

**Marriage, Migration and the International
Marriage Business in Japan**

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**This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.



Tomoko Nakamatsu

Abstract

This thesis examines the development of the international marriage business in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s, and the experiences of female participants from China, South Korea, and the Philippines who married through this system and currently live in Japan.

The study treats these women as active female migrants and contributes to a gendered understanding of the process of contemporary migration. The thesis argues for an acknowledgement of the way in which the international marriage business served the purposes of marriage and migration for women in male dominant and economically stratified societies in Asia, without downplaying the fact that the same system and its ideology oppresses women. The study argues that, for these women, participation in international marriage by introduction was about marriage *and* migration. Analysis of the intricate sites of marriage and migration was thus critical to understanding their experiences. The thesis also argues for recognition of the diverse and complex experiences of the women participants.

Part I of this study investigates the macro-economic, social and political factors that influenced development of the international marriage business in Japan. It analyses representations of international introduction marriage and its female participants, and maps the ways in which patriarchal gender ideology in the international marriage business system intersects with global capitalism, and other hegemonic power relations operating in contemporary Japan.

Part II examines the marriage and migration experiences of 45 women. The section identifies conflicts faced by the women and examines processes of negotiation inside and outside the family domain. It investigates the extent of the women's agency in their decision to marry and live in a foreign country, covering interconnected arenas of marriage, family, paid work, involvement in women's groups and questions of legal citizenship. The women's narratives demonstrate the importance of articulating a structurally embedded analysis with active female agency in the study of international marriage migration.

Contents

List of Figures and Tables	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
1 Introduction	
1.1 Marriage Introduction and the Introduction Business	1
1.2 <i>Kokusai Kekkō</i>	9
1.3 Definitions	14
1.4 Objectives of the Study	16
1.5 Analytical Framework	18
1.6 Research Methods and Data	28
PART I	35
2 Representations of International Introduction Marriage and its Female Participants	36
2.1 In Public Discourse	38
2.2 In Academic Research	56
2.3 Conclusion	63
3 Globalization, Marriage, and Migration	65
3.1 Marriage and the International Marriage Business	66
3.2 Women and the Japanese Marriage Market	73
3.3 Globalization and Migration	81
3.4 Conclusion	91
4 International Marriage Agencies	93
4.1 Mapping the International Marriage Introduction Industry	94
4.2 Problems of Marriage Agents and Reading Legal Cases	108
4.3 Selling International Marriage	114
4.4 Conclusion	128
5 Villages, the State and International Marriage	130
5.1 The Politics of Fertility at the Policy Level	131
5.2 International Marriage in Rural Politics	137
5.3 From 'Japanising' to 'Promoting Differences' in the Policy of Internationalisation: A Case of the Mogami Region	148
5.4 Conclusion	152

PART II		155
6	Marriage and Migration	157
6.1	Social Background of the Women Participants	158
6.2	Choosing International Marriage Introduction	163
6.3	In Transition	171
6.4	'Alias': Symbol of Subordination?	176
6.5	Conclusion	179
7	Reproduction, Production and the Politics of Affection	180
7.1	Contesting Marriage and Family	182
7.2	Gender Roles in the Extended Family	196
7.3	Experiencing the Paid Work Force	202
7.4	Conclusion	214
8	The Complexity of Power Relations and Identity Construction	216
8.1	Marriage Agents and the Marriage Migrants	217
8.2	Local Governments, Support Groups and the Migrant Women	224
8.3	The State and the Migrant Women: Residential Status	230
8.4	Conclusion	243
9	Conclusion	246
Appendices		
I	Social Background of Japanese Husbands and Comparison with Foreign Wives	255
II	Lists of the Interviewees: Marriage Migrants and Marriage Agencies	258
III	Interview Questions for Marriage Migrants	264
IV	Glossary of Important Japanese Terms	275
Bibliography		277

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

3-1	Trend in unmarried rate for men: 1940–1990	74
3-2	Trend in unmarried rate for women: 1940–1990	75

Tables

6-1	Ethnicity and length of stay in Japan at the time of interview	156
6-2	Ethnicity and place of residence in Japan at the time of interview	156
6-3	Age at the time of marriage with a Japanese husband	158
6-4	Marital status at the time of meeting a prospective Japanese spouse prior to migration	158
6-5	Educational background	159
6-6	Occupation at the time of meeting a prospective Japanese spouse	160
7-1	Marriage migrants' educational background and place of residence in Japan	181
7-2	Main Occupation in Japan at the time of interview	205
7-3	Current and previous occupations in Japan	206
7-4	Current and previous occupations in Japan by employment status	206

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Japanese names are indicated with the surname first, followed by the given name. Long vowels are written with a macron over the vowel as in *sōdan*, except for words that are commonly used in English such as Tokyo.

1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Marriage Introduction and the Introduction Business

Miai kekkon (marriage by introduction) is a long-standing social practice in Japan. It is not, however, a static 'tradition'. Family patterns and functions in Japanese society underwent significant changes in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Economic, social and legal changes had a direct effect on the practice of marriage by introduction in terms of how it was performed, who performed it and how prevalent was the practice. Marriage by introduction involves intermediaries, and their involvement gave scope for turning a practice into business. Socio-economic changes in the post World War II period provided an opportunity for this intermediary group to become established as the marriage introduction industry. As the social meaning of *miai kekkon* changed over time, so did the features and function of intermediaries.

Miai refers to meetings with a view to marriage and *miai kekkon* indicates marriages that eventuate from introductions¹. The standard meaning given to the term is 'arranged marriage' (see for example, *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary* 1974; *The Kodansha Japanese-English Dictionary* 1976). But over the last one and half centuries its usage has gradually lost the coercive connotation of the term, where prospective couples had no choice over the selection of their partners. *Miai kekkon* in today's sense signifies no more than marriages where the couple's initial meeting is formally arranged by intermediaries. The intermediaries can be commercial agencies or non-commercial parties such as relatives. Participants in introductions, with or without consulting their parents, decide whether to pursue the relationship and subsequently marriage. 'Marriages by arranged introductions' rather than 'arranged marriages' therefore better captures the contemporary social practice of *miai kekkon*. Tracing the history of marriages identified as *miai kekkon* reveals its many forms.

¹ *Miai* also has a meaning of 'looking at each other'