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## International Marriage in Contemporary Japan A Review Essay on Japanese-Chinese Couples

Yan LI\*

日本における日中国際結婚に関する研究の文献レビュー

李 燕

### Abstract

Currently, Chinese women account for the largest number of foreign wives, while Chinese men rank the third among foreign husbands in Japan. This review examines how international marriage between Chinese and Japanese couples in contemporary Japan has been conceptualized in the academic literature. It demonstrates that there is a noticeable tendency to focus on Chinese women living in rural or peripheral regions of Japan who are of lower socio-economic backgrounds, using small non-randomized samples. Few studies pay attention to men and the mixed heritage children born to Japanese-Chinese couples. This review concludes by highlighting that the existent literature has been framed within gender, class, and ethnicity-based inequalities.

Keywords: international marriage (*kokusai kekkon*), Japanese-Chinese couples, literature review

### 1. Chinese spouses of Japanese nationals in the context of restrictive immigration policies

Intercultural marriages are becoming ever more common across the world, as global travel for leisure, education, and employment purposes is increasing. Increasing ethnic diversity in the developed economies leads to people with different cultural

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\*Graduate School of Human Sciences, Kyosei Studies, Osaka University; yan.li201904@gmail.com

backgrounds or nationalities meeting in their everyday lives (Williams 2010). Marriage is possibly the most intimate result of these everyday encounters of difference.

International marriage (*kokusai kekkon*) is the most common term for exogamy in Japan, pointing to marriages between couples from more than one country. More specifically, the term refers to marriage pairings between Japanese and non-Japanese nationals with emphasis on the difference of nationality (Nitta 1988; Takeshita 2000; 2016; Kamoto 2001). According to Kamoto (2001), *kokusai kekkon* is a “strange word” created at the beginning of the 20th century as a rejection of the term *zakkon*, supposedly a translation of the Western concept of intermarriage or mixed marriage (Kamoto 2001; Senda 2007:307). The creation of the term *kokusai kekkon* in order to replace *zakkon* reflects a commonly held idea that the Japanese are mono-racial, mono-cultural, mono-linguistic, and homogeneous. Thus, any ‘inter-marriage’ only takes place with those of another nationality (Nitta 1988; Yamamoto 2012). Whether non-Japanese nationals who were born and raised in Japan (such as second or third generation Koreans and Chinese) marry Japanese nationals, or naturalized Koreans or Chinese marry Korean or Chinese nationals, it will be counted as *kokusai kekkon* in Japan’s governmental statistics (Nitta 1988). In contrast, naturalized non-Japanese nationals who marry Japanese nationals, as holders of the same nationality will remain invisible as far as statistics of international marriage, despite the multi-cultural or multi-ethnic character of their family unit.

This paper uses the term international marriage to describe intercultural marriage, mixed marriage, or cross-border/national marriage, considering the discussed phenomenon in Japan and the prevalent usage of *kokusai kekkon* in the Japanese literature. According to statistics from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (hereinafter, MHLW), the number of international marriages in Japan rose rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, peaking at 6.1% in 2006 then falling to 3.3% in 2015 (MHLW 2016a:11). Despite still being a small fraction of overall marriages, international marriages did increase significantly in the latter part of the last century compared with 0.4% of the total marriages in 1965 (MHLW 2016a:11).

There is plentiful evidence indicating that Japan is reluctant to recognize itself as an immigrant country (Yamanaka 2008; Liu-Farrer 2009), something which is

reflected in restrictive immigration policies and the lack of an integration policy (Ishikawa 2014). Japan's national government has a positive attitude towards accepting skilled or professional foreign immigrants and a negative attitude towards accepting low-skilled foreign workers (Douglass & Roberts 2003; Ishikawa 2014; Kondo 2015). Nevertheless, some scholars point out that "an ironic aspect of Japan's immigration is the glaring contradiction between its official stance of not permitting the entrance of unskilled workers and the high proportion of its immigrants who are poorly educated" (Liaw & Ishikawa 2008:814). In order to fill the shortage in the so-called "3K" industries (*kitanai*, *kiken*, *kitsui*-dirty, dangerous and difficult), various side doors have been created to make it possible for low-skilled workers to work in Japan, for example through temporary visitors, entertainers, trainees, and students visa categories (Douglass & Roberts 2003; Liaw & Ishikawa 2008; Liaw et al. 2010; Liu-Farrer 2011). Le Bail (2017) argues that international marriage is another side door for low-skilled workers. Liaw et al (2010) suggest that "we can also consider the possibility that under Japan's restrictive immigration law, many foreigners may use such a marriage as a strategy for gaining the opportunities to work and reside in Japan on a long-term basis" (Liaw et al. 2010:62).

Currently, the Chinese are the largest group of foreign residents in Japan, constituting 28.5% of foreign residents (Ministry of Justice (MOJ) 2017). The majority is divided into three main groups according to visa categories in Japan: marriage and family-related group, student-related group, and worker-related group (Shao 2017). The demographical characteristics of the ethnic Chinese population in Japan have shifted substantially from oldcomers to newcomers, older to younger, and male to female (Shao 2017). Factors such as the influx of Chinese migrants from the mid-1980s onwards, China's 'reform and opening-up', the diplomatic relationship between the two countries, and changing immigration-control policy are responsible for these changes (Liu-Farrer 2009; Shao 2017). As a result of varied means of entry, the Chinese community is the most diverse among those who have legal resident status in Japan (Liu-Farrer 2009; Shao 2017). According to statistics on the foreigners registered in Japan from 1991 to 2004, Liu-Farrer (2010) estimated that Chinese spouses of Japanese nationals made up as many as a quarter of the total adult Chinese women in Japan, with a significant number of them coming as brides

to Japanese men or entering Japan as students and then choosing to settle down through marriage. The Chinese women make up the highest share of brides of all foreign nationalities, while Chinese men rank the third of grooms of all foreign nationalities in Japan (MHLW 2018:32).

Based on this background, I have developed an interest in studying international marriage of Japanese-Chinese couples in Japan. This paper provides a review of existent literature on international marriage of Japanese-Chinese couples in Japan written in English, Japanese and/or the Chinese language. A qualitative thematic analysis of the findings of the selected studies was performed, structuring the review in the form of descriptive summaries to map the areas of knowledge around international marriage between Japanese and Chinese couples.

## 2. Elucidating the review process

A literature review should be a systematic process, and rigorous enough to provide confidence that the conclusions of the research are trustworthy (Cooper 1998; Fink 2005). This literature review was conducted in five stages following Cooper (1998) and Hart (1998): (a) problem formulation; (b) data collection or the literature search; (c) data evaluation; (d) analysis and interpretation; and (e) presentation of results.

### 2.1 Review process

First, a search of all credible databases for scientific literature on Chinese-Japanese international marriage in English, Japanese or Chinese was conducted. Following this, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria in Appendix 1), some studies were excluded. In addition, a bibliographical search by the authors who had published papers included in the list for review was also conducted using the same language database. Finally, the selected papers were summarized and synthesized.

### 2.2 Search Strategy

“Article title, Abstract, Keywords”, “Topic”, and “Abstract” searches were

conducted for a combination of three databases in English, one database in Japanese, and two databases in Chinese (see data sources in Appendix 2), using four categories of search terms. The first category included the terms inter-, mixed, inter-ethnic/cultural, cross-border/cultural/national, and multicultural. The second category included the terms marriage/family. The third category included the terms migration/migrant. The last category included “Japan and China” or “Japanese and Chinese”. The combined terms of the first and second categories combined with the fourth category, or the terms of the third category combined with the fourth category (see search terms in Appendix 3). The Boolean search command is AND, with the wildcard \* to blur the single or plural form of the literature title and phrase search “ ” to limit the literature on couples between Chinese and Japanese.

## 2.3 Data Extraction

The titles and abstracts of 137 articles were screened, and a full-text view of 46 articles was completed. Twenty-eight articles were excluded because they did not meet one or more of the inclusion criteria or items met the exclusion criteria (see the flowchart of the study selection in Appendix 4). One unfortunate result is that all of the Chinese literature was excluded based on the exclusion criteria “research design or methodology is not reported”. Thus, while this paper aimed at evaluation of the literature in the English, Japanese and Chinese language, the articles evaluated were only in English and Japanese.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis of the findings of the selected studies has been performed. It involves making critical annotations to better understand the framing of the knowledge. An attempt was made to identify areas where knowledge was relatively lacking and aspects which were poorly understood.

### 3. Exclusive focus on Japanese men Chinese women couples

This review makes clear the fact that there are still few studies focusing on Japanese-Chinese international marriage in Japan. The studies have been carried out by a small number of researchers working in a variety of fields, including sociology, linguistics, nursing science, psychology, and anthropology. The existing literature on Japanese-Chinese international marriage in Japan, as it stands, can be roughly divided into the following related domains: 1) Studies sought to understand why and how Chinese women married the Japanese men (Saihanjuna 2007; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b). 2) The literature describes how the Chinese women adapt to the Japanese society (both language and culture) and challenges or cultural and structural conflicts the Chinese women are facing in their daily lives (Wang 2005; Saihanjuna 2011; 2014a; 2014b; Kakizaki 2009; 2010; Ichijo 2015; Shikita 2014; Lan 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016; 2017). 3) Study sheds light on the impact of the Chinese women on the Japanese society (Le Bail 2017).

The following sections review the current literature on Japanese-Chinese international marriage in Japan thematically and critically.

#### 3.1 Qualitative methodology used in the literature

Almost all of the literature (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Kakizaki 2009; 2010; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Shikita 2014; Ichijo 2015; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b; Hu 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016; 2017; Le Bail 2017) evaluated in this article take a qualitative methodology except Wang (2005). The qualitative research design is very useful for the study of international marriage because factors affecting international marriage such as policies, historical, social and cultural aspects that are not discussed so far, are thought to have a strong impact but difficult to quantify (Inoue 2014).

Nonetheless, the samples in the existing literature are small non-randomized samples. The researchers who offered information on the way they approach their informants, made contact with the Chinese women through local municipality international communication centers [*Kokusai kouryu senta*], other grass-roots international foundations and/or through personal connections (Saihanjuna 2007; Hu

2012; 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Ichijo 2015; Shikita 2014; Wang 2017). The main data collection method is semi-structured interviews with small samples, usually three to less than ten Chinese women. These kinds of international communication centers are seen as a symbolic place to communicate with foreigners as well as a representative place to provide support (particularly Japanese language) and multilingual information to foreigners. They are working with local citizen volunteers to promote the internationalization and multiculturalism of the local community in an era of globalization (Tanemura 2007; Shikita 2014; Takaoka 2015). Thus, many foreigners may gather at the international communication centers, because they can receive various kinds of support, consultation and establish their own social network (Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Shikita 2014; Saihanjuna 2014b; Hu 2012). In addition, it is difficult to access the Chinese spouses of Japanese nationals because they are dispersed all over Japan (Hu 2015; Hanaoka et al 2017). Besides, the Chinese population in Japan is “commonly perceived as invisible” in daily lives (Coates 2015:139). Thus, it is reasonable to consider international communication centers or personal connections to approach the Chinese spouses of Japanese nationals.

However, there is a noticeable bias in that the Chinese spouses who come to the international communication centers are those who are looking for support or in search of new social networks. There is no data on how many of the foreign spouses know of such places and get information from them so far. Presumably, some of the Chinese spouses do not go to the local international communication centers for support and social communication from these places. One comment in a survey carried out by a local municipality articulated the following: “I’m wondering if all foreign moms know such places [international communication centers] or whether they receive the information here... it is important to help the people [foreigners] who do not come out [for support]” (Toyonaka municipality 2016:4-5).

We should be aware of the bias such as gender, socioeconomic status caused by the characteristics of the sample recruiting sites and means, as well as the small sample size. For example, there is little research looking at Chinese men of Japanese nationals, variation concerning the socioeconomic background of Chinese women within the Japanese men-Chinese women couples, “partly because of the small



samples” (Cottrell 1990). Quantitative research or qualitative research that increases the number in the sample population would be indispensable in the future (Kuramoto 2017b).

### 3.2 Particularly focusing on the Chinese women

Almost all of the Chinese spouses studied in the existing literature are women (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Kakizaki 2009; 2010; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Shikita 2014; Ichijo 2015; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b; Hu 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016; 2017; Le Bail 2017) except Wang (2005).

Chinese women are disproportionally represented among the spouses. This can be explained in part because marriage migration in East Asia or even on a global scale is chiefly undertaken by women (Davin 2007; Williams 2010), as it is in the case of Japanese-Chinese couples. It could also be that “men might wish for their own opportunities for marriage migration but find that such opportunities are mostly available only for women” (Constable 2005:16) or “there exists no agency introducing Chinese men to Japanese women” (Yamaura 2015b:1035). There are other aspects to this result that need to be considered. As Yamamoto (2010) points out, studies on international marriage have tended to focus on women who enter international marriages, whether Japanese or foreign, with far less research focusing on men. From a practical point of view, this could be understood as an accessibility issue, especially given that the overwhelming majority of researchers in this field are female (Yamamoto 2010).

It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that almost all of the Chinese spouses described in the existing literature are women. There is hardly any literature investigating Chinese men married Japanese women so far. This is perplexing because Chinese men also actively engage in international marriage with Japan women as evidenced in written narratives (Duan 1998). Moreover, though international marriage in Japan is highly gendered and the majority of foreign spouses are women (Davin 1999; 2007; Piper 2003; Constable 2005; Liu-Farrer 2010; Lu & Yang 2010; Shikita 2014; Shao 2014; 2017), the statistics show a significant change in the past two decades of the ratio of Japanese woman-foreign man couples. Through the 2000s, the ratio of international marriages of Japanese

women compared to those of Japanese men gradually rose from 8:2 to 7:3 (Calculated from MHLW 2016b:26). In the cases of Japanese woman-foreign man couple, about 12.5% of the foreign spouses are Chinese men, which shows a slight increase compared to two decades ago (MHLW 2016a:12; MHLW 2018:32).

### 3.3 Couples of lower socioeconomic background

Fujii (2013) divides international marriage in Japan into two categories. That is the South-North Pattern (*nanbokugata*) and the Culture Exchange Pattern (*bunkakouryugata*) (cited in Saihanjuna 2014a). The South-North Pattern refers to commercially arranged couples with lower education level. The Culture Exchange Pattern refers to love marriage between highly educated couples (Fujii 2013, cited in Saihanjuna 2014a). The majority of Japanese-Chinese international marriage couples studied in the existing literature can be classified as the South-North Pattern. The majority of the Chinese women in question come from rural areas of China, with relatively low education levels (Saihanjuna 2007; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b; Hu 2012; 2015). Most have been laid-off, divorced or widowed raising a child (Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b; Le Bail 2017). The majority of the Japanese men described in the existing literature are male farmers from the rural regions of Japan. They have tried to import brides from Asian countries, including China, with the help of commercial arrangements. These Japanese men choose this path as their local opportunities for marriage are limited due to depopulation in some villages or they are not highly valued in the local marriage market (Constable 2005).

Kelsky (2001:133) points out that “international marriage is a circle of the weak [*jakusha no wa*]” in Japan (cited in Yamashita 2008:109-110). The socioeconomic background of the Japanese-Chinese couples in Japan represented in the existing literature to some extent supports Kelsky’s claim. One might say that those Japanese-Chinese international marriages that take place through commercial matchmaking agencies are part of the “circle of the weak”.

However, studies have shown that international marriage between Japanese men and Asian women is not an exclusive rural or weak circle phenomenon. Women’s migration experiences and socioeconomic statuses of international marriage couples

are increasingly diversifying alongside the process of globalization (Nakamatsu 2005; Constable 2005). The Japanese men in international marriages are not limited to male successors of farming households or blue-collar workers but also include white-collar workers (Liaw et al. 2010; Yamashita 2008; Nishihara et al. 2013; Achenbach 2014; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b).

### 3.4 Living in rural/peripheral areas of Japan

The majority of the Japanese-Chinese couples in the literature reviewed here are living in rural (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Kakizaki 2009; Le Bail 2017) or peripheral (Hu 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016; 2017) areas of Japan.

In terms of resident area, the first significant characteristic is that there are no Chinese men found in the existing literature living in rural areas (Wang 2005; Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Kakizaki 2009; 2010; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Shikita 2014; Ichijo 2015; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b; Hu 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016; 2017; Le Bail 2017). Among the 50 Chinese spouses in Wang (2005)'s study, 17 Chinese men and 16 women live in urban Japan, and 17 Chinese women live in rural Japan.

The second significant characteristic is that Chinese women living in rural areas are more likely to need different kinds of support (Wang 2005; Saihanjuna 2014b; Kakizaki 2009; Hu 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016; 2017), because they are isolated in rural or peripheral regions. Wang (2005) has shown that Chinese women living in rural Japan need more support than Chinese women living in urban Japan.

The third significant characteristic of international marriages in rural areas is that the foreign women are more likely to be living with extended families and therefore have important roles as daughters-in-law (Kakizaki 2009; Liaw et al. 2010), who are seen to contribute to the Japanese stem-family (*ie*) system.

Ishikawa (2014) stated clearly that since there is little international migration inflow to periphery/rural areas, the influx of foreign women through international marriage is considered a valuable and important contribution to Japan to fill the expanding population and labour gap between urban and rural areas. Tsuneyoshi

(2009:151) also suggests that “rural communities with Asian brides” provide “insights into the dynamics of how a society built on images of homogeneity is facing cultural diversity”. Thus, the research on Japanese-Chinese couples living in rural areas is very important as it enables an understanding of Japanese-Chinese couples’ contribution to Japanese society both economically and culturally.

Nonetheless, the over reporting on the rural/peripheral cases in the existent research has generated an impression that international marriage between Japanese men and Chinese women in Japan has been “exclusively a rural phenomenon involving Japanese farmers” (Nakamatsu 2003:181).

Studies have shown that the municipalities with high international marriage rates are not only located in underpopulated areas in mountainous and peninsular regions but also in the highly industrialized areas, especially large cities (Nishihara et al. 2013). International marriage, which was common in rural areas, is now diffusing throughout the country including metropolitan areas (Ishikawa 2014; Kamiya 2015).

In order to construct a broader, more balanced, picture of Japanese society, it is important to look at what is happening outside of rural areas (Burgess 2007). Wang (2005)’s research suggests that the degree of satisfaction, adaptation, and need for support is correlated with the residential area. Chinese women in urban areas show a higher degree of satisfaction and adaptation than those in rural areas, whereas women in rural areas show a higher degree of need for support than those in urban areas (Wang 2005). Thus, it is particularly important to investigate the urban experiences and acknowledge the real differences between rural and urban experiences of these international marriage couples.

### 3.5 Commercially arranged marriages

Many Chinese women in the literature have met their Japanese husbands through commercial matchmaking agencies or via introductions (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; 2014b; Kakizaki 2010; Hu 2012; 2015; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b).

The commercial matchmaking agencies play an important role in determining desirable ethnicity and origins of the brides, both in the sending and in the receiving countries (Lu & Yang 2010). Ishikawa (2010) estimates that at least one-third of

registered international marriages would not have occurred without a commercial matchmaking agency intervening. One factor that directly accounts for the rapid expansion of international marriages in Japan is the initiatives of local governments and commercial matchmaking services for Japanese men and Asian women that emerged due to the marriage squeeze in rural and agricultural areas (Nakamatsu 2005; Liaw et al. 2010; Ishikawa 2010).

The existent research on commercial Japanese-Chinese international marriages provides insight into the experiences and implications of Chinese women who married Japanese men through matchmaking agencies. Meanwhile, the focus on commercially arranged Japanese-Chinese couples deepens the impression that matchmaking agencies' or personal introduction is "the sole explanation for the increase in the number" of Chinese women marrying Japanese nationals" (Nakamatsu 2003:181).

In trying to explain this pathway to marriage, these Chinese women are described as being motivated to marry a Japanese spouse in order to improve their economic situation or try to escape oppressive gender norms (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; 2014b; Hu 2012; 2015). To justify their transnational commercial matchmaking, the Chinese women are constructing Japan as a proximate place, while Japanese men are imagining Chinese women as "almost Japanese brides" (Yamaura 2015a; 2015b:1052). Studies confirm the validity of the view that women from lower-income countries use intermarriage as an effective economic strategy for immigration (Liaw & Ishikawa 2008; Liaw et al. 2010). Studies also confirm plenty of noneconomic reasons, such as out of a sense of adventure, the desire to escape narrow family relations, because of a failed relationship back home, and purely for love (Piper & Roces 2003; Nakamatsu 2003; 2005; Kawaguchi & Lee 2017).

Given the focus on commercial matchmaking agencies as the pathway to marriage, romantic love in the intimate relationship is not explored in the existent literature. However, the danger of exploring romantic love as it is viewed in modern western society (Giddens 1992; Coontz 2005) is that it may mask the commercialization of intimate relationships of international marriages in Japan. Nonetheless, international marriages as a result of "a greater opportunity to meet potential spouses due to exchanges with foreign countries" (Liaw et al. 2010:53) should not be overlooked.

The persistence of stereotypical representations in the literature regarding Chinese women married Japanese nationals through commercial matchmaking agencies seems to underlie and reinforce unequal gender and power relations and structures between Chinese women and Japanese men. As mentioned in the ‘UNESCO priority gender equality action plan 2014-2021’, “promoting positive gender images in order to promote gender equality” is very important. We should “try to deconstruct them [stereotypes] and to replace them with more gender equal representations” (UNESCO 2014:23).

### 3.6 Marriage as a cause of migration

Regardless of the pathway to matrimony, for most of the Chinese women who migrated to Japan, marriage is a cause of international migration (Saihanjuna 2007, 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b; Hu 2012; 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016; 2017; Le Bail 2017).

While international marriage may be the cause of migration, it may also be the result of migration (Piper 2005; Morgan et al. 2016). Most international marriage studies do not provide direct information distinguishing between cause and result (Kawaguchi & Lee 2017). A meaningful distinction between marriage migration and labour migration may be impossible to sustain (Piper & Roces 2003; Palriwala & Uberoi 2005). Even so, the mechanism and impact of international marriage as a cause or result of migration could be quite different. Yakushko & Rajan (2017) argue that women who married U.S. citizens through a cross-border arrangement of marriage are more likely to be socially, culturally, linguistically, and economically dependent on their male spouses and in-law families than those women whose marital arrangements did not have migration. It is thus crucial to understand if Japanese-Chinese international marriage is a cause or a result of migration, not to overly focus on the former.

### 3.7 From the Manchurian area of China

Studies have shown the Chinese case is unique, therefore standard hypotheses in a variety of areas may provide a poor fit to the Chinese case (Lu & Treiman 2008; Wang & Schwartz 2018). The existing literature (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b;

Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b) reveals that researchers interested in Japanese-Chinese international marriage couples in Japan focus rather specifically on the Chinese case than focusing more generally on Japanese men Asian women pattern. They have carried out in-depth fieldwork in China to try to identify the distinguishing characteristics of Chinese women, particularly focusing on commercial marriages. The fieldwork-based studies have contributed a new perspective from which to reinterpret the phenomenon of Japanese men Asian women international marriage in Japan.

Most researchers concentrated their fieldwork in the Manchurian area of China where there was a history of Japanese colonialism (Saihanjuna 2011; Hao 2014a; 2015; Hu 2015; 2016; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b). One direct reason is that many Chinese spouses of Japanese nationals in rural Japan come from this area (Le Bail 2017). Saihanjuna (2007)'s study reveals that some of the Chinese spouses migrated to urban China as labourers before migrating to Japan while others directly migrated to Japan through a local international marriage introduction agency in rural/peripheral areas or urban China (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b). The case of going directly to Japan is more likely from the Manchurian area of China (Saihanjuna 2007; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2015; 2016; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b; Le Bail 2017). Yamaura (2015a; 2015b) demonstrates that although gendered economic inequalities do exist in the international marriage industry between Japan and northeast China, it is not simply a product of such inequalities, but is also rooted in relationships generated by specific regional histories, historical contingencies, and individual interpretations.

The current transnational links between Japan and northeast China are interwoven with the residual social network of the Japanese colonization of Manchuria, the phenomenon of Japanese war orphans, and local Chinese ties to labour migrants in Japan (Yamashita et al. 2007; 2013; Yamaura 2017). It may be one of the explanations for the international marriage industry prevailing between Chinese women and Japanese men in northeast China.

It is noteworthy that there are increasing numbers of Chinese men married to the Vietnamese women in this region of China due to a sex ratio imbalance caused by the prevailing international marriages between Chinese women and foreign men

such as Japanese or South Korean (Hao 2014a; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b; Hu 2016). As a matter of fact, this region of China has become both a sending region of women to South Korea or Japan and a receiving region of women from Vietnam. Marriage migration emerges as a new kind of chain migration within East Asia (Hao 2014a; 2015), which may reflect the changing power relations in this region.

### 3.8 Mothering mixed heritage children

Kakizaki (2009) shows that in rural Japan, Chinese women are expected by their spouse's family to begin their role as child bearers as early as possible due to the husbands' older age. As a result, the period from marriage to first childbirth was between 11 months to 2 years and 3 months (Kakizaki 2009). As such, international marriage is also tied in with parenting mixed heritage children. There are a few studies which originally did not explore the parenting experiences, but show the importance of paying attention academically to intercultural parenting attitudes and experiences in their family life (Ichijo 2015; Kakizaki 2009; 2010).

It is said that cultural differences are most prominent in childrearing situations (Crohn 1998; Perel 2000; Romano 2008, cited in Kuramoto 2017a). Compelling evidence suggests that the parenting experience not only affects a woman's sense of self but also influences her children's health and development (Hamner & Turner 2001). Liam (1991; 1999) argues that motherhood is an overwhelming experience particularly for women who become mothers in a new country (cited in Liamputtong & Naksook 2003). Indeed, immigrant mothers face significant and unique challenges in their mothering beliefs and practices due to cultural differences and variation in social constraints between their country of origin and their host country (Barclay & Kent 1998; Liamputtong 2001; Liamputtong & Naksook 2003; Tummala-Narra 2004). Therefore, migrant mothers need both academic attention and support from the host society.

Saihanjuna (2011; 2014a) and Shikita (2014) pay attention to Chinese women's mothering experiences of their mixed heritage children in Japan. Saihanjuna (2011; 2014a) gives us insights into the agency of Chinese mothers when they decide on the strategies with which to educate their mixed heritage children or try to transmit their heritage language and culture in rural Japan at different stages of their lives.



Shikita (2014) demonstrates how the agency of Chinese mothers in urban areas faced the constraints set by the immediate familial sociocultural environment. Her research shows the education strategies of the Chinese mothers are deployed depending not only on their own priorities but also on the wishes and practices of their families in Japan (Shikita 2014).

Although few, studies regarding parenting mixed heritage children of international marriage couples introduce valuable findings regarding educational strategies and attitudes towards diversity and transmission of the cultural heritage from Chinese mothers to their mixed heritage children. Compared with other studies focusing on the reasons and pathways to international marriages and adaptation to Japanese society, Saihanjuna (2011; 2014a) and Shikita (2014)'s research move on to another life stage of the Chinese women in their life cycle.

At the same time, the exclusive focus on mothering and motherhood combined with the absence of focus on fathering and fatherhood in the existent literature may reinforce patriarchal norms which emphasize the mother as holding the primary role in parenthood. This focus unintentionally deepens the underlying ideology of “good wife and wise mother” in Japan. Thus, particular voices from other family members such fathers, grandparents and the host society outside of the family, as well as mixed heritage children themselves should be heard in future studies on intercultural parenting of the mixed heritage children.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Absence of literature in the Chinese language

As this article reviewed the literature in the English, Japanese, and Chinese languages, it is of interest to compare the literature in the three languages.

There are five papers on this topic written in English. Although this is a topic concerning the Chinese population, the English literature appears to use few literary references in the Chinese language. This is partly because “Chinese researchers do not always provide explicit methodological information” and this can make their data hard to evaluate (Davin 1999:21). The literature in the Chinese language was, unfortunately, excluded based on the criteria “no research design reported” in this

review. This does not imply there is no credible research in the Chinese language on the whole, yet we could say this is a tendency on the topic examined.

It could also be that many Chinese researchers choose to publish their findings in other languages, such as English or Japanese, which are used more in the country they study or live in. Using three name components-first, middle and last names (Coldman et al. 1988) and the Book of Hundred Family Names (1973) or the preface in the author's monograph or doctoral thesis to identify, it was clear that most of the Japanese language papers evaluated were written by ethnic Chinese scholars (Wang 2005; Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016a; 2016b). This may reflect an appreciation of publishing in a foreign language in the academia of China or people who live in Japan are more interested in and have more access to a phenomenon that actually takes place in Japan.

A significant implication of the findings of the difference in the academic language is that we should be cautious to evaluate and confirm the quality or credibility of the literature when we refer to the literature in Chinese language or when we evaluate the findings referred from the Chinese language.

Another observation about the language difference is that the Japanese literature evaluated in this paper makes little reference to English language literature that has not been translated into Japanese. Saihanjuna (2007:81) mistakenly note in her paper that her study's research population – Chinese marriage migrant women from rural areas of China – had not been research subjects previously. However, women from rural areas of China who migrate to urban cities as labourers and are reluctant to return to their rural hometowns, and therefore try to marry Japanese men, are well illustrated in Clark (2001)'s research. This may reflect that those researchers whose academic language is Japanese are less likely to locate their studies on the global stage, even if they study “international” marriage.

## 4.2 For better or for worse: being the same ethnicity

Piper (1997:335) argues that “in determining the specific socio-economic and legal position of Asian wives in Japan, assumptions about gender may be informed not only by sexism but also by racism”.

Japanese scholars on international marriage often study Chinese women as part of the wider topic of Asian women (Saihanjuna 2006, cited in Saihanjuna 2007), whereas ethnic Chinese researchers can take their advantage of being of the same ethnicity as their research subjects and familiar with the culture and language of Chinese women. In this sense, the ethnic Chinese researchers are insiders. So they can well understand or investigate the Chinese spouses from a specific sending country perspective and the circumstances that could only be experienced as foreign migrants to Japan. When migrants conduct research on migrants, they are able to bring a new perspective, just as migration scholars in the US, such as Portes et al. (2001), contributed to US immigration research. It is very important to give voice to the stories of these migrants and send the message to mainstream society. The studies by ethnic Chinese scholars as migrants to Japan are making a meaningful contribution to migration studies in Japan from an insiders' perspective.

However, none of the ethnic Chinese researchers (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016a; 2016b) mentions ethnicity itself, ethnic relationships and ethnic hierarchy in Japanese society. None of them includes Japanese men as interviewees or as study subjects when they focus on Japanese men Chinese women couples (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016a; 2016b).

Despite having the same position as migrant scholars in Japan, none of the ethnic Chinese researchers (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016a; 2016b) interpret the phenomenon of Japanese-Chinese international marriages in a similar way to the French scholar Le Bail (2017) who turns the spotlight on how these Chinese spouses contribute to Japan. The studies show foreign spouses as subjective agents full of potential abilities, making the point that it is necessary for Japan to actively consider the contribution of foreign spouses who migrate to Japan (Ishikawa 2014).

In contrast, the ethnic Chinese researchers tend to focus on the reasons and pathways to international marriage (Saihanjuna 2007; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015), Chinese women's adaptation to Japanese society and challenges or cultural and structural conflicts the Chinese women encountering in their daily lives (Wang

2005; Saihanjuna 2011; 2014a; 2014b; Lan 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016; 2017). The Chinese women are not portrayed as victims, but as active agents of their life during the process of pursuit, choice and daily life of international marriage (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015). Yet, their (Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Hu 2012; 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016a; 2016b) focus on lower socioeconomic groups of the Chinese women unintentionally strengthened stereotypes of the image of non-Japanese Asians, the social exclusionism of Japanese society and the Japanese tendency to “look down on other Asians” (Creighton 1996:226), within and beyond the Chinese population as a “model minority” (Vasisht 1997:108) in Japan.

#### 4.3 Limitations of this review

The results of this review should be interpreted with consideration of several limitations. First, in Japan, other non-Japanese Asians are viewed as one ethnic group (Creighton 1996). The literature on international marriages regarding Japanese-Chinese couples as a part of the wider topic of non-Japanese Asians/Japanese international marriage was not included in this review. In addition, whether Japanese-Chinese couples are similar or different from other non-Japanese Asians/Japanese international marriages was not looked at. Second, studies revealed that there are increasing Japanese-Chinese couples who are residing in China (Jeffreys & Wang 2013; Sakai 2013; Yanase 2017). While the phenomenon of Japanese-Chinese international marriage in contemporary Japan was looked into, Japanese-Chinese couples who reside in other countries such as China or a third country are not explored in this review. Although the practical aspects of conducting a research review “may mean the investigator must settle for a less-than-perfect product” (Cooper 1998:183), the ideals of the science of the research review process were still strictly applied.

#### 5. Implications for future research

This paper has highlighted the extensive coverage in the existing literature on Japanese men Chinese women couples with lower socioeconomic backgrounds who

live in rural or peripheral areas of Japan and met through commercial introduction, particularly focusing on Chinese women. Hence, there are many gaps in the research on the topic and implications for future research, which is not surprising given the complexity of the phenomenon.

## 5.1 Implications for the study from a gender-conscious perspective

Japanese-Chinese international marriage in Japan is a highly gendered phenomenon, the existing research is also highly gendered as described in previous sections.

Concerning migrant women in international marriage, we should be conscious that they are subject to two sets of patriarchal forces, each of which predominates at different stages in their lives (Piper 1997). Yamashita (2008) argues that the flow of women in international marriage represents the current state of international power relations in the modern world system, “mediated by gender” (Yamashita 2008:109). Given the rise of China in East Asia and the rapid social changes in the country, we need to consider the ways in which international power relations between China and Japan will be mediated by gender.

Wang (2005)’s research suggests that the degree of satisfaction, adaptation, and need for support is correlated with gender. In the urban areas, the Chinese men show a higher degree of satisfaction, adaptation, and need for support (Wang 2005). These findings allow us to observe how gender has different impacts on Chinese spouses.

Therefore, it is important to study women, but also gender differences in international marriage (Davin 1999), as we need to “learn from the experience of both men and women” (Williams 2010:213). Gendered social roles and attitudes are powerful, while often unrecognized and unchallenged, shaping migratory patterns and options, and the way women and men migrate is shaped by state policies reflecting gendered assumptions (Williams 2010). Kawaguchi & Lee (2017:647) reveal that male marriage migration “appears not to share the underlying mechanism behind importing foreign brides”. Given the complete absence of Chinese men in the existing literature, there is a need to explore this phenomenon involving the Chinese men.

## 5.2 Implications for the study considering diversity

Japanese-Chinese international marriage in Japan is conceptualized as intermarriage where the emphasis is on the nationality difference (Nitta 1988; Takeshita 2000; 2016). However, the samples in the existing literature only represent the cases of Japanese-Chinese couples whose nationalities are acquired by birth in Japan or China and who did not change nationality before marriage (Wang 2005; Saihanjuna 2007; 2014a; 2014b; Kakizaki 2009; 2010; Hao 2010a; 2010b; Shikita 2014; Ichijo 2015; Yamaura 2015a; 2015b; Hu 2015; Zhang 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Wang 2016; 2017; Le Bail 2017).

Japanese nationality is attained either by birth in Japan, through a parent's Japanese nationality or by naturalization (MOJ 2008). As for nationality intermarriage, there are a variety of Japanese-Chinese couples who can be thought of.

Although it is difficult to get an accurate estimate of Chinese old-comers who have Japanese nationality (Yamamoto 2012), as Oxeld (2005) shows Chinese overseas men turn to China for prospective marriage partners of homeland women, presumably there are some international marriage couples between naturalized Chinese old-comers or their descendants and partners from China.

There is diversity even within the Chinese newcomers' group. The term newcomers refers to foreigners who came to Japan from the 1980s onwards in Japan (Shiramizu & Kaburaki 1999). The so-called Chinese newcomers who came as adults are becoming "old" as almost four decades have passed since the 1980s. The number of naturalized Chinese newcomers rose quickly alongside a large number of Chinese newcomers, and today about 1/3 of all naturalized foreign nationals are Chinese (Shao 2017). Consequently, there are intermarried couples formed between Japanese nationals who are naturalized, Chinese newcomers and non-naturalized Chinese newcomers. Besides, the second generation of these Chinese newcomers, who are raised in Japan but still hold a Chinese nationality may have grown up and intermarried with Japanese nationals.

Japanese orphans and/or their descendants who are raised in China but hold a Japanese nationality may marry a Chinese national, in which case it would be

counted in the Japanese official statistics. But the married couple themselves might not identify as an international marriage couple due to their similar background, despite the difference in nationality.

For the above reasons, the patterns of Japanese-Chinese nationality intermarriages which involve couples that have some ethnic Chinese identity should be looked into separately.

In terms of diverse socioeconomic background, Davin (2007:93) argues international marriages in East Asia are “indeed statistically quite significant” and “it is not always realized that these practices are not restricted to a small number of the marginalized poor”. As this review shows this is very relevant in the case of Japanese-Chinese couples, we need much more investigation to explore the diverse and various socio-economic backgrounds of Japanese-Chinese international couples. Hao (2010b:67) writes about one of the reasons why she focuses on Japanese-Chinese international marriage couples through commercial arrangements: “in recent years, more frequent exchange between Japan and China results in both flows of tourists and expatriate employees from Japan to China and tourists and international students from China to Japan are increasing. Under these circumstances, it is obvious that people who interact will lead to a love marriage naturally” (translated from Japanese to English). These assumptions should not be taken for granted, otherwise we may overlook the diverse socioeconomic background of Japanese-Chinese couples, as well as the potential social consequences of this phenomenon in both Japan and China, or even wider regions and societies.

### 5.3 Implications for the study of the impact of marriage or divorce

Increasing international marriages may promote subsequent opportunities for cross-national exchange (Liaw et al. 2010; Hao 2014a). International marriages may have an impact on social change in both sending and receiving societies. Burgess (2004) argues that international marriage participants themselves may become potential agents of social change in Japan. Wang (2015:1) points out that the increased frequency and altered nature of international marriages in China “indicate a disruption of the conventional forms of marriage in China and a transformation of peoples’ values in connection with marriage and family and perhaps a trend towards

marital multiculturalism”. Thus, besides the reasons and pathways to marriage, the adaptation of Chinese women, and conflicts in the family represented in the existing literature, various potential impacts due to international marriage should be explored. Scholars may turn their eyes towards the positive aspects, which have not been explored. For example, it would be worthy to address the growing economic or cultural exchange between the two countries, the increasing acceptance of multiculturalism in both societies, more partners supporting each other within the families etc.

Liaw et al. (2010) reveal that the foreign wives of Japanese men have a particularly high probability of divorce, and there is a rapid increase in divorce among foreign women. There has not been researching on the divorce of Japanese-Chinese international marriages yet. This may result in overlooking the social consequences such divorce may have on mixed heritage children.

#### 5.4 Implications for the study on parenthood and mixed heritage children

Given the lower socioeconomic background of the majority of the international marriage couples in the case of Japanese man and Chinese woman matchings in Japan represented in the existent literature, the development of their mixed heritage children could emerge as an issue. Because one of the fundamental and robust results of the sociology of education research is that the level of children’s educational and socioeconomic outcomes is significantly influenced by the socioeconomic status and education of their parents (Hart & Risley 1995; Lareau 2003; 2011; Hartas 2011; Kataoka 2001; Hojo 2011).

Particular reason that international marriage couples in Japan deserves scholarly attention is that the mixed heritage children that are born to them are at the front line in the creation of multicultural spaces in Japan in the home, classroom and in wider society (Yamamoto 2010). However, due to their Japanese nationality, while a large number, these mixed heritage children are particularly invisible in terms of official policy (Yamamoto 2010; 2012). As a result, “they have garnered little academic attention beyond a few studies on bilingualism” (Yamamoto 2010). Research should be more concerned with the socialization and education inside and outside the homes



of these mixed heritage children when considering the topic of international marriage in Japan (Nitta 1988; Hara 1996; Shinozaki 1996; Qu 2009; Yamamoto 2010; 2012; Kawaguchi & Lee 2017).

Crippen & Brew (2007:113) points out much more research on intercultural parenting is needed “to help all couples make the most of their differences as a family”. Further research is needed to understand the experiences of intercultural parenting of Japanese-Chinese couples to help them make the most of their differences as a family and contribute to future generations of mixed heritage children’s well-being. Such a study may also be applicable to other mixed heritage children who are in a similar situation in Japan.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this review essay demonstrates that research on Japanese-Chinese couples of international marriage in Japan is a relatively new and under-researched area. The dominant discourse focuses on the Chinese women from the Manchurian area of China, of lower socioeconomic background, living in rural Japan, with small non-randomized samples. For this reason, the existing literature has been framed within gender, class, and ethnicity-based inequalities, “as well as global colonial disparities” (Yakushko & Rajan 2017:202) between Japan as a wealthy developed country and China as a developing country and parts of China as former Japanese colonies. In the future, research on Japanese-Chinese international marriage couples in contemporary Japan will be able to connect research conducted in both societies and cut through the intangible web of relations in this region. Future studies should be aware of the contexts of gender, class, and ethnicity in Japan as well as the rapid social change occurring in China. Such contextual consideration will allow for deeper and more extensive investigations, and construct a more equal discourse.

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## Appendix 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Type
Term "international, intercultural... marriage" and Japan and China in topics	Content
English, Japanese, Chinese	Publication language
The study population had to intermarry	Research Population
The study population was Chinese spouses and Japanese national	Research Population
The study population had to reside in Japan	Research Area
Both quantitative and qualitative research	Research Design
No restriction placed at the time of publication	Publication Date
Both non-Peer-reviewed and Peer-reviewed journal articles or doctor thesis	Publication type

  

Exclusion Criteria	Type
Research design or methodology is not reported	Research Design
The study population did not reside in Japan	Research Area

## Appendix 2. Data Sources

- a) English electronic databases: Web of Science (core collection), Scopus, ProQuest (Research Library, Eric)
- b) Japanese electronic database: CiNii
- c) Chinese electronic databases: CNKI, Wanfang Data

Appendix 3. Searching terms

- a) English keywords included “Inter\* ” and “marriage/family\*”, “mixed marriage”/“family\*”  
“transnational”/ “Cross\*” and “marriage”/“family,\*” “Marriage migration/migrant\*” and “Japan” and “China” or “Japanese” and “Chinese.”
- b) Japanese keywords included 国際結婚 (International marriage), 異文化結婚/異文化間夫婦 (Intercultural marriage)、多文化家族 (Multicultural family), 結婚移住 (者) (Marriage migration/migrant (s)) and 日本 (人) and 中国 (人) (Japan and China or Japanese and Chinese), (Marriage migration/migrant (s)) and 中国 (人) (China or Chinese) 日中国際結婚 (Japanese/Chinese international marriage)
- c) Chinese keywords included 涉外婚姻 (Chinese-foreign marriage), 跨国婚姻 (Cross-border marriage), 国际婚姻 (International marriage), 异族通婚 (Interethnic marriage), 婚姻迁移 (Marriage migration) AND 日本 (人) AND 中国 (人) (Japan and China or Japanese and Chinese), or 日本 (人) (Japan/Japanese), or 中日婚姻 (Chinese/Japanese international marriage).

Appendix 4. Flowchart of the study selection

