mixed with Chinese and dialects. We naturally consider that the number of people speaking Singlish is expected to decrease in the future, as the number of people speaking Standard English and Mandarin increases generation after generation. With the promotion of bilingual education, a new challenge such as the English level gap between generations and what kind of language is standard English could also arise in Singaporean society.

In addition, it has been pointed out that the westernization of youth culture and the accompanying transformation of identity could occur as Singapore's English education is further promoted. In modern Singapore, especially among the younger generation, they have the internet as a part of their daily lives; it is extremely easy to interact with anyone on SNS in English. It is possible to easily access English, the standard language of the world, and the accompanying Western culture. Especially given that many of the younger generation's favorite subcultures come from the West, they are less likely to confirm their Chinese descent. Okumura describes the vague and complex identity of English-educated Chinese Singaporeans as follows (Okumura, 2009).

"It is impossible that Singaporeans who have been educated in English have the same culture and identity as Chinese on the continent. However, we may say that the Chinese culture learned in English is just the cultural identity of ethnic Chinese Singaporeans. "

Chinese Clan Association and Ethnic Chinese Identity

In considering the transformation of overseas Chinese identities, the existence of Chinese clan associations established in many communities around the world is significant. The Chinese clan association is a mutual aid organization established on immigrated land for Chinese people to spend a stable life on immigrated land (Yokohama, 2020). In Singapore, as in other countries, many Chinese clan associations have been established since the early days of British rule in the Malay Peninsula, and they have been historically supported by people all over China.

For example, large-scale clan associations such as the Fujian association and Chaozhou association are still running schools, conducting various event activities, and establishing scholarships for students, and have currently become a symbol of overseas Chinese in Singapore. The Chinese clan association, currently existing not only in Singapore but also in many communities around the world, can be said to symbolize the identities of many overseas Chinese and ethnic Chinese.

Few survey studies have mentioned the relationship between the Chinese clan association and the identity of young Chinese Singaporeans. Here, we will review the results of a survey by Goda on the participation of the Chinese clan association and youth. In 1993, Goda conducted a survey on "Chinese clan association and Chinese / Chinese culture" among 500 adolescents aged 15 to 29 (collected: 256). This survey conducted about 30 years ago, is helpful in comparing it with the current changes in education, society, and economy in Singapore (Goda, 1999).

As for the survey subjects about the existence of the Chinese clan association, 70% of the respondents answered that they know the existence of the Chinese clan association, however, have never participated in the activity. 20% of the respondents answered, "I don't even know the existence of the Chinese clan association." Furthermore, according to the results of a survey of university students, Chinese clan association is not friendly place to young Chinese Singaporeans. However, 84.5% of all respondents answered that they were "interested in Chinese and Chinese culture".

What is noteworthy in Goda's survey results is about the ethnic consciousness of the respondents. Singaporeans are supposed to list their ethnicity on their ID cards, at the point they become conscious of their ethnicity. According to the survey results, more than 60% of the respondents stated that they were "proud of being Chinese." The results based on each educational background, about 70% of the younger generation of university and graduate students answered that they were "proud of their own ethnic group". Goda analyzes this result as follows (Goda, 1999).

"One of the reasons is that ethnic Chinese feeling the difference from other ethnic groups in terms of advancing to higher education and finding employment have begun to have a sense of superiority as ethnic Chinese."

About 30 years after Goda's survey, Chinese Singaporean students are now educated mainly in English due to the government's bilingual education policy, and at the same time they are learning Mandarin, which is their mother tongue. We would like to clarify from a survey on young Chinese Singaporeans how the identity of young Chinese Singaporeans has changed due to Singapore's rapid economic development and changes in the social environment in recent years.

Survey on Language and Identity for Young Chinese Singaporean

More than 50 years have already passed since Singapore was established as a nation in 1965. Since its founding, the Singaporean government has promoted bilingual education; its educational activities are still ongoing. Underlying that a small country in Southeast Asia has achieved one of the largest economic developments in the world, it is not only English but also Mandarin that this state-led language education activity has been spreading all over the country.

On the other hand, as we see in the previous chapter, English is at the center of education, the interest in Chinese dialects, cultural activities, and history that Chinese Singaporean ancestors used to have, have been gradually fading out in fact.

Therefore, we conducted a survey with the aim of considering how the current language education in Singapore is affecting the younger generation of Chinese Singaporeans. The date of the survey was August 27th, 2019. The survey was conducted on five National University of Singapore (NUS) graduates who cooperated with the survey from my research collaborator, Professor Thang Leng Leng of NUS. We conducted a semi-structured interview survey on (1) the status of the language being used, (2) the activities of the overseas Chinese Clan Association (3) Singaporean society, and (4) their own identity.

The ethical considerations of the survey were as follows. Before the survey, we gave an oral description on the survey purpose, content, survey method, risk of the survey, confidentiality,

and handling of data. The survey was conducted with their consent, their understanding the descriptions and the survey consent form signed off by hem.

Survey Subjects

Table1 shows age, work, and family status of the survey subjects. The survey subjects were those who had just graduated from NUS, and the average age was 25.2 years, one male and four females. All subjects surveyed had parents (and grandparents) and siblings. The average household population was 4.4, more than the average Singapore household population of 3.16 in 2019.

	Sex	Age	Academic history	Current occupation	family member
Case 1	male	26	Bachelor's degree	Social Worker	4 (father, mother, younger sister and myself)
Case 2	female	24	Bachelor's degree	medical Social Worker	4 (father,mother,elder sister and myself)
Case 3	female	26	Bachelor's degree	Social Worker	4 (father,mother,elder younger sister and myself)
case 4	female	24	Bachelor's degree	Office Worker	6 (2grandparents,father,mother,brother and myself)
Case 5	female	26	Bachelor's degree	Social Worker	4 (father, mother, Aunt and myself)

Table1: Sex, Age, Work, and Family Status of the Survey Subjects

Results and Discussions

Situation of Family's Birthplace

Table 2 shows family's birthplace places of the survey subjects. All respondents' parents were born in Singapore. The grandparents' birthplaces were diverse, including those from Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Regarding the birthplaces of the respondents' ancestors, some respondents answered that they were coastal cities in China (Fujian, Hainan, and Guangdong Swatow city), and others answered, "I am not sure". When asked if "you have been to your ancestor's hometown," most of the respondents answered, "I have never been."

	Birth place						The place of origin of ancestors	Have you ever been to your ancestral hometown?		
	Father	Mother	Paternal		Maternal					
			Grandfather	Grandmother	Grandfather	Grandmother				
Case 1	Singapore	Singapore	China	Malaysia	Singapore	Singapore	Fujian in China(Maternal side) Hainan in China(Paternal side)	No		
Case 2	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Malaysia	I am not sure	No		
Case 3	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	China	Singapore	I am not sure	No		
Case 4	Singapore	Malaysia	Malaysia	Singapore	Malaysia	Malaysia	Hainan in China (Maternal side) I am not sure (Paternal side)	grandparents' hometown in		
Case 5	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	indonesia	Singapore	Swatow in China (Maternal side) I am not sure (Paternal side)	No		

Table2: Family's Birthplace Places of the Survey Subjects

Languages Used in Conversations with Parents and Grandparents in Daily Lives

Below are responses to the questions about the languages they use in their daily lives with their parents and grandparents. Many of the respondents were found to be using both English and Chinese. Looking at the answers in detail, they often used Chinese in conversations with parents and grandparents. Some used dialects in conversations with their grandparents, however, in some cases they used Mandarin because the respondents themselves could not use the dialect.

"I speak to my parents in Mandarin. I speak to my younger sister in a mixture of Mandarin and English. Usually if my sister and I are speaking about work or school related fields we will speak in English, for other matters in Mandarin." and "I speak to them in Mandarin, do not use any dialects." (Case 1)

"English and Mandarin. More Mandarin as my parents are not highly educated" and "I use very basic Hokkien dialect. Grandparents are not around anymore" (Case 2)

"English, at time Chinese. Most of the times we use English to communicate." And "Yes. at times I use Hokkien or Hakka with my paternal/ maternal grandparents." (Case 3)

"I speak in English to my brother and parents, and Mandarin to my grandparents." "I do not use dialects." (Case 4)

"English and Chinese (used to talk to my maternal grandmother in Chinese everyday life before she passed away in 2018) and I do not have chance to use dialects." (Case 5)

Language Used in Conversations with Friends

The respondents revealed that they used in conversations with their friends in their daily lives English more than Chinese, as shown in the answers below. On the other hand, the answers also revealed that they frequently use so-called Singlish, or a mixture of English and Chinese.

"I speak to them mainly in English. I will use Mandarin at times especially when discussing casual things like food. I will also use Mandarin in between my English words. " (Case 1)

"English and Mandarin. We are more used to conversing in English since we use it most of the time for our studies and work." (Case 2)

"English. Actually, we speak mostly in Singlish, a local variation of English." (Case 3)

"I use English every time." (Case 4)

"English, Chinese less often than English." (Case 5)

Speak Mandarin Campaign

In 1979, the Singaporean government launched Speak Mandarin Campaign. This campaign is a large-scale campaign encouraging mainly Chinese Singaporeans to speak Mandarin rather than the Chinese dialect in their social lives; is still ongoing. Below are the responses to questions about this Speak Mandarin campaign. Many of the responses welcomed the campaign. However, we can clearly say that modern young Chinese Singaporeans have a sense of danger about having fewer opportunities to speak Chinese dialects.

"The campaign does not have the traction against the larger trend of the lack of environment to speak Mandarin." (Case 1)

"I don't really know much about it. But I think it is a good initiative since it would be quite devastating if we were to lose one of our mother tongue languages." (Case 2)

"I think it's great because speaking Mandarin has reduced a lot and the newer generation are increasingly speaking more English than Mandarin." (Case 3)

"I wish that young people had a chance to learn dialect formally as well. It is a pity that only mostly older generations speak these dialects today, and young people do not have the opportunity to learn it properly." (Case 4)

"The Campaign aims to encourage Singaporean Chinese to speak standard mandarin Chinese and discourage the use of dialects. I think the campaign was very successful and perhaps backfire. This is because many youths are not able to speak dialect." (Case 5)

Chinese Clan Association

Chinese immigrants have created Chinese clan associations for their birthplaces in China on the land they have immigrated to, and received from the associations, life supports, job mediation, contact with their homeland, ceremonial occasions, and many other lives' supports. Even now, there are many clan associations in Singapore such as Fujian Hall, Guangdong Hall, Hainan Hall, and Fuzhou Hall, which are connected by powerful networks with clan associations in Chinese communities around the world.

Table 3 shows the responses to the questions regarding the Chinese clan associations in this survey. We can clearly say that many of the respondents were unaware of the activity. Particularly, when asked about the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations unifying overseas Singapore's Chinese clan associations as a federation, none of responders know the existence of this organization itself, except that one of the respondents was concerned that the organization would deepen relations between China and Singapore.

	Q5. Do you know some Chinese Clan associations?	Q6. Have you ever participated in some activities of clan associations?	Q7. Do you know Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan
Case 1	Yes, Teochew Association Hokkien Association.	No.I am not interested nor aware of their activities.	I am not really interested in finding out what they are. I am a little concerned they might be influenced to be too friendly towards People's Republic of China.
Case2	I know they exist but I cannot recall their names.	I have no affiliations with any of the clan associations.	No. This is the first time hearing about it.
Case 3	No.	No.	No.
Case4	No.	My Primary School was established by the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan, so I probably did participate in some activities associated with them in my Primary School days.	No.
Case5	Yes. Hokkien Association, Teochew Association	I have never heard of activities organized by clan associations. I am also not interested in the activities of clan associations	No. I am unsure of the role of Federation of Chinese Clan Associations.

Table3: Responses to the Questions Regarding the Chinese Clan Associations

Maintaining Singaporean Society

We asked young respondents being responsible for Singapore in the future what is important for Singaporean society. The response is as follows. Many of the responses were that respecting multicultural and multi-ethnic Singapore is essential for the society.

"Our meritocracy where everyone must be given a fair chance to excel regardless of their background. Social mobility for even the less privileged to have decent opportunities to move up. Understanding and respect across different ethnic and religious groups – that we accept

"that there will be differences and that is to be celebrated." (Case 1)

"I think Singapore is unique in its multiculturalism and this should be maintained. Growing up in a multicultural society enables us to learn more about other cultures and be appreciative and accepting of one another's differences and similarities." (Case 2)

"I think what's important in maintaining a harmonious Singapore society is mutual understanding and respect between the different ethnic groups. More importantly, to not have censorship about real issues and instead to start real communication and conversations about issues that troubles these ethnic groups. From this, as a society we can work together in coming up realistic solutions with regards to these said problems." (Case 3)

"I think Singaporeans need to be more compassionate towards the needs of minority groups (in terms of ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, immigrant workers etc.)" (Case 4)

"I think respect is important to maintain Singapore society. By respecting each other's culture, language, religion and way of life, we can live harmoniously." (Case 5)

Identity

When asked about "your identity," all responses were "my identity is Chinese Singaporean." We can clearly say that their identity does not simply mean having roots in Chinese descent; their identity is necessary to have relationships with other ethnic groups in Singapore and a sense of belonging to Republic of Singapore.

"My ethnicity does not dictate my political loyalty. I am a Singaporean first and foremost. My Chinese heritage merely informs the cultural practices I subscribe to. The fundamental ideals that make Singapore will come first." (Case 1)

"I identify myself as a Singaporean Chinese. I think it is important for one to still be in touch with the cultures of your own race while still identifying as Singaporean with the rest of the nation. This helps me to embrace the fact that we are all different yet similar and how we can have a collective identity but still keep our own roots." (Case 2)

"I personally view myself as a Singapore Chinese. I believe having this national identity as a Singaporean is important to me because it makes me feel that I have a stake in my country's matters. Therefore, it matters to me how other countries perceive Singapore as a country and Singaporeans whom are representatives of Singapore." (Case 3)

"I feel that there needs to be more sensitivity towards other races and ethnic groups, not just by Chinese Singaporeans but also by the Singaporean government." (Case 4)

"I think that my national identity is Singaporean. This is because Singaporean's identity ourselves based on our shared Singaporean Singlish way of speaking and our multi-racial society. In addition, our national pledge states that: we the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves as one united people, regardless of race, language or religion to build a democratic society... Therefore, I think national identity should not include our race. We are all Singaporeans regardless of race, language or religion." (Case 5)

Conclusions

Everyday Languages

Regarding the language used in the family, we can clearly say that for conversations with parents Mandarin is often used and for conversations with grandparents, dialects are often used, although it depends on the individual home environment of the respondents. On the other hand, we have found that English is often used in conversations among brothers and sisters. The survey results on the languages used by the respondents' friends revealed that English is becoming more and more the main language used in a daily life in the younger generation. When asked about the language used in conversation with their friends, all respondents said they mainly used English.

From the results that many respondents had completed learning Mandarin by high school, we can more clearly say that English has become a common language in their social lives, especially among the younger generation. However, in those responses, when talking about casual topics with friends, they responded that Mandarin is included in the English conversation, and in a different response, some respondents said that they used in conversation with the friends, local English in Singapore, Singlish.

From the above, young Chinese Singaporeans learn and utilize practical English for their social lives and works, while we consider that they skillfully use Mandarin, Chinese dialects, and Singapore's unique Singlish according to the intimacy with others. One of the reasons why Chinese Singaporeans' identities are not simply "Chinese" is in our consideration due to their multilingual use in their daily lives.

Maintaining Singaporean Society and Identity of Young Chinese Singaporean

Many responses to the question about what is needed to maintain Singapore's society included Singapore symbolic aspects with a multicultural society. They often described the need for understanding and respect for multi-ethnic cultures, languages and religions, inter-ethnic cooperation, consideration for minorities, and compassion for other ethnic groups.

We think that the younger generation, being responsible for Singaporean society, said this means that the younger generation felt proud and hopeful that they had become one of the world's leading economic powers in a short period of 50 years after the founding of the country, due to the Singapore government's promotion of policies treating multi-ethnic groups equally, and the education policy centered on elite education such as bilingual education. In other words, they were considered to at least trust the government. This is also reflected in the responses to the respondents' own identity questions.

Many respondents answered to the question: What do you think about your own identity? as they were "Chinese Singaporean". However, at the same time, some respondents said that the identity of "Chinese Singaporean" is just the identity defined in the ethnic classification by the government, and that their identity is "Singaporean".

In other words, they are aware that by being recognized as Singaporeans relative to people in other countries, they can establish Singaporean identities, which in turn allows ethnic groups to unite with one single identity. Moreover, recognizing themselves as Singaporeans helps

them to become aware of the country of Singapore. As the above mentioned and as the response in Case 5 represents the young Chinese Singaporeans of today, it describes as follows.

"I think that my national identity is Singaporean. This is because Singaporean's identity ourselves based on our shared Singaporean Singlish way of speaking and our multi-racial society."

What is interesting in this description is the Singlish that exist in their lives. *Singlish* is a unique Singaporean English, but it is interesting for us that it has become a part of the Singaporean identities. For example, Yamada states that Singlish is de-Anglicized and is a type of World English (Yamada,2001) . Investigating the identities of Singaporeans' other generations and Singaporeans other than Chinese Singaporeans is naturally necessary since this survey applies to limited survey subject. We consider that Singaporeans will establish non-racial identities gradually when it comes to the identities of Singaporean being responsible for the next generation. At that time, we would like to continue to verify how the identities of Chinese Singaporeans, consisting of the large population of Singaporean society will continue to change in relation to their Chinese roots, cultures, traditions, and dialects.

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Contact email: yokohayu@kanto-gakuin.ac.jp