

# The Narratives of Korean-Japanese Transnational Families: Life in the Shadow of History

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**Abstract** | This study examines how families of transnational marriages between Korea and Japan construct their family relations while negotiating and adjusting their lives between the domains of private family life and the wider social world. This is an ethnographic study that uses the conceptual frameworks of transnationalism and contact zones. Field research was conducted between April and July 2017 in Kyushu, Japan, and a total of fifteen members of transnational unions between Korea and Japan participated.

These transnational Korean-Japanese couples shared their understanding and interpretation of their social categories and positions in the society they were living in. The majority of their narratives reflected the hegemonic discourses and practices arising from the two nations' shared history. Although these couples acknowledged that they felt that their minority status in Japanese society could not be easily changed, they imagined transnational spaces that might transcend the divisions between Korea and Japan for their children. Rather than this being an action or practice of trying to forge a sincere transnational identity, however, this conception seems to be a cognitive coping strategy for the discriminatory reality of life in Japan.

In looking at the life experiences of the families of international marriage between Korea and Japan, this study sheds light on how history can affect the power relationships between two individuals and between the individual and society, dynamics which have been overlooked in previous research.

**Keywords** | International marriage, Korea-Japan relations, transnationalism, contact zone, colonialism

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## Introduction

My hometown, in the Kumamoto region, is an area where many people lost their families during the Imjin War,<sup>1</sup> so it didn't seem like a good place for us to live. That's why I moved to the larger city of Fukuoka before my husband arrived in Japan. ... But after marrying, I went to the district office to declare our marriage, and they told me that I should register myself as head of the family rather than my husband. If I didn't want to change my husband's last name to fit the Japanese style, that is ... (Sachiko, 49 W)

They didn't oppose our marriage all that much. They said that according to my grandmother and grandfather, despite Koreans being poor, there were a lot of them who were kind and who would share food with one another. (Nakashima, 51 M)

My mother-in-law was against [our marriage], saying "Korean blood is dirty." So, I never once met her. ... But what was even more galling was when a friend said, "I thought you went [to Japan] to study, but I guess that's not all you did." A relative even asked "How much did you get paid?" (Kim A-jöng, 46 W)

Over the past three decades cases of so-called global hypergamy or "global marriage-scapes" (Constable 2005, 3) have become increasingly widespread in Korean society, usually referring to a legal marital union between a Korean man and a woman from a less economically developed nation. But what sort of life unfolds for partners from Korea and Japan when they marry across national borders? And how do their lives differ from those of marriage migrant women from Southeast Asia in Korea?

International marriage is an act that takes place through the decision of two parties in a highly private realm of their life. Just as marriage between two citizens of the same country merges their two families and family cultures, international marriage represents the merger of two countries and their respective cultures. Furthermore, when individuals marry across the boundaries of culture and country, while they remain distinct individuals—husband and wife—they are, at the same time, members of their respective society in which they were raised (i.e., individuals who have internalized Korean culture), as well as citizens of a nation that accorded them rights and individuality within each of these distinct social and cultural systems.

To understand the role played by society and culture in marriages between Koreans and Japanese people, the shared history and experiences of these two countries cannot be ignored. The history between these two countries provides

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1. Japanese invasion of Korea, 1592-98.

critical context for the families of Korean-Japanese international marriages in that this historical context not only serves to independently influence their individual identities, but also the ongoing formation of their identities through their relationship with the opposing collective. By looking at marital unions between Korean and Japanese people, this study intends to show how society, culture, and historical experiences mediate the union between two individuals that occurs beyond the boundaries of state and society. In addition, it will examine how the two parties negotiate and adjust their lives in the arena between private life and the social world to construct transnational spaces of life for their families.

The geographical proximity of Korea and Japan, as well as the historical relationship between the two nations, has meant that there are a substantial number of international marriages between Koreans and Japanese individuals. However, the families of such international marriages have not attracted much academic attention. One reason for this may be that marriages between Korean and Japanese nationals do not neatly fit into the framework of global hypergamy, as exemplified by the case of “marriage first, then migration” by women from economically developing nations to those relatively more prosperous. Another reason may be that research on Korean nationals living in Japan has largely focused on the experiences of Zainichi Koreans as the subjects of institutional, systemic discrimination. Consequently, Japanese research on international marital union between Koreans and Japanese people is limited to examining the small number of cases of Korean women who married men living in rural Japan in the 1970s and ’80s, and research from Korea is limited to a few studies of Japanese women who have elected to marry Korean men within the Unification Church (Kim Sök-ran 2007; Yi Ŭn-a 2015; Yi Chŏng-hŭi 2012; Cho Hyŏn-mi 2009).

However, Korean-Japanese marital unions make up a large proportion of international marriages both in Japan and Korea, and these unions do not fit the common international pattern of “marriage first, then migration.”<sup>2</sup> Also, they face the challenges of dealing with social, political, and economic tensions and conflicts between these two geographically close yet politically distant countries

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2. According to the 2018 e-country index of Statistics Korea (statistics gathered 2009-17), of all international marriages, marriages with Japanese partners numbered the third highest, behind only those with Chinese and Vietnamese partners. It was the largest group when considering only foreign male spouses. Foreign female spouses make up 72.9 percent of all foreign spouses, but the ratio of male to female Japanese spouses is around one to one. In Japan as well, where foreign female spouses make up seventy-one percent of marriage migrants, the gender ratio of Korean spouses was about one to two, male to female respectively. Female Korean spouses made up the third largest group of foreign spouses, and male Korean spouses were the largest among foreign male spouses (Kōsei Rōdōshō Seisaku Tōkeikan n.d.).

encroaching on their daily lives, a challenge stemming from the historical experiences between two countries. All these reasons suggest the need for a more in-depth understanding of the families born of international marriages between Koreans and Japanese people.

With increasing demographic mobility in our globalizing environment, interest in boundaries and border crossing has experienced corresponding academic attention (Paasi 1999). Boundaries are meaningful not only in terms of their spatial dimensions but in that they are imbued with additional significance by our everyday lives. In the context of Japan and Korea, the border was to some degree erased with the Japanese colonization of Korea, after which it was restored following Korea's independence. Korean-Japanese couples cross numerous boundaries as they decide to marry. As they cross state borders, geographical boundaries, and the boundaries of language and culture, their sense of physical and psychological connectedness, individual and family identities, as well as power relations informed by historical experiences are again mixed and merged into their current lives and constructed anew (Paasi 1999). This general context of mixing is further complicated by the fact that Korea and Japan have shared a tumultuous modern and contemporary history of relations, with war and colonization as well as political, economic, and cultural exchange taking place for many years. As such, this study concerns how the complex history between these two countries impinges on the identities of individuals and their families, their ways of relating with each other, power relations in the private contact zone of their marriage, and how members of these families negotiate and compromise over their life circumstances.

This study's research question can be formulated as the following: How do individuals belonging to Korean-Japanese transnational families respond to the vestiges of history and the social categories that act on their transnational married lives, and how do they create a transnational life space?

## **Literature Review**

### **1. Trends in Research on International Marriage**

Existing research on international marriage has largely explored the phenomenon of a woman becoming wed to a man of higher status for the sake of upward economic mobility. The main concerns are how people in such marital unions adjust, as well as the policies and systems that support their settlement, and factors that may hinder such. Previous studies can also be said to be

concerned with the question of social integration of marriage migrants from the perspective of the destination country.

Corresponding to an increase in marriage migration between women in lesser developed countries and men in more highly developed countries starting in the mid-1980s, women's transnational migration came to be on par with that of men (Castles and Miller 1993). However, women's marriage migration has a much longer history. In the early 1900s, women from Korea and Japan migrated as "picture brides" in order to marry men who were working in Hawaii as migrant laborers. Directly following the second World War, there were the "war brides" of US soldiers who had been stationed around the world (Gothard 2001). Beginning in the early 1980s, there was also the phenomenon of "mail-order brides," which referred to women from economically underdeveloped countries who were expeditiously married off to men from more developed countries via an intermediary marriage service. In the context of the West, feminists decried such forms of marital union as the commodification of women and for being rooted in racist and sexist stereotypes that sexually objectified women, particularly Asian women, as passive and exotic (Cullen 2002). Although previously the majority of marriage migration was done by Asian women seeking to marry Western men, starting in the late 1980s, marriage migration within the Asian region itself soared drastically. As a result of the urbanization of economically prosperous countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore, men residing in the rural areas of these countries struggled to find spouses, and, as a way of remedying this social issue, they began to seek Southeast Asian women to marry. Now, international marriage is not limited to women migrating to marry men residing in rural or farming areas, but has become a pathway for any man who lacks competitiveness in the marriage market to find a potential bride.

Existing literature on international marriage views such as a form of gendered migration in which women are the primary migrators, and has noted the patriarchal norms of the man being older and of a higher socio-economic status or education level, and the anticipation that the traditional roles of the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the caregiver be upheld. The commodification of affection resulting from commercial operations mediating the private and intimate relations of marriage has often been criticized, making the dominant discourse on international marriage a perspective that views women as either victims or opportunists scheming to attain higher economic status through a loveless legal union (Kim Hyön-mi 2008; Hwang Chöng-mi 2009; Constable 2005). They point out that, particularly in the Asian region, there is an expectation that marriage-migrant women will uphold Confucian norms

such as performing care work for their spouse's aging parents, bearing responsibility for reproductive labor, and labor performed within home (Bélanger and Wang 2013; Hsu 2014; Robinson 2007).

Indeed, current literature on international marriage between Korea and Japan has highlighted the gendered, global phenomenon of hypergamy and has focused on the adjustment and social integration of immigrants in destination countries. There are a small number of studies regarding the experiences of Korean women married to Japanese men who reside in rural and farming regions. These studies are concerned with Korean women's motivation for migration, their adjustment problems settling in rural Japan, cultural identity, and the processes of resolving conflicts and issues (Min Chi-wŏn 2000; Yang A-ram and Yi Haeng-sin 2017; Yu Yŏn-suk 2011). They are also concerned with how socio-structural factors, such as Japan's sexist labor market or immigration policies, affect the process of adjustment for women who migrate to Japan to live with their husbands (Min Chi-wŏn 2000). There also are studies that illustrate the process of cultural assimilation, in particular the processes of negotiation and choices made within the value system of double standards, as experienced by these "newcomer" Korean women (Kim Sŏn-mi 2011). These are paralleled by studies on female Japanese migrants living in Korea that approach the topic from a similar standpoint, and cover issues such as cultural identity, the process of settling in, experiences raising children, and adjustment to language (Kim Sŏk-ran 2008; Yun Su-hyŏn and Grace H. Chung 2015; Isii et al. 2015; Yi Chŏng-hŭi 2012).

## 2. Limits to the Existing Literature on International Marriage Migration

Criticism of the existing literature on international marriage migration can be roughly divided into four categories: 1) lack of awareness of the diversity that exists within marriage migration; 2) limitations of methodological nationalism; 3) assimilationist perspectives; and 4) lack of historicity.

### *(1) Forms of International Marriage and Diversity of Relationships*

In focusing on international marriage migration among low income and rural families, the existing research has overlooked the diversity of forms of international marriage, the various pathways and motivations for migration, precise demographic characteristics, and power structures within the family. Though international marriage is often thought of as the gendered movement of women from economically developing nations marrying men from more prosperous nations, in certain regions, the gender ratio may be relatively equal depending

on the migrant groups involved. There is a conception that attaining higher economic status is the primary objective of international marriage, and “marriage for migration” is accepted as conventional. But for the vast majority of international marriages, migration and the act of legal marital union occur as entirely discrete processes. Furthermore, there are a variety of pathways to and processes of arriving at international marriage—studying abroad, travelling abroad, job opportunities, et cetera—and we must recognize that these varied pathways create differences in the aspects and power structure of the relationship between spouses.

## *(2) Limitations of Methodological Nationalism*

The geographical scope of most research that analyzes social processes is confined by the territorial and political boundaries of the nation state. Based on the premise that social change is driven by agents who exist within the state, the nation-state container theory (Wimmer and Schiller 2003) claims that because they consider the boundaries of the nation state as being identical with the scope of society they aim to address, many social theories have made the mistake of restricting their analysis to the borders of the state. Though the existence of hard international borders remains a crucial factor influencing marriage migrants, the social lives of transnational migrants in society today are not entirely delimited by the boundaries that define nation states, as their social relations, religious activities, movement of assets, political activities, and various other domains of their life spill over national borders.

While the everyday lives of transnational migrants are primarily affected by their relations within the specific region that they reside in, the individuals themselves maintain personal connections with people in different nations. This international purview extends to the more general exchange of ideas and information (Kim Yeun Hee and Lee Kyo Il 2017), in addition to maintenance of their established social networks as they go about their lives. In contemporary society, it could therefore be stated that the simultaneity of transnational connections better explains the lives of transnational migrants (Levitt and Schiller 2004), and the question of where these migrants will maintain closer ties to is a choice based on numerous contextual factors.

Thus, research on transnational migration must know how to observe the effects of transnational relations. Conducting research across multiple sites would be ideal, but by asking individuals about the transnational aspects of their lives, we remain able to understand their transnational relations as they extend beyond national boundaries without the need for physical travel. Furthermore, it is vital that we understand transnational migration not as a one-time event,

but rather a process in which the social relations encompassing the migrator become connected and intertwined over a considerable period of time. Once we longitudinally observe how the events which occur in the lives of migrators' families, as well as the social and political events and economic and cultural opportunities in both their countries of origin and their destination countries affect the everyday practices these individuals adopt, we will be better able to understand their transnational practices (Levitt and Schiller 2004).

### *(3) Limitations of the Assimilationist Perspective*

By operating under the assumption that migrants' current place of residence is their ultimate destination and portraying social integration into their current locale as an important task for marriage-migrant women, in the Korean context the existing literature on transnational migrants approaches the topic from a predominantly assimilationist perspective. The tendency of such research is to seek answers to questions related to migrants' "social integration" relative to the local arena of interactions created when they arrive, such as marriage-migrant women's adjustment to family relations, child-rearing, linguistic/cultural issues, levels of psycho-social adjustment, and participation in their local communities (Kwŏn Pok-sun and Ch'a Po-hyŏn 2006; Kim Tu-sŏp and Yi Myŏng-jin 2007; Kim Yi-sŏn, Hwang Chŏng-mi, and Yi Chin-yŏng 2007; Kim Hyŏn-mi 2008; Yun Hyŏng-suk 2005; Yi Hye-gyŏng 2005; Han Kŏn-su 2006). We can observe that particular focus is placed on the adjustment of the children of these migrants, such as through research on their enrollment rates, academic achievement, psychological development, language development, and communication skills (Kim Sun-gyu 2011; Cho Hye-yŏng et al. 2007). Some may claim that by holding up a magnifying glass to the vulnerability of marriage-migrant women, such research contributes to promoting the rights and interests of this group, but it is difficult not to criticize this body of work as being based on a standpoint that focuses on patricentric values and the assimilation of immigrants.

The immigration policies of Korea and Japan are alike in that they derive from a gated stance when it comes to the increase of migrants and their settlement in the respective countries, yet recognize the importance of marriage-migrant women in the two countries and consist of social integration policies centered on such women (Kim Yeun Hee and Lee Kyo Il 2017; Kim Hyŏn-mi 2008; Kim Hye-sun 2007; Yi Chi-yŏng 2012).<sup>3</sup> These social integration policies

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3. Japan pursues policies of multicultural symbiosis for immigrants that are centered around local governments, and there are support systems and protections offered for migrant women under these policies. Korea's migrant support policies are focused on the social integration of marriage-migrant women and their families through multicultural family support policies (Kim Yeun Hee



are targeted at reinforcing the role of migrant women in the family, and, rather than being concerned with ensuring the individual human rights and social standing of migrant women, they are based on patriarchal values and concentrate on the performance of women's roles for the sake of underpinning the rights of the patriarchy. We can infer that this institutional characteristic has an impact on marriage migrants' perceptions of their identity, the power relations between family members, and the process of forming a transnational space relative to their lives.

#### *(4) Lack of Historicity*

There is a dearth of research on how the historical experiences and geo-political relations between the countries with which international marriage migrants are affiliated inform the private areas of their lives, such as their family and social relations. Despite having departed from their homelands, immigrants are depositories of culture who carry their nation's history with them (Yi Su-ja 2004, 216). The contact zone of the family of international marriage and the local community which encompass it offer not only a tangible space that traverses established national partitions of geography or politics, but a space in which historically forged situational connectivity, identities, and power relations are combined, mixed, and reconstructed (Wang, Wong, and Zheng 2014). The experiences of history, as well as the hierarchical order and hegemonic relations between countries and regions affect the families of marriage migration and their interactions with their neighbors, but there has yet to be an in-depth discussion of this.

## **Analytical Framework and Methodology**

For too long, migration has been primarily framed within the academic literature as a linear movement from an originating country to a destination country, and due to the geographical and temporal divisions, migrants have been characterized as people at the margins of society, who do not belong in any one place. In contrast, this study seeks to examine transnational migrants and their lives from the perspective of transnational mobility and border crossing in the ever-shrinking global community. These migrants' border crossings are not simply a form of physical or mental mobility, but actions produced across and through a relational field of psycho-social connectivity, identity, and power relations

formed by historical experiences. In short, migration is a process of confronting, negotiating, and reconstructing identities, positionality, and power relations that have been shaped by the past relations between the national contexts involved. This study aims to illuminate how such historical asymmetry, in addition to the contemporary context of politics, economics, and cultural relations between Korea and Japan, can impact the private space of a Korean-Japanese internationally married family. Additionally, it explores how the members of such relationships respond to these issues, and how they go about creating their own spaces within which to live their lives.

## 1. Conceptual Framework for Analysis

### (1) *Transnationalism*

Transnationalism is a perspective that considers how, in contemporary society, the importance of economic, social, and psychological borders between states is ever diminishing while the interconnectivity between people across national borders is increasing. Migrants cross state borders and form bonds of transnational connectivity which are simultaneously constructed of the multilayered relations between family, economy, society, organization, religion, and politics within a social arena between their country of origin and their destination country (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995). They are also able to simultaneously maintain a bifocality on “there” and “here” in their everyday lives (Levitt and Schiller 2004; Vertovec 2009). In this process, hegemonic discourses along with the given legal, political, and social institutions of a society both determine individuals’ ease of access in conducting such relations between countries, as well as affect the individuals’ and community’s social positioning and influence the collective imagination as regards ideas of belonging and modes of practice related to such (Anthias 2002). The current study examines how families of Korean-Japanese international marriages recognize, respond to, and reproduce social categories, which are formed through the influence of predominant discourses and systems relative to their changing social status and physical (geographic) place of residence. For instance, I focus on how the thoughts and beliefs of Korean women married to Japanese men are maintained, compromised, and changed with regards to the social categories that determine their identity, such as their identity as Koreans, their recognition of the history of oppression and colonialism between the two nations, and their recognition of the relationships they have with Japanese people and Japanese society.

## (2) *Contact Zone*

Scholar of comparative literature Mary Louise Pratt (1991, 34) coined the term *contact zone* to describe the places where “cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.” The concept is concerned with how distinct groups of differing culture, ethnicity, or race coalesce through exchange and communication in so-called borderlands areas, such as globalized cities, trade ports, or frontiers. Though originally used to describe spaces in which a dominant culture “edifies” subcultures through the unilateral instilling of colonial culture from an imperialist, Eurocentric perspective, the concept is now used more broadly to describe spaces in which cultures meet—spaces of exchange and coexistence between different ethnicities and cultures in which emotional and intellectual experiences of overcoming conflict to reach agreement through compromise are compressed.

Space is not a blank slate or empty canvas, but rather a framework within which are forged “social relations” including those of power (Giddens 1987, 144). Relations formed in contact zones may indeed achieve parity, however in many situations they involve relationships between natives and immigrants, or those of the ethnic majority population and minorities. As a consequence, relationships with unequal power or hierarchical relationships are often formed there as well. One contact zone is that of marriage across state borders and the families that are formed as a result of such transnational marital unions. Though such marriages and the resulting circumstances of family are private spheres of life, state institutions, international politics, economic factors, and historical experiences all have insistent effects on these innermost realms of people’s lives. The current study looks at how relationships connecting individuals with other individuals, and individuals with society are formed within the private realm of family life and the resulting range of close interpersonal relations as a contact zone between Korea and Japan. Furthermore, it examines what kinds of power relations form, how such power relations affect determinations of individual and collective identity, and how they change depending on situational context and interlocuter, in this process of relationship-forming. In short, how migrants modify the terms they use to describe their and their children’s identity according to context and fluctuations in political ties between Korea and Japan, how they adjust their thoughts on historical awareness or social issues and methods of exchange, and how such processes of adjustment and modification interplay within family relations.

## 2. Data Collection and Analysis

For the purposes of this study, a qualitative ethnographic research method was applied. Ethnography is a suitable approach for studying a group that shares the values, behaviors, beliefs, and learned patterns of language. The objective of this methodology is to examine the culture or cultural system of meaning shared and functioning beyond the behaviors and recognition of members of a respective group (Kim In-suk 2017). This study is concerned with how the narratives produced in relation to the historical experiences between Korea and Japan function with regards to how an individual's identity and social position are determined, within the private arena of the family of a Korean-Japanese international marriage. It is also concerned with how the identity and social position of the community that they belong to are determined, as well as what sorts of experiences these people go through, and what their methods of responding to and negotiating such experiences are. In collecting evidence for this study, I conducted in-depth interviews, engaged in participant observation, and analyzed documents, internet forums, and other resources.

This research was approved by Daegu University's Institutional Review Board in March 2017. Before conducting interviews with informants, I told them about the research project and its various procedures including the purpose of the research, the procedures for data collection that I would be recording the interview, their right to cease the interview, and that all information would be confidential and anonymized, before seeking their consent to participate in the study. To encourage active participation in the interview, an honorarium was provided to participants.

Research for this study took place between April and July of 2017, in Kyushu, Japan. Families of Korean-Japanese international marriages residing in and near Fukuoka were my primary subjects.<sup>4</sup> A total of nineteen people who were part of Korean-Japanese transnational marriages were interviewed. These individuals came from a total of sixteen families, ten of which were made up of a Korean woman and a Japanese man, and six were made up of a Japanese woman and a Korean man. Three families had both partners participate in the

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4. Due to geographical proximity and cultural similarity, among other factors, Kyushu has historically been a region that has had active exchanges with Korea. Though Kyushu is also an area that has promoted a friendly relationship and prosperity through active cultural exchange with Korea, it was also a site of the beginning of an unhappy relationship between the two countries. During the first Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, Kyushu was developed into a forward base, and in WWII countless Koreans were forcibly conscripted to work in the region in coal mines and industrial sites, where many of them ended up dying (Chu-Il Huk'uok'a Taehanmin'guk Chông Yôngsagwan, n.d.)

research, two families only had the man participate, and eleven had only the woman participate in the interview.

The participants were all members of transnational marriages between Korea and Japan who were married after 2000. This study places its focus on understanding the experiences of transnational marriage starting in 2000.<sup>5</sup> Owing to the Korean Wave, the turn of the millennium was a point in time when relations between Korea and Japan were more friendly than ever before. It was also around the time when the relationship between the two countries began to be recognized as being more-or-less symmetrical. Couples that married around this point in time belong to a generation that was able to enjoy the freedom to travel between the two countries, as well as symmetrically engage in the creation of economic, social, cultural, and political relations between the countries, making them a suitable group for this research into understanding Korean-Japanese transnational marriages as transnational migrants.

Taking into consideration the length of marriage, experience residing in Korea and Japan, and activeness of their participation in the research, subjects were selected through purposive sampling. Because qualitative research does not aim for representativeness or generalization, but is rather an effort to uncover insights about a specific subject by closely observing and analyzing the experiences and subjective awareness of research participants, an effort was made to find a sample that could provide abundant in-depth data. The characteristics of the participants in this study have been recorded in table 1.<sup>6</sup>

Ethnography is based on field research, and places weight on investigating a particular socio-cultural setting. Participatory observation, in which the researcher participates both directly and indirectly in the everyday lives of subjects for a set period, and in-depth interview is the primary method of data collection. For the purposes of this study, a semi-structured questionnaire was used during in-depth interviews, which were recorded with the consent of the informants. Each interview lasted between approximately ninety minutes and two hours and took place over one to two sessions. As for location for the interviews, I opted to let participants choose a place that they felt comfortable

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5. Yi Mun-ung (2005, 152-60): The first era (1910-38) when Koreans went to Japan after the fall of the farming peasant class, the second era (1938-August 1945) when Koreans were forced to emigrate to Japan, the third era when Koreans remaining in Japan after its defeat in WWII began to form a society in Japan, and the fourth era starting in 1989 when Korea allowed its citizens the freedom to travel abroad, as Koreans went to Japan and formed a society within Japan. Those who travelled to Japan after the freedom to travel abroad was established in 1989 were called "newcomers" in Japan.

6. To protect the privacy of my informants, pseudonyms are used, and peripheral information was changed as well.

**Table 1.** Personal information of research participants

	Research participant	Family details
1	Kim So-yŏng (41, homemaker) Hatanaka (48, employed at a SME)	Married fourteen years, their relationship started as pen-pals while taking Japanese classes. Then, they began dating when So-yŏng traveled to Japan in 2003 for language education. They have a twelve-year-old daughter together.
2	Kim A-jŏng (46, interpreter)	Traveled to Japan in 1998 to study abroad. Married in 2004. Her husband works in a small business. They have two sons and one daughter. Fascinated by Korea, her husband enrolled in Korean classes, where she met him as her student. They previously lived in Korea for three years.
3	Kim T'ae-hŭi (32, Ph.D. student)	Visited Japan in 2005 after being invited by her father who had been working there for some time. Met her husband in an international exchange student group during college. Her husband is a civil servant for the railway service. They have been married for six years and have a two-year-old son.
4	Kang Sŏk-wŏn (48, professor), Yukiko (44, homemaker)	Travelled to Japan to study abroad while a graduate student in 2002. He met his wife at church and they began dating. They have been married for fourteen years and have a twelve-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter.
5	Yi Hyŏn-ju (55, homemaker)	In 2001, a friend introduced her to a client who regularly visited Korea. After dating for two years, she married at the age of thirty-eight. Her husband is fifty-nine, and a salaryman. They have a thirteen-year-old son.
6	Kim Sang-mi (48, homemaker)	Married for fourteen years, she met her husband while studying abroad at a Japanese technical school for her beautician degree. Her husband is fifty-five and a businessman. They have an eleven-year-old and an eight-year-old.
7	Kim Mi-ra (46, Ph.D. student)	While studying abroad for graduate school in 2001, she met her husband in a volunteer club. They have been married for fifteen years. She teaches Korean at a university. They have a twelve-year-old daughter.
8	Sŏ Yŏn (45, employed at food supply company)	While working at a Busan hotel in 2002, she met her husband, who was on a trip to Korea. They have been married for thirteen years and have an eleven-year-old daughter. She works part time at a food supply company, and regrets that she had no opportunity to continue her initial career path in Japan.

**Table 1.** Personal information of research participants (continued)

	Research participant	Family details
9	Sachiko (49, homemaker)	Introduced by a family member, their relationship began as pen-pals and phone-mates in 1997. After five years of dating, her now husband moved to Japan. Though he worked in sales in Korea, he now works as an electrical technician. They have been married for nineteen years. They have a sixteen-year-old son, and a fourteen-year-old daughter.
10	Tomoko (39, employed by Korean travel company)	She met her husband at a student gathering in 2005 while he was studying abroad at a technical school. She has dreamt about going abroad since she was young. She lived in Kōjedo for three years after her husband found a job there, then returned home to Fukuoka. Her husband is forty-one and works at a Korean goods shop.
11	Nakashima (45, professor), Kim Hyōn-mi (42, professor)	Hyōn-mi studied abroad in Japan in 2001, and met Nakashima, who was in the same department as her. They have been married for fourteen years and have three sons, who are ten, five, and three-years-old.
12	Ayako (38, homemaker)	She met her husband while studying in China in 2004, and they married. She has lived in Korea for a decade. Because they only use Korean at home, she moved to Japan one year ago for the sake of her daughters' (seven- and five-years-old) Japanese education. They plan to stay for two years, then are considering whether to send their children to study abroad in Korea or an English-speaking country.
13	Yi Mi-sun (45, works part time at food processing factory)	She met her husband, who was her neighbor, while studying at a technical school in Japan around 2000. After ten years, she got back in touch with him, and married him in 2016, and they have been married for one year. Her husband is a salesman for a small business.
14	Kim Hyōn-mok (44, professor)	While studying abroad during graduate school in 2002, he met his wife, who was a graduate student at the same school. They have three children, ages ten, five, and one. His wife is a full-time homemaker.
15	Choi Wōn-sōk (42, researcher at Japanese public enterprise)	Went to Japan in 2005 for graduate school and earned his engineering Ph.D. in Japan. Works at a municipal research facility. He met his wife at an event for international students. They have been married for four years and have one child together.
16	Chōng Sae-mi (30, elder care provider)	She was hired in 2014 by a Japanese elder care facility while on working holiday. Married in 2016. Her husband is a thirty-one-year-old social worker. They have no children.

talking. Transcripts were taken from recordings and used as raw data, and my observation journal and notes of reflection were additionally reflected in the analysis of results.

In-depth interviews were initiated with the open-ended question of: What is the transnational marriage experience? and, as the interview progressed, questions such as: How did your family, relatives, friends, and those around you react to you marrying a foreigner? When did you really feel that your family spanned two cultures and two countries? Please share any memorable moments or situations? To help refresh participants' memories on the predominant social discourses on their married lives, I also asked: What kind of significance does belonging to a household based on a transnational marriage have for your own, or your children's lives currently and in the future?<sup>7</sup> This question not only prompted them to share how they respond to these social discourses, but also discuss their thoughts on their own and their children's identities, and the hierarchy and power structures that are ingrained in their familial and social relations.

In order to supplement data collected from in-depth interviews, documents regarding government statistics, legal regulations, and the history of the Kyushu region were examined to better understand the institutional and historical context. Additionally, I joined an internet forum for Korean mothers living in Japan, "Japan Moms," and observed the conversations that took place over social media. In the process of preparing for the in-depth interviews, I participated in casual conversation in forums for women in Korea-Japan transnational marriages, and participated in Korean education activities.

Though my informants had diverse backgrounds, having different genders, a range of ages, education, and various careers (professor, graduate student, community cultural organizer, homemaker, salaryman, travel agent, electrician), they were similar in that they were all living generally middle-class lives. The length of their marriages ranged from one to seventeen years, and there were families with children and those without. As most existing literature on transnational migration covers the experiences of female participants, I made an effort to recruit male participants and also reflect on their experiences and perspectives in my analysis. Interviews were conducted in Korean or English by myself, and an interpreter was hired to assist for interviews conducted in Japanese.

Rather than being linear, data analysis in ethnographic research is a helical

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7. The concept of transnational space was something I felt informants would talk about in more detail on when discussing their children's position, and so I asked "What kind of identity will your children have? What is their future position?"



process in which adjustments and revisions are made throughout the entire process. For this study, recordings of in-depth interviews were transcribed, and important words and phrases were extracted and coded by subject after repeatedly reading over these transcriptions. This allowed for a semantic analysis. In order to assure the validity of the study, I was continually in the field participating and observing. Additionally, I discussed what I witnessed as well as my interpretations of my observations with an expert on the region's culture (a Korean living in Japan) and two fellow professors to draw out any assumptions and biases I held. Prior to interviews, I instructed my Japan-residing Korean research assistants about the methods and intentions of the interviews. Following the interviews, I conferred with them about the issues involved in interpreting what was discussed, trying to minimize any communications hurdles due to the language barrier.

## Analysis of Results

### 1. Transnational Marriage: Routine Border Crossing

Due to the geographical proximity and diverse contact points of exchange between Korea and Japan, my informants met their spouses through a variety of pathways. Six of my informants met their spouses while studying abroad in either China or Japan, indicating that studying abroad makes up a key component of exchange between Korea and Japan. Though there were those studying abroad for graduate school, there were also other types of study abroad such as attending technical schools or language courses. Tourism, blind dates, and family introductions were some of the other main pathways that led to their transnational encounters.

#### *(1) Transnational Marriages are Relationships between Two People*

Informants considered their international marriages to be not much different from marriages between people from the same country, in that both are based on affection and intimacy. They claimed that the only time they recognize their own marriages as exceptional is when others refer to their unions as being "international." They had their own preconceived notions about international marriages, and felt that their own new families did not conform to those notions. Some of the stereotypes that they listed included "marriages after brief encounters," and marriages with an "exotic person from a faraway land." In contrast, they viewed their own marriages as simply "a relationship between two

people” that had nothing to do with physical or institutional boundaries such as state lines and nationality, or boundaries between different cultures.

I didn't think of my marriage as an international marriage. We got married after knowing each other for three years, too. ... International marriages are something between people from faraway countries across the Pacific, I feel like. (Kim T'ae-hŭi)

(2) *Crossing the Boundaries of Social, Institutional, Cultural, and Historical Experiences*

Though participants felt that their marriages had no reason to be any different from the ideals applied to any ordinary marital union, soon after marriage the couples were challenged by the perceptions of those around them, and suffered issues in relation to the wider social perception of their marriages. The first such reactions often came from their family and close friends, for instance, beginning with their parents' and friends' reasonable concerns that “marriage isn't just the union of two people” and that they must “consider their children's future as well.” These types of comments were often followed by racist remarks borne out of the two nations' shared history, as well as stereotypical ideas that reflect the social conditions and prejudices about the dysfunctional nature of families of international marriages. In short, the participants in the study felt embarrassed, enraged, ashamed, and antipathetic when they were subjected to any of the diverse range of pejorative stereotypical social reactions to international marriage.

My mother-in-law said that maybe a Westerner (would be acceptable), but told [my husband] that he couldn't marry a Korean person with dirty blood, so I never saw her before she died. (Kim A-jŏng)

I experienced a lot of bias about international marriages at the beginning. ... The neighborhood old ladies would ask me if the young Japanese man had given me thirty million won. (Kim Sang-mi)

My mother was against it, saying that Korean men are irresponsible when it comes to their families. She said that she had a neighbor who married a Korean man who only boozed and never took care of his family. (Sachiko)

[They said] I thought you were going to Japan to study, but I guess that's not all you did. (Chŏng Sae-mi)

But not everyone had negative reactions. One family even seemed to interpret their daughter's marriage to a Japanese man as a particularly noteworthy type of international hypergamy.

My parents bragged to their friends that they were getting a Japanese son-in-law. My cousin married an American, and they were envious of her going and living in the US. (Chông Sae-mi)

One informant reported that the reality of transnational marriage as being based on border crossing hit them when they were issued a new passport from their spouse's home country.

The reality that I made this exceptional choice of international marriage hit me when ... I got my second passport. (Ayako)

Informants confronted the reality of the threshold to each nation and the hierarchical relationship between the two countries when they navigated the immigration process. While they primarily spoke about their experiences with Japan's immigration agency because they are currently living in Japan, it seems that crossing the border into Japan involved a more fastidious, complicated process. In order for a Japanese national to invite their foreign spouse, they must prove that they are a "real couple" by providing their wedding photos, the story of how they met and started dating, as well as private records such as letters they had exchanged.

Procedural problems with the paperwork were when it really hit me. When you get your first visa, you have to prove you're really a married couple. ... I [had to] include wedding photos and translated copies of the letters we had sent each other. (Kim A-jông)

People that they came into contact with in their everyday lives informed them of the social perceptions of their international marriage. One of my informants, a Japanese woman, told me that when she went to report her change of address, the civil servant working at the administrative office advised her that it would be best if she used her Japanese surname to register as the head of the household, or to write the Korean surname out in a Japanese pronunciation. One Korean woman living in Korea reported that her child's preschool teacher suggested using her surname for her child rather than the father's, in view of the anti-Japanese sentiment in Korea.

My child's preschool teacher told me that if we were going to live in Korea, it'd be better to use a Korean name, saying that people still don't think about Japan in a positive light in Korea. (Kim A-jông)

Another time that it struck informants that they were living transnational

lives was when they felt the distance separating them from their homes. These included moments such as when a family member suddenly passes away but they are unable to go immediately to their families, or when their friends that always felt close at hand on social media suddenly decide to get together in Korea. When confronted with such experiences, informants often stated that the reality of the physical distance felt particularly clear. In addition, when they find themselves feeling culturally alienated within both Korea and Japan the reality of their lives in a transnational space becomes more perceptible.

When I suddenly lost someone who I loved, I realized just how far I was, physically. If I were living in Korea, I would have rushed over right away. (Kim Hyön-mi)

When I moved to Japan after living in Korea for so long, I asked the mom of one of my kid's classmates for her phone number, thinking that it would be nice if we could exchange information with one another, but she was kind of cagey about it. Lately, I feel like I'm more self-conscious about how Japanese people may think of me. (Ayako)

I'm in a KakaoTalk group chat with my friends. But when my friends say "let's meet up at such-and-such time at such-and-such place." ... I can't go. ... I feel this hunger, not because I can't eat, but when I can't do things that I want to. (Chöng Sae-mi)

### (3) *Beyond Life as a Liminal Subject*

There have been those who view the existence of migrants as based on absence and disenfranchisement, and those who view migrants lifestyles as based on privilege and expansion. Interestingly, these perceptions can easily coexist within the single person of the migrant themselves. Informants themselves perceived their own image as liminal subjects, and saw such liminality in how others viewed them as well. And, while they had grown accustomed to regularly crossing borders and being able to do so with relative ease, the exhaustion of such a life had left its toll on them.

When I go to Korea, I'm uncomfortable, and when I come to Japan, I'm lonely. (Kim So-yöng)

I think there are a lot of pluses as your values and your world have been broadened. ... Learning that something you thought was common knowledge isn't to another person feels like you're gaining double the outlook on the world. (Hatanaka)

Going through life everyday like you're in a war, your anxiety mounts and there are times you just explode. ... One time I went to get therapy, and they told me that I was living too hard, that I had too much stress built up, so I asked them to tell that to my husband. (Kim So-yŏng)

At first, informants told me that they did not think that their marriage was any different than an ordinary marital union, and that they went about their lives without being conscious of it. However, once they experienced the perceptions that others have about international marriages, or when they set out on the institutional procedure of transnational migration, or when they felt the physical distance separating them from their home country and family, the realization hit them that they have made the decision to cross national borders and transcend the physical space of their home country, crossing boundaries of culture and social norms. Such border crossings can be experienced as a valuable expansion of one's consciousness and knowledge, but they can also result in the feeling that one has become liminal, in as much as a migrant can feel they do not belong in any single place. They also often quickly realize that their transnational life based on the frequent crossing of social, psychological, and cultural boundaries is an experience that brings about wariness, anxiety, and mental stress.

## 2. The Shadow of History

The history between Korea and Japan casts a long, dark shadow over the families created through Korean-Japanese transnational marriage. This history often resurfaces in their lives at unexpected moments, such as when it makes its way into their daily conversations with acquaintances and family. One may reasonably assume that the colonial period might affect Korean-Japanese families married before the 2000s, but shockingly enough, the history between the two countries going all the way back to the Imjin Wars is still impacting their lives today. The more recent history of Japan's colonization of Korea was regularly considered an issue within informants' everyday lives, and something that might stir up feelings of pain even within the private and intimate domain of marriage. Consequently, most couples tried their best to avoid the topic and tread gently with humor. Similarly, the postwar Japanese history of *kisaeng* sex tourism in Korea, foreign mistresses, and human trafficking of Korean women using entertainment visas were topics that frequently impinged on their daily lives, and had an impact on their social position and personal relationships. My informants were wary that this history affected not only their own lives in the present day but had an impact on the negotiation of their children's future in

Japanese society.

*(1) From the Imjin War to the Korean Wave*

The Imjin War, a series of Japanese invasions of Korea in the 1500s, remarkably continues to impact the lives of my informants in the twenty-first century. One Japanese woman living in Kumamoto Prefecture was introduced to a Korean man by an acquaintance, and in order to marry him, left her hometown for the large city of Fukuoka. This was because during the Imjin War, Kumamoto was a forward base for the invasion forces of Shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi and, as a result, local residents suffered a considerable number of fatalities during the conflict. The woman concluded that it would be difficult to settle down with her husband in the region, not only because of the insular nature of the rural farming region, but because, to this day, there are still festivals commemorating this war with Korea that occurred 400 some years ago.

During the Imjin War, Saga Prefecture, a region where another of my informants lives, was an area where potters abducted from Korea were brought, bringing with them advanced pottery techniques. The region is said to be insular and wary of outsiders in order to protect their pottery techniques, and there is a tendency to downplay the influence that Koreans and Korean culture had on the development of their ceramic art techniques, thus locals are famously not very welcoming of Koreans.

Compared to big cities, the relationships between people are much closer in the Japanese countryside, so if you were to say you married a foreigner, you'd be the object of a lot of interest, rumors, conversations. ... The prejudices about Korea in Kumamoto Prefecture are particularly bad. (Sachiko)

Descriptions of the relationship between the two countries arising from the colonial period were more abundant, and more varied. Though both positive and negative experiences with Korean neighbors were described, the hierarchical relations between Japan and Korea were pronounced in each of their descriptions. Roles and expressions that plainly illustrated the experience of rule and subjugation, as well as prejudiced views were used, such as Koreans being described as "poor but kind people," "an old woman who could speak a bit of Japanese because she worked at a Japanese family's house," "a grandfather who was active in the forces stationed in Korea," and "indolent, irresponsible Korean men." Expressions that were even explicitly racist such as not being able to marry a Korean because of their "dirty blood" came up as well.

My mother was very much against it. [She said] there were Japanese women who married Korean men in her neighborhood, and those men never did any work and were always flouncing around. She said that if I were to marry a Korean man, I would suffer, so she was opposed to me marrying a Korean man. (Sachiko)

My mother-in-law was against [our marriage], saying “Korean blood is dirty,” so I never once met her before she passed away. (Kim A-jöng)

I had heard that my wife’s grandfather had been active as a soldier in Korea during Japan’s imperial rule. So I thought that they would probably be opposed [to our marriage], but I actually didn’t feel much pushback. I think *hallyu* (the Korean Wave) in the 2000s played a part. But when our child was young, he once said, “I have Korean blood mixed in,”<sup>8</sup> which shocked me. I had never taught him to say anything like that, but he was using such an expression with his friends. (Kim Hyön-mok)

The unbalanced economic relations between Korea and Japan between the period of the 1960s and ’80s made it so that any marriage between a Japanese man and a Korean woman was readily associated with commercial international marriage or even prostitution. This led to many such marital unions becoming the subject to the suspicion and imagination of wider Japanese society. In this respect, many of stereotypical social categories Koreans are placed into within Japan arise from the memories of the two nations’ asymmetrical history.

My father-in-law apparently opposed [our marriage]. I didn’t think he would oppose it, since I knew he had visited Korea on business frequently in the ’70s. (Yi Hyön-ju)<sup>9</sup>

The neighborhood old ladies asked me if the young Japanese man had given me thirty million won. ... My friends joked, “I thought you went [to Japan] to study,

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8. To justify colonial rule over Korea, Japan put forth the slogan “Japan and Korea as one body” and seemed to at first be encouraging marriages between Koreans and Japanese. But such an expression seems more likely to allude to fears about the pure blood ideology that was prevalent within imperial period Japan.

9. The Prostitution Tourism Policy was enacted by the Korean government in the process of pursuing economic growth (Pak Chöng-mi 2014). When the number of Japanese tourists jumped dramatically following the normalization of diplomatic relations between Korea and Japan in 1965, the high-class restaurants and *kisaeng* that had been solely enjoyed by a certain special class of Korean men were developed into tourist attractions for Japanese men, creating the *kisaeng* tourist industry, or sex tourism. The authoritarian government’s “development first” ideology resulted in this kind of tourist policy. There were intensive media reports on Japanese *kisaeng* tourism. Reportedly the percentage of tourists from Japan who were men in the 1970s was over ninety percent, while about seventy percent of Americans and other foreign tourists were men (Kukche Kwangwang Kongsä 1979, 50-52, 1981, 36-39; Han’guk Kwangwang Hyöphoe 1975, 22).

but I guess that's not all you did." (Kim A-jöng)

In striking contrast, Korea often was described as a "newly discovered country" by Japanese people even in the 1990s. As a "faraway country [people] didn't know much about," it was in effect "rediscovered" with fascination as a country with a vibrant culture similar to Japan's thanks to the Korean Wave at the turn of the twenty-first century. Despite this interest in South Korean popular culture specifically, there are still young Japanese people who referred to South Korea as the *Chōsen hanto*, a term that was used during Japan's imperial rule to refer to the entire Korean Peninsula.

Japanese people hardly had any information about Korea before the 2000s. (Ayako)

When I first visited, I thought it was similar to Japan. Before that, I didn't think of it as good or bad, just as a faraway country. (Hatanaka)

Throughout the long historical process of change from the Imjin War to the Korean Wave, Japanese people's memories and image of Koreans fluctuated over a number of negative social categories, from dangerous enemies, impoverished neighbors, threat to pure blood ideology, and sexual objects. Korea was described as being a nearby, yet unfamiliar country to Japanese people. Then in the early 2000s, the Korean Wave swelled in Japan, arousing sensational interest and positive perceptions about Korea and Koreans in Japan. One of my research participants went so far as to say that "Yon-sama"<sup>10</sup> did more for the lives of Koreans living in Japan than any of Korea's presidents had.

## (2) *Forgotten History vs. History that Must Not be Forgotten*

For Koreans, the history between Korea and Japan is something that cannot be forgotten and is underscored as something that must be remembered through rigorous historical education. The history between the two nations is one that rouses an awareness of national consciousness. In this respect, one informant changed their child's surname to her Korean name, having decided that it was for the better not to disclose their child's Japanese identity in Korea, where the roles of Japan as aggressor and Korea as victim are repeatedly reinforced through the education system starting at an early age.

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10. [Translator's note: Yon-sama is an honorific nickname given to the actor Pae Yong-jun, who starred in *Winter Sonata*, one of the earliest (2002) Korean dramas to become an international sensation, particularly in Japan.]



When my kid was in preschool, they were talking about National Liberation Day in class, and heard what their parents were saying, so the other kids started to ask my child, “Is your dad Japanese?” “Why is your dad Japanese?” ... And so, we changed his last name to my last name. (Kim A-jōng)

Meanwhile, the history of the colonial era is something that Japanese people are not very familiar with, as it is glossed over when they study history at school. For Japanese people, the history and delicate political relations between Japan and Korea are something that they can easily remain ignorant of without caring about. For most, it is something they want to have nothing to do with. However, there was one Korean father who expressed concern over how his son, who would learn about the history between the two nations from Japanese textbooks, would regard the undeniable fact that a relationship of dominance and subservience existed between the two nations, as well as the fact that his father is Korean.

In Japan, modern history is something you learn in the second semester of your final year of high school, after taking college entrance exams, so it's not something that's necessary to study. ... [it's] in the backs of history textbooks, [something] that a student is supposed to self-study. ... My husband has been taught a lot of history, but I haven't, so I don't know a lot of things. When I ask him some questions about history (between Korea and Japan), it upsets him, so I don't ask him much anymore. (Ayako)

My husband's part of the *satori* generation. It's a generation that's not interested in politics, and that puts themselves first—“I get my paycheck and I live my life.” [History] to them is “*dōdemo ii*,” which is to say, it doesn't matter one way or the other. (Chōng Sae-mi)

What my son will think of me [as his father] being Korean after reading the history of Korea-Japan relations as written from the perspective of Japan while in school—this is something I worry about. (Kim Hyōn-mok)

### (3) “Tokdo” (Dokdo) and “Comfort Women”: Thorns in the Side

The history or political situation between Korea and Japan permeated even the private realms of the household and family. Because members of these families are well aware that the perceptions each nation's people have about this history is different and that it is not easy to reconcile these differing perspectives, they make an effort to tread cautiously on certain topics.

In the early 2000s, Korea was really friendly with Japan, but lately there's all this unpleasant news with Japan about comfort women and Tokdo, which isn't good.

At my child's preschool they teach them about Tokdo, or tell the kids that Japanese people invaded Korea a long time ago. (Ayako)

Each of us grew up receiving our education in our respective countries, so what each of us know is what we were taught in our country ... We each learned things from our own history textbooks, so it's a waste of energy to fight over it, and I think that the comfort women issue is something that deserves an apology [from Japan], but I don't have the confidence to try to sway anyone on Tokdo... I'm not sure if my husband avoids the topics because they're sensitive, or if he just has zero interest in them at all. (Kim T'ae-hŭi)

One Korean father tries to explain his "objective" view of history to his children, but he is well aware that he has plenty of Japanese colleagues who have various opinions on the past, and that the political situation between Korea and Japan is immediately reflected in his own work (i.e., the number of students in his lecture on Korea-Japan relations). Japanese spouses expressed resentment that the problems of the past continued to be brought up and were escalated into tensions between the countries, and were becoming a burden in their own lives, and set out their own views of history.

I tell him objectively that Tokdo is a contested territory. I tell him my clear perspective on the comfort women issue as well. (Kang Sŏk-wŏn)

My husband says, "I know that Tokdo isn't my land, but ... Koreans just can't quit bringing up the comfort women issue. You have any idea how many Japanese people died when they dropped the a-bomb on us? But we don't talk about that at all ... The past's the past, what am I supposed to do about it?" (Sŏ Yŏn)

Tensions and conflicts between Korea and Japan bring subtle tensions to the families of transnational marriage and their social relations. Regarding this, Japanese spouses respond by avoiding the issue, saying "It doesn't matter to me," or "I'm not interested." In response to frequent questions about the political tensions, my Korean informants said that they felt "caught between a rock and hard place" between the two nations, reporting that in some situations they feel as though they are obligated to act as a representative of their home country. The majority of Koreans also avoid giving direct answers, instead saying that they are not interested in politics. The comment that "the whole useless molehill needs to be blown up" by one informant's Japanese husband, a member of the *satori* generation, illustrates the desire to eradicate the uncomfortable issue that feels like a continual thorn in his side.

My informants responded to the perennial, twisted history between the two nations and the political conflicts they were frequently exposed to with the

mechanisms of avoidance and denial in an attempt to preserve their private lives in the home and their relationships at their places of work. An individual's view of their own national history is the consequence of a comprehensive and complex construction of meaning based on social, cultural, political, economic, and educational experiences starting from an early age, and something not easily changed or forgotten. While some may want to engage in honest debates or discussions about history or political issues with their spouse, they make the realistic assessment that there is nothing that they as individuals can do about the past or current contention between the nations. Understandably they do not want to run the risk of such discussions turning into conflicts between them and their partners, hence the majority of families have chosen a strategy of maintaining a distance from controversial historical topics. However, though informants' resentment, anger, confusion, and concerns over the political conflict and residues of history that infiltrate their family relations come through, they also express their sense of helplessness that there is not much that they themselves can do as individuals, and their frustration that with their own superficial knowledge, they are unable to investigate and understand all of the relevant historical perspectives from both national perspectives.

### 3. Life as an Outsider

#### *(1) Appearance and Surname: Erasing Indications of Foreignness*

As both Korea and Japan are highly homogenous societies, my informants were well aware that carrying any overt indication of being a foreigner would mean enduring discomfort and disadvantage. Two primary indicators of foreignness are appearance and surname. In order to erase these indicators, all the families I spoke with registered the birth of their children in both countries, and gave their children the "appropriate" surname for each country. Though nearly all whom I spoke with agreed that having any "indications of being Korean" in Japanese society meant being at a disadvantage, Japanese women who resided in Korea did not see themselves as minorities in Korean society.

In Korea [my child] is a Park, in Japan [they're] a Tō. (Tomoko)

I don't think about needing to be careful so as not to bring shame to Japanese people while I'm in Korea. In fact, I actually am more conscious of how others look at me, and get nervous when I'm in Japan (because of cultural behaviors I've forgotten). (Ayako)

Generally, the father becomes the head of the family in both Japan and

Korea and children take their father's name, but in transnationally married families, surnames were given to their children based on whichever was appropriate in each country. While taking the mother's surname could be seen as a threat to the father's dignity under patriarchal traditions, the fathers that I spoke to told me that doing so was a pragmatic choice made voluntarily for the sake of their children, and consequently was not something they took issue with.

When we register as a family, we have the local parent as the head of the family, and we register our children under their name. I'm registered under the name of the practical head of the family ... If I wanted to, I could give [my children] my name,<sup>11</sup> but we thought that maybe doing so would make them targets for jokes from their friends, and so we just thought it might be better to register them under their mother's Japanese name. (Kim Hyŏn-mok)

In the ethnically and culturally homogenous societies of Korea and Japan, my informants were trying their best to erase the indications of their foreignness. Even if doing so were to go against the standard social norms and practices, parents did not think it was a large price to pay if it meant protecting their children from discrimination or exclusion.

## *(2) Ordering of Nationality and the Individual's Social Position*

As a result of the colonial and imperialist, then developmentalist discourses that influenced the modern global notions of race and identity in the twentieth century, in simplistic terms, the perception of nationality and ethnicity in Korea and Japan remains generally hierarchical, even in the twenty-first century. Western people, often typified by white Americans or English people, are often considered to occupy the most advantageous position in this hierarchy, and among Asian ethnicities, Japanese people are often considered as being most advantaged. Because of this, my female Korean informants did not enjoy being mistaken for being Chinese, or Southeast Asians. While the attention Koreans receive and their status in Japan have both improved greatly thanks to the Korean Wave, there is a perception that there remains an order of "superiority"

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11. When it ratified the International Human Rights Covenants in 1979, Japan began treating migrants as equals to Japanese people when it comes to social securities. In 1985, when amending its citizenship laws in order to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, it transitioned from its patrilineal system to an ambilineal system, and eliminated the requirement of changing one's surname to a Japanese surname upon naturalization. However, there are criticisms that these changes go no further than the formalistic egalitarianism necessary for ratifying international law (Yi Chi-yŏng 2012, 269).

in relations between Korea and Japan.

With the Korean Wave, they pay attention to Korean people, but without it they have no interest in foreigners in general. ... Maybe if the person is from the US or the West they'll be a bit more hospitable, but among Asians there's Korea's position, so there's this strange mix of disinterest and disregard towards us. (Kim So-yŏng)

This ordering of race and nationality can be seen clearly in the assignments given to a person in their place of work. People in transnational marriages have their position determined based on their nationality as well as the social position of their Japanese spouse in Japanese society.

I work part time at a place that makes lunchboxes for 7-Eleven, and the Japanese people work in the offices while I work at the last stage of packaging. The hardest jobs go to Southeast Asians. It seems like work is allocated by order of country. (Sŏ Yŏn)

There's definitely a hierarchy among Asians as well. ... I think that my point of contact in Japanese society has expanded by marrying a Japanese person ... A person might not call it hypergamy, but it provides a somewhat stable foundation. (Kim Hyŏn-mok)

Informants were well aware that the national status of one's home country played a significant role in determining one's status or social position as an individual. Thus, they selectively choose their children's national identities dependent on their country of primary residence, and exhibited ambivalence about revealing their transnational heritage to others.

### *(3) Internalization of Social Stigma*

The power of social stigma to interfere in the lives of my informants came from numerous directions. There were prejudices stemming from the international marriages between Korean and Japanese people of the past, sexist views regarding unmarried women studying abroad and international marriage, and those arising from minority status and otherization in Japanese society. Such stigma came from the perceptions of Japanese people, but they also considered themselves subject to the harmful preconceptions held by Koreans as well. For instance, the image of women working in the entertainment industry and marrying Japanese men was the most onerous social perception for Korean women married to Japanese men whom I spoke with.

Another Korean acquaintance who has been in Japan longer than I have said that she had been in an arranged marriage, but the other [Koreans] had all married [Japanese men] while working in bars ... She said that she was so happy to see another “normally married person.” ... I understand my husband, who emphasizes our child’s Japanese identity so that they don’t become objects of this type of prejudice. (Kim Mi-ra)

When the Japanese partner or child criticizes or censors the Korean partner’s ability to speak Japanese or their wider cultural behavior, this was also reported by many as contributing to stigmatization. One informant told me that when her husband, who is constantly trying to teach her and erase any trace of her being Korean, criticized something she did while on an airport bus in Korea, she was so incensed that she got off the bus, leaving her husband behind.

My husband says he feels responsible for me, but when he tells me to do this and that or tries to teach me Japanese etiquette and how to act, I feel like he sees me as someone needing to be taught. (Kim Mi-ra)

Regardless of how long they had resided in Japan, when treated as foreigners, my informants felt othered and stigmatized. Such experiences were described with words like “bothered,” “anxious,” and “victim mentality.” While Koreans residing in Japan with their partners easily reported to me their experience with social stigmatization, Japanese spouses residing in Korea reported their experiences in terms of receiving “special attention” or “excessive help” because they were foreigners.

When I’m asked a historical question, or when I’m asked about Korea, I feel like an outsider in this society. People are most interested in Korean culture, K-pop, idol culture, but ... I’m currently in Japan, and I don’t know about the situation in Korea or idols, [so when they ask questions like that] they’re saying that they see me as belonging to Korea. Each time I’m perceived as a foreigner, it bothers me a bit. That tension goes away when I am home. When I am home, I feel free. (Chōng Sae-mi)

Traces of the history of economic, political, and social subordination between Japan and Korea, as evidenced with the historical discourses of colonialism, sex tourism, foreign mistresses, and sham marriages affect the social categories produced regarding Koreans in Japanese society. My informants feared that they would be regarded in the same light as these historical stereotypes, so they felt pressured to create and maintain an image of a model ideal Korean. It seems that often, stereotypes and discriminatory perceptions of Koreans can come from informants’ own spouse or children, and it is clear that

informants have internalized some of these pejorative preconceptions themselves. The experience of being othered by multiple sources grows more acute at times when there is conflict or tension between Korea and Japan, and we can see that both Korean and Japanese families make a conscious effort to erase any indication of their foreignness.

#### 4. Negotiations and Responses in Transnational Life

##### *(1) Strategic (In)visibility*

My informants found that having a disparate background was a risk factor in Japanese and Korean society and, in particular, that a Korean identity was more of a burden than an asset in Japan. Families attempted to wipe out indicators of their difference for the sake of their children's future, and made the choice to forgo the cultural custom of inheriting one's father's name.

We don't really emphasize a Korean identity. There isn't discrimination at school, but there will be out in society. ... We live in Japan, so we thought that giving our children my wife's Japanese surname would make their lives easier. (Kang Sök-wŏn)

While readily undertaking many such sacrifices to guarantee their children's future in Japanese society, some of my informants have also accepted the reality that they may have yet to be guaranteed rights as capable citizens (such as those regarding the scope of their career options). They demonstrate passive responses, accept constraints and discrimination without resistance, and secure their children's dual nationality "just in case."

I think we should admit that there are parts of life our children can't choose. (Kim Hyŏn-mi)

Japanese and Korean people cannot be easily distinguished from each other by appearance. The invisibility afforded by their similar appearance functions as a double-edged sword; while they can avoid the discrimination and exclusion suffered by more visible minorities, they not only constantly experience internal conflict over whether to disclose their identity or not, but also may pay the psychological price associated with opting not to assert their right for full social recognition.<sup>12</sup> One situation in which their identity is revealed is in their use of

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12. "Visible people may be recognized people, and 'invisible people' may be excluded people, or forgotten people. Undocumented migrants are one example of invisible people. However political

language, and responses to this were diverse. Among the people I spoke to, there were those who chose to quickly disclose that they were a foreigner because speaking for even a brief time would make that fact apparent. There were also those who chose not to expose their identity by restricting their conversations with Japanese people to short greetings whenever possible.

Just talking for even ten minutes, anyone would know that I'm not native. They'll get a sense that I'm not Japanese, so wherever I go I tend to take the initiative and say it first. (Kim Hy n-mi)

(In)visibility is a strategic choice made according to the situation.<sup>13</sup> In fields where it was relevant to one's work (Korean language education, research on Korea and Japan, etc.) people used their Korean surnames, but in trivial situations like at the hair salon or when signing up for a membership card at a store, they would use Japanese names to avoid being inconvenienced. Once when signing up to hire a senior home helper, one informant used her husband's name, afraid that using her Korean name might make it difficult to find a helper due to Japanese seniors' discriminatory attitudes. Similarly, when anti-Japanese sentiment is high in Korea, one couple switched to using their wife's Korean surname for their child.

I go back and forth using Kim and Yoshida. ... As a Korean language educator, my Korean identity is a plus, but in my role as vice chair of the parent-teacher association, not revealing that I'm a foreign mom [is best]. ... I feel like I'm wearing a mask. (Kim Mi-ra)

I started writing my husband's name on my membership card at the hair salon I

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activists support the claims for recognition put forward by minority groups, one should be aware that the very social relationship producing recognition can produce denial of recognition, too. Distortions *in* visibility lead to distortions in social representations, distortions *through* visibility" (Brighenti 2007, 331). While Goffman (1971) has pointed out that the visibility of minorities can be a risk, saying the "characteristic of normality is the characteristic of the invisible."

13. On an online forum called Japan Moms, a member posted that she thought it would be nice to use her Japanese husband's last name when she was out, so she began to do so. But then the poster said that she was conversing with someone she met for business, who said, "Us Japanese people" and felt that she had missed the timing to say that she was not Japanese, and was worried about whether she should reveal her identity or continue pretending to be Japanese. Within less than an hour of this post going up, over forty comments had been posted on it. These comments were replete with anxiety about whether revealing one's identity would bring about a disadvantage, discomfort at the fact that they or their society could not accept their identity, the suffocating feeling of having to live a lie, and reasonable responses to situations that could be awkward. These show the difficulty of living in Japanese society as an invisible foreigner, as a Korean.



frequent. So as not to needlessly disclose that I'm different. (Kim A-jöng)<sup>14</sup>

When my kid was in preschool, the other kids started to ask my child, "Is your dad Japanese?" "Why is your dad Japanese?" ... And so, we changed his last name to my last name. (Kim A-jöng)

My last name is my identity, so I don't have any plans on changing it (at work). I just want to be myself. (Chöng Sae-mi)

While speaking about her daughter's allergies, one informant said that, "Having a foreigner for a mom is like having an allergy." She knows precisely the food that her daughter can and cannot eat, and by making her needs clear wherever she goes, she must be able to protect herself from having an allergic reaction. In this regard, she perceived identity like an allergen, meaning she must know ahead of time where and what to avoid in order to prevent troublesome situations. Multiple participants in the study made strategic choices about their visibility; they knew the sorts of situations that their identity could yield negative results for them and actively avoided them, while highlighting their identities in situations that it was an asset to them. Such strategic (in)visibility seemed to be recognized as more necessary for Koreans living in Japan among my research participants.

## (2) *Becoming a Model Minority*

One strategy Korean parents chose for overcoming their vulnerability as minority in Japanese society was to conform to the idea of an exemplary model minority. They listed things such as social status as a professional, their children's academic achievement, their proficiency in the local language, and their industriousness.

The fact that I came to graduate school, that I have a role in teaching at a university. ... these titles or positions, or the skills one has, they don't completely free you (from discrimination) but they make your life a bit better because people don't treat you poorly. ... (Kim Mi-ra)

I took my daughter to so many *hagwöns* trying to raise her grades. As a result, I'm stressed. But I am not sure if this is the right thing for me to do, or maybe I'm

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14. "Passing" is a tactic of trying to belong to a group that you do not belong to. If one is able to successfully hide indications of being from a group subject to social discrimination—race, sexual orientation, gender, class, disability—they protect themselves from discrimination, and even ensure their survival. For instance, if a disabled person does not have a visible disability, they may try to hide the fact that they are disabled in order to not be subject to discrimination or exclusion (Renfrow 2004).

doing it for the sake of my own pride. ... I took her to the library a lot with me when she was younger. (Sŏ Yŏn)

Feeling responsible for the wider perception of all Koreans and their collective position in Japanese society, Korean informants also placed a great deal of significance on their personal actions and self-censored their words and behaviors. Japanese spouses living in Korea, however, did not report feeling such a burden, showing that while number-wise Japanese immigrants are a minority in Korea, they do not perceive themselves as such.

I think that I have this self-imposed pressure to prove that I'm different from those people (lawbreaking Koreans) by giving 120 percent of my ability. (Kim A-jŏng)

I don't think about having to be careful so I don't bring shame to Japanese person while I'm in Korea. (Ayako)

### (3) *Imagining Transnational Identities*

Along with their efforts to flexibly erase the mixed identity of their children, transnationally married parents made varied efforts to help their children form positive self-definitions of their cultural heritage. Some rechristen their children not as "half," as is common to refer to children of mixed ethnic backgrounds in Japan, but as "double." They also recall connections to their mother country via cultural characteristics such as their children's eating habits or language.

Korean people eat spicy foods. ... When we talk over KakaoTalk with their grandmother we use Korean, and I put out *goch'ujang* to mix into their food. ... I'm fairly certain they have a strong recognition that they're Korean, wouldn't you think so? Language and food are important to a person's identity. (Kim Hyŏn-mi)

Yet these efforts can be seen as recognizing that they and their children will never be free from the oppression and exclusion of the social world they find themselves in. At the same time, they also imagine a transnational space located somewhere beyond Korea and Japan, and their children as having citizenship of such a place. They referred to their children's identities using terms like "citizen of the world," "citizen of heaven," "people of the Korean strait," and "cosmopolitan."

You're a Japanese person and also a Korean person. ... You're a citizen of the world. (Kim Hyŏn-mi)

I tell them, not only are there advantages to having a Korean father and a Japanese mother, but above all, that they're a "citizen of heaven." (Kang Sŏk-wŏn)

My husband is Korean, and he wants to raise our child as cosmopolitan rather than as a Japanese child. (Ayako)

The identities that these parents imagine illustrate that they are aware that they are helpless to change the social position and relations between groups established amid the longstanding historical, cultural experiences that inform social understanding at a general level. However, rather than accepting the existing discourses and social structure and allowing themselves to be restrained by them, they attempt to create a meaningful transnational identity for their children. Some even felt that protecting their children from the impact of predominant discourses through using their social imagination was not enough, and were considering migrating somewhere where they would not be discriminated against.

We think about moving to a place where our children's background won't be a weakness. (Ayako)

The experiences of becoming a minority and being othered in Japanese society enabled those I spoke to master a number of coping strategies. First was eliminating indications of being a minority to the greatest extent possible. They strategically utilized the invisibility granted by physical similarity, and pointed to yet another coping strategy of emphasizing their exemplariness in various areas, such as language, education, career, or work performance. In suggesting a transnational identity for their children, or even going so far as to consider moving, these parents primarily hoped that the discrimination, hierarchical relationships, and discriminatory social relations inextricably tying Korea and Japan would not become a burden to their children.

## **Conclusion**

As discussed in the introduction, this study intended to provide a thick description of how Korean and Japanese couples in international marriages compromise, negotiate, and resist the social world that intrudes into their private lives, and to uncover the meaning of their daily struggles and social maneuvering. The people who I spoke with crossed the national borders of Korea and Japan as a result of legal marital union and, like other couples, their marriages were all the result of a mutual choice made between two partners. They believed that they were constructing their own lives and were living as such. However, in-depth interviews revealed that when one person crosses a national border

and enters into a relationship with a person who has been brought up in a different culture built on different institutions, that individual—whether a man or a woman—is no longer an entirely private individual. In this regard, my informants were all compelled to confront the reality that the long history between Korea and Japan—even extending as far back as the Imjin Wars of more than 400 years ago—including Japan's colonial rule over Korea, has played a role in their own lives. When encountering this social world they compromised, avoided, exhibited their flexibility to overcome, and fixated on the fact that they were Korean or Japanese to safeguard themselves. In such a manner, we find that the marital unions of two private individuals are constantly pervaded by the social world and are exemplary forms of fluid trans-border phenomena.

Second, this study was concerned with the various semantic horizons of the transnational spaces created by the marriage migrants themselves. We have seen how people switch between using Japanese and Korean names based on the situation, how they respond flexibly to their social context when revealing or hiding their nationality, and how they assert to their children “You’re double, not half.” Such behavior demonstrates the varied compromises, maintenance, and changes to their flexible identities practiced by my informants. However, we have also seen how the private world of the transnationally married household is a place inextricably tangled in the various hierarchical, historical, and cultural relations between the two nations; it is a place where they are unable to avoid or disregard this fact. Such a discovery confirms that the transnational space created by marriage migration is a private realm that is trespassed on by the public world they belong to. That is to say, the life of a Korean woman who married a Japanese man in the early twenty-first century is a multilayered and multifaceted space infiltrated by historical time from the Imjin War to colonial rule, and these women adjust and compromise their lives within this wider social-historical world according to their own rules.

Third, the history of sex tourism, Japanese men's foreign mistresses, and employment at adult entertainment establishments through entertainment visas, all are aspects of the dark shadow cast over the relationship between Korea and Japan following the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. To this day, decades after those experiences, this distorted history emerges like a ghost from the shadows, haunting my informants' existence and identity formation and impacting on the major events in their lives subsequent to their transnational marriage. An important point revealed by this case is that not only the Japanese businessmen, but even the friends and relatives of Korean women married to Japanese men readily reinforce the stereotypes arising from

this painful history. Despite, or beyond, such prejudices, marriage migration was shown to be an act of two people positively forging a new space of transnational life. Consequently, we are able to confirm that in the space of transnational marriage new cultural meanings are regularly and inventively produced and accrued by the individuals and families themselves, meanings that have the potential to exceed the prejudiced perspective of the contemporary social world.

• Translated by Grace PAYER

**Acknowledgements** | This article is a revised and translated version of the author's Korean article "Han-Il kan chògukchòk kyòrhon kajòng iyagi: salm e tũriun yòksa ũi kũrimja," published in *Tamunhwa sahoe yǒngu* [The journal of migration and society] 12 (1) (2019), with the permission of Sukmyǒng Yǒja Taehakkyo Asia Yǒsǒng Yǒnguwn [Research Institute of Asian Women, Sookmyung Women's University]. The translation and the English editing of this article were supported by the (Chae) Hakbong Changhakhoe [Hakbong Scholarship Foundation].

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