

## **Dynamics of Interethnic marriages - the case of Korean-Japanese couples**

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### **Abstract**

Since the mid-20th century, a dramatic rise in the number of international marriages can be observed, with Japan being one of the host countries to increasing numbers of international couples, adding to the various types of inter-ethnic relationships already present among its minority populations.

Most research that has dealt with international marriage derives from the context of well-educated, middle-class couples in Japan, focusing on cultural aspects and marital everyday life. Not much has been written about the wider, socio-economic and historical framework establishing links between lived personal experience and broader social factors. Macro-and micro-level forces that affect cross-cultural relations are often not linked up.

In order to understand the dynamics of marriages in general and “mixed” marriages in particular from a gender perspective, the main argument here is that inter-ethnic marriages need to be contextualized with two main analytical frameworks : 1. patriarchy and 2. the sexual division of labour, both in their cross-border links. Occurrence of, and the possible marital problems in, cross-cultural marriages are to a larger extent related to gender differences and global patriarchal structures than to ethnicity or “racialisation”

The specific context of Korean-Japanese couples constitutes the empirical focus of this article. A distinction needs to be made between the “oldcomer” and “newcomer” Korean residents and their specific historical background.

Overall, in this article, inter-ethnic marriage is contextualized with a gendered analysis of socio-economic development and labour migration, set within the framework of the global political economy and the global patriarchal system.

Key words : Marriage ; Koreans in Japan ; migration ; gender, inter-ethnic ; patriarchy ; sexual division of labour ;

## Introduction

A dramatic rise in the number of international marriages has occurred since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Cottrell 1990). With economic development and unprecedented ease of travel, the number of individuals working, studying and/or travelling abroad is rising globally, and so is the number of international marriages (Johnson & Warren 1994).

Japan is also host to increasing numbers of international couples, adding to the various types of inter-ethnic relationships that are part of Japan's significant minority populations. This stands in contrast to the still prevailing public image of ethnic and cultural homogeneity of Japanese society which is linked to a largely negative public image of immigrants in general, and Asian women in particular. In statistical terms, however, the overwhelming dominance of Asian women as spouses among international marriages today cannot be denied and they form the largest settling immigrant group today.

Most research on international marriages derives from the context of well educated, middle-class couples in Japan (Imamura 1986, 1988, 1990) as well as elsewhere (Johnson & Warren 1994 ; Breger & Hill 1998), undertaken mainly by anthropologists, focusing on cultural aspects and marital everyday life (i. e. from a micro-level perspective). In this literature, cross-cultural marriage is often defined *a priori* as problematic. Imamura's work on Japanese-foreign couples follows this line by also predefining such marriages in this way (Breger & Hill 1998). More importantly, not much has been written about the wider, socio-economic and historical framework showing links between lived personal experience and broader social factors in such marriages (in other words, adding a macro-level perspective). Scholars know little about the links between macro- and micro-socio-political forces that affect these cross-cultural marital relations, as rightly observed by Alex-Assensoh & Assensoh (1998). Furthermore, social scientists seldom look at formal legal constraints and public stereotypes

and assumptions behind these (Breger 1998 : 129).

In the case of Japan, international marriage has also been researched mainly from the point of view of middle-class couples (Imamura 1986, 1988, 1990 ; Refsing 1998). The only other group that has been subject to some attention are the so-called “*hanayome-san*” (Asian brides of Japanese farmers) (Shukuya 1989 ; Iida 1991 ; Kuwayama 1996). Despite the fact that there has been an increase in publications in forms of handbooks (Enomoto 1998, Saitoo 1998, Kokusai Kekkon o Kangaeru Kai 1996) and personal accounts (Kan Sonche 1998, Tsuji 1992), other forms of international or interethnic marriages - with few exceptions (Piper 1997) - have been largely neglected. Moreover, a gender-specific analysis of such marriages which takes on board a feminist critique of marriage is usually missing.

There is a wealth of terms with which ‘cross-cultural’ marriages can be referred to, and the context of the specific study often determines the choice of terminology. Historically, a large proportion of social-scientific literature on cross-cultural marriage has come from the US where the language of ‘race’ is typically deployed, and to a lesser extent from Britain, so that “much of it (academic writing, N. P.) was about marriages between Black and White Americans, Jews and Gentiles, or American (or British) expatriates marrying someone from the subjugated population under colonial or military conditions abroad” (Breger & Hill 1998 : ix). In addition to ‘inter-racial’, however, there are also such terms as ‘international’ and ‘inter-ethnic’. In my previous research on this topic, I opted for the term ‘international’ as I investigated the link between labour migration and international marriage. In other words, I purely focused on immigrant ‘newcomers’. In this article, however, I intend to focus on Korean-Japanese couples and by doing so, it is impossible to ignore the existence of the established ‘oldcomer’ Korean community who constitute the largest ethnic minority in Japan and whose presence is linked to Japan’s colonial rule of the Korean peninsula and the mobilisation of forced Korean labour during the Pacific War. The term ‘cross-cultural’ might be more suitable which usually is taken to refer to marriages between

two people from different linguistic, religious or ethnic groups or nations. However, there can also be a cultural divide between the sexes within the same class and cultures, or different classes or even regions within the same society. All marriages could, therefore, be said to be cross-cultural in some way (Breger & Hill 1998 : 7). At the same time, it would be wrong to ignore ethno-cultural differences, and in the case of Korean-Japanese couples, I would suggest the use of 'inter-ethnic'. 'International' will only be used in the context of immigrant newcomers. Another, related aspect is that definitions of who constitutes an outsider are also open to change. Identities can be plural, cross-cutting, conflicting, contested, and changing.

In order to understand the dynamics of marriages in general and 'mixed' marriages in particular from a gender perspective, my main argument in this article is that inter-ethnic marriages need to be contextualized with two main analytical frameworks : (1) patriarchy (Walby 1990) and (2) the sexual division of labour (Macintorsh 1984) in their historical specificity and their cross-border links (i. e. between Korea and Japan). In other words, the occurrence of, and the possible marital problems in, cross-cultural marriages are - in contrast to arguments put forward in many other studies - to a larger extent related to gender differences and global patriarchal structures than to ethnicity or 'racialisation'<sup>1)</sup> which stands in contrast to many other studies. This is, however, not meant to say that the latter (ethnicity/racialisation) is of no significance, as it is in fact in the specific context of Korean-Japanese couples which constitute my empirical focus. The example of Korean-Japanese couples requires the distinction between the 'oldcomer' and 'newcomer' Korean residents. The reasons and motivations for their migration to Japan need to be placed within specific socio-historical contexts. There is, therefore, an additional dimension which is of great importance with regard to the origin of the Korean community in Japan : colonialism, i. e. the historical link between Japan as the colonizer and Korea as the colonized and, thus, with racialisation.

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1) For a full discussion of the concept of 'racialisation' see Miles (1993) and Small (1994).

This article is based on pilot study carried out between September and December 1998 in Osaka. This research was made possible through a visiting fellowship from Kansai University. I would like to express my gratitude to Kansai University in general, and various professors at the Department of Sociology as well as at the *Jinken Mondai Kenkyuu Shitsu* in particular, for offering me the opportunity and supportive environment to conduct research on this topic.

### **Historical background**

Under the national seclusion policy of the pre-modern Tokugawa government (1603–1868), Japan was closed to foreigners for more than two centuries, and communication and exchange with other countries had been restricted to the trading post in Deshima (off Nagasaki). In some cases, Japanese women who worked as maids for these foreigners became their unofficial wives or mistresses (Shukuya 1989 : 10). However, this kind of relationship was not considered a proper marriage. Therefore, neither registration nor approval from the government was needed.

When Japan opened up to the outside world with the onset of the Meiji period (1868–1912), among a series of reforms was the first regulation of international marriages in Japan, entitled *Daiseikan fukoku No. 103* (Koyama 1995 : 12). The gist of the regulation was that when a Japanese wished to marry a foreigner, he/she had to apply for permission from the Japanese government. If a foreign woman married a Japanese man, her nationality would be changed to Japanese. If a Japanese woman married a foreign man, she would automatically lose her Japanese nationality and her children would not be able to obtain it either (ibid.). It was not until 1950 when the nationality law was revised so that Japanese women were allowed to keep their nationality if they married foreigners. Most marriages during this period were between Japanese men and European or American women, reflecting the Meiji government's policy of sending young men abroad to study more advanced 'civilizations'.

During the immediate post-war period (1945-1955), marriages between Japanese women and western men - mainly US Americans - were predominant. This feature is often referred to as the phenomenon of 'war bride marriages' (Johnson & Warren 1994). Overall, however, until the 1970s marriages between Japanese and foreigners were rare. Since then, the numbers have gradually been on the rise, with a specifically rapid upsurge between 1985 and 1991. This is linked to the feminisation of international migration and Japan's rigid immigration procedures, as I have argued in more detail elsewhere (Piper 1997, 1999). Of all those marriages, statistics show that the usual pattern is for the husband to be Japanese and his wife to be a foreigner (Kono 1994). Furthermore, the case of Japanese men married to East Asian women is the most salient one among all cases of international marriage in contemporary Japan (Sadamatsu 1996 : 68).

#### ***Specific case of Korean-Japanese marriages***

During periods of high cultural exchange between Korea and Japan, cases of marriages between the two ethnic groups also existed—among aristocrats as well as the lower classes. According to Koyama (1995 : 114), there were however no intermarriages at all between Japanese and Koreans during the years 1874-1898 despite both countries' close geographical location. This shows that no communication or cultural exchange existed between the two countries at that time.

Until 1910, the Korean community in Japan was composed primarily of students, political exiles and consular officials. Although there may have been a small number of Koreans working illegally before this time, there is no firm evidence (Weiner 1989 : 52). When Japan annexed Korea in 1910, all Koreans were made Japanese subjects and thus immigration laws ceased to apply to Koreans. Until as late as 1915, it was in fact Chinese - and not Koreans - who made up the largest part of the foreign population in Japan (ibid.). After 1915, however, the number of Koreans rapidly increased, with most of them having been directly or indirectly forced to migrate to Japan with the

main purpose of filling jobs vacated by Japanese mobilised into the war effort. There are no statistics from that time indicating inter-ethnic marriages, but in view of Japan's harsh assimilation policies in Korea itself which prohibited the use of the Korean language and Korean names by law, in addition to the fact that official policy went so far as to encourage inter-marriage<sup>2)</sup>, it can be assumed that whenever such marriages did occur, their cross-cultural nature was disguised.

After 1945 with the end of the Pacific War, many Koreans returned to their homeland, but because of the disastrous political situation on the Korean peninsula, a substantial number remained in Japan, forming the largest ethnic minority today of just under 650,000<sup>3)</sup>. With regard to inter-marriages, reliable statistics are available from 1955 onwards. One general feature is that numbers of Korean-Japanese couples have been steadily on the increase, reaching a peak in 1990 (total of 13,934 couples) and then decreasing gradually to a total of 8,804 couples in 1996 (Ministry of Welfare, 1997). Figures compiled by Kim Yong Dal on behalf of the Korean Christian Center (KCC) in Osaka (kindly passed on to me during my visit when interviewing the director) give a more detailed picture on differentiations by sex : between 1955 and 1969/70, most cross-cultural marriages were between Korean men and Japanese women; from then onwards, the opposite has been the case up until the last available statistics (1996), i. e. ever since 1969 more marriages have been between Korean women and Japanese men than the other way around. The gap between these two 'groups' has started to become particularly wide since 1988, when 4,405 marriages were between Japanese men and Korean women (as opposed to 2,365 between Japanese women and Korean men), peaking in 1990 with 8,940 marriages between Japanese men and Korean women (as opposed to a mere 2,721 between Japanese women and Korean men). As for the reasons why the trend during the years 1955 to 1969 has turned to the opposite with

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2) This information derives from a paper entitled "Limitation of Japan's Efforts to Deal with the Past from the Viewpoint of Political History", presented by Kang Changil at *the International Symposium on Military Sexual Slavery by Japan*, Seoul, June 4-5, 1999. I was not able to find any other figures or more evidence for this.

3) The precise figure for the year 1997 is 645,373 (Shutsunyukokukanritookeinenpan, 1998).

now far more Japanese men marrying Korean women, the specific socio-structural conditions and their specific gendered nature during that period need to be considered. Between 1955 and 1969, it was mainly Korean men who went out to work mixing with Japanese people and, thus, having more chances to meet Japanese women. When Japanese society gradually began to become more open from around 1970 - a trend largely triggered by a serious shortage of labour with increasing numbers of women entering the labour force - Korean women, too, took up paid employment in rising numbers which increased their chances to meet Japanese men. Another explanation for the initial low numbers of Korean women marrying out must also be related to the assumption that there were less Korean women than men in Japan at that time. When Japan brought Korean labourers by force to the mother country during Japan's annexation of Korea to work mainly in the mining industry, the majority of these labourers must have been male. However, no statistics to confirm this assumption could be found<sup>4</sup>.

A word of warning needs to be added here with regard to official statistics. There are a number of problems with the interpretation of marriages figures broken down by nationality : first of all, they do not indicate whether marriages are between naturalised Koreans (who would be listed under the category of "Japanese") and resident Koreans who hold their Korean nationality or two naturalised Koreans. Although the overall figures for naturalised Koreans remain rather low, they have comparatively increased and it can be assumed that some marriages listed as "international" are actually between spouses who are both ethno-culturally of Korean background. Also, the statistics do not indicate whether these "international" marriages are between "oldcomer" Koreans and Japanese or "newcomer" Koreans and Japanese. A significant proportion of Japan's relatively recent labour immigrants is, however, from Korea. A

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4) Weiner provides a statistical breakdown by sex with regard to Korean movement into Japan between 1917 and 1923 (1989 : 67) which clearly shows that there were far more male Koreans than females coming to Japan. From these statistics, however, it is not clear as to how many male and female Koreans stayed in Japan after the war and whether those who stayed were able to bring families left behind in Korea.

representative of the KCC, therefore, strongly believes that a substantial number of all marriages between Korean women and Japanese men since 1988 are in fact of “new-comer” Korean women. The drastic rise in these marriages from 1988 onwards is, thus, partly to be linked to labour migration and Japan’s harsh immigration laws preventing ‘unskilled’ labour to migrate ‘legally’. In other words, these figures suggest that “marriages of convenience”, or as often referred to “fake marriages” (gisoo kekkon) have been on the rise as a result of the inability to get a working visa in Japan. Another reason for the drastic increase of inter-ethnic marriages since 1988 is the increasing social acceptance of such marriages and reduced opposition by parents and society at large.

A further problem with official statistics is that they only consider ‘proper’ legal marriages disregarding other types of relationships – although in the context of Japan where cohabitation is still quite unusual when compared with western Europe, for instance, this is not a major shortcoming.

To sum up, opportunities for out-marriage have increased. What influences them, how choices are constructed and constrained both informally (media discourse e. g.) as well as formally by the state and laws is largely a socio-political matter. Although the rate of out-marriage has increased, it still is rather low across generations which is partly related to deliberate political choice of Koreans – in particular those who identify with North Korea<sup>5)</sup>. Another aspect is improved socio-economic emancipation of women with the increased possibility for women to make free choices with regard to marital partners. In this respect, it is of interest to what extent these socio-political aspects influencing the choice of spouse are related to ethnic differences or gender.

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5) The Korean Community in Japan is mainly divided into two political groups that are formally organised : MINDAN (Korean Residents Union in Japan—the principal South Korean-affiliated Korean support group in Japan) and SOREN (the North Korean-affiliated support group in Japan).

### Gender perspective

Historically as well as in contemporary context, marriage in general - be it mono-ethnic or inter-ethnic - exists legally only between a man and a woman<sup>6)</sup>. In other words, the issue of marriage is linked to relations between men and women, that is to the issue of gender. Marriage has been described as a contract between unequals in that men and women are socio-economically not equal (Pateman 1988 ; Delphy & Leonard 1992) which is related to patriarchal relations in the public and private sphere (Walby 1990). Furthermore, particular instances of international marriages have to be placed in their specific historical context. Higurashi (1989 : 191), for example, claims that the occurrence of the phenomenon of 'war brides' during the immediate post-war years was, in fact, more related to economic reasons rather than romantic love. As the defeated nation, Japan experienced high inflation and massive unemployment immediately after the war whereas America had the image of being rich and strong. In this context, it is not surprising that Japanese women opted for international marriage as a means of social upward mobility<sup>7)</sup>.

There is, however, further need to explore the international interconnectedness of patriarchal relations, which is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary international migration, be it for the purpose of finding work or marriage. As the movement of people across national borders has undoubtedly become a global issue, and will most likely become an even more important one in the future, patriarchy cannot only be discussed as an issue within the boundaries of single nation-states. In the process of transmigration, patriarchal relations of the country of origin and the host country are connected. In the context of migration from lesser developed to more

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6) Apart from a few progressive countries, such as Denmark, where legal marriages between homosexual couples is possible.

7) This is not an unknown phenomenon in Germany during the immediate post-war period (i. e. marriages between US servicemen and German women) (Bregger 1998).

advanced countries, patriarchal relations at home and abroad are not identical. Their degree and expression vary, depending on the countries' different position in the global political economy. An additional aspect is also to be found in historically derived notions of ethnic hierarchy, with former colonising countries treating the formerly colonised as lower ranking in the international system of nation-states.

Integration into the international division of labour via certain forms of economic restructuring in the home country of migrants are very influential in determining who migrates and the types of jobs available. Economic development has always involved gendered processes, pushing women into low-paid and insecure job categories, often as providers of sexual services. Historically, in the context of Japan's own developmental process, the import and export of female labour has been an integral part of its modernization process, and although often regarded as a new phenomenon, Japan's involvement in the international trade in women has been evident since the early Meiji period. Rural impoverishment resulted in a substantial number of young women being sold to labour brokers and subsequently to brothels operating throughout East/South East Asia and as far afield as the United States. Around the turn of the century, the Japanese government officially promoted emigration to the US as a solution to a growing problem of landlessness. Initially, the majority of Japanese emigrants were young, single males working as unskilled labourers, but because of this unbalanced sex ratio in the context of restricted US immigration policies and mescegenation laws, prostitution of Japanese women became a thriving business (Matthaei & Amott 1990). Many of these women are said to have been abducted or tricked into coming, and once arrived in the US, they were often held in bondage by pimps (op. cit. ; see also Yamazaki 1998 : Translator's Introduction). The mobilization of women for purposes of prostitution continued until the end of the Pacific War, as women from areas under Japanese colonial or military occupation, including Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines and Indonesia, were drafted as so-called 'comfort women' (jugun ianfu) to provide sexual services to the Japanese military (see e. g. Howard 1995). With the end of the Pacific War, military-related prostitution had not come to an end in Japan.

‘Comfort stations’ were established for the Allied Occupation Forces, mainly constituted of US military personnel (Hanochi 1998). Japanese brokers were also still actively involved in recruiting and despatching of Japanese women to abroad for the purpose of prostitution as recently as the early 1950s (Oshima & Francis 1989), while licensed prostitution in Japan (established in 1528) was not prohibited until 1956 under the Prostitution Prevention Law<sup>8)</sup>.

In the contemporary Asian context, a link between development and gender specific analysis has been made in works on international tourism, given the rather gendered strategy of development deployed in countries of Southeast and East Asia (Barry, 1995 ; Hall, 1992 ; Lee, 1991 ; Truong, 1990). At the same time, authors have established links between international tourism and the phenomenon of out-migration, in particular in the Japanese context (Muroi & Sasaki, 1997).

In Korea, at the beginning of the 1970s, the government promoted the development of the Cheju Island as a tourist resort in order to attract high numbers of tourists, including a plan for the construction of *kisaeng* (prostitution) houses (Muroi & Sasaki 1997 : 185). Japanese sex tours to Southeast and East Asia are said to have started in the 1960s, which coincided with the 1964 liberalization of travel abroad and the growth of the country’s economy. Initially, the most preferable destinations were Korea and Taiwan. The structure of Japanese sex tourism, however, changed in the 1980s, partly as a result of anti-sex tour protests starting in Korea and subsequently infiltrating Japanese feminists’ activism too (Matsui 1987). It is, therefore, not surprising that the number of women coming into Japan from Southeast and East Asia has risen dramatically since the early 1980s. Although women from the Philippines constitute the largest group of foreign “entertainers”, Korean women follow soon thereafter. According to

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8) Article 3 prohibits for anyone to commit prostitution or be a client of a prostitute. Chapter II of the law makes it an offense to solicit in public places for the purpose of prostitution, to procure a prostitute for some other person, to induce another person to engage in prostitution by deceit, threat or use of force. Pimping is punished under Article 8 (Royanakorn 1995 : 45).

Muroi and Sasaki (1997), there is ample evidence that most of these women are involved in the sex industry in Japan. Working as entertainer or hostess requires a certain type of woman : young and reasonably good looking. It is, therefore, not surprising that a significant proportion of these women in marriagable age (and in view of much social pressure on their getting married at certain ages) opt for international marriage with a Japanese customer. Their insecure, and often “illegal” resident status reinforces this decision. Another important aspect is the image these women acquire back at home : it is usually impossible to hide the fact they have migrated for work and neighbours question the way in which these women earned a better income than they could have back at home. In this way, they easily gain a certain reputation which would make settling back into their home society difficult. This is another crucial reason that distinguishes the migration of women from men : when men return, they are often celebrated as heros, whereas the women are looked down upon as ‘loose’. Marrying out is, thus, a convenient way out of such a situation.

As can be seen from the change of direction of providers and consumers of sexual services, there is a causal link between developing countries’ integration into the international division of labour, the emergence of sex tourism as a strategic economic development and female migration for the purpose of sex work. This is not to say that the various forms of sex work are historically new<sup>9)</sup> or that trafficking in women has not existed before, but the scale on which it has been occurring is nonetheless unprecedented. New is also that many countries, particularly those in the Asian region, function today simultaneously as sending and receiving countries as well as countries of transit—a fact which is said to increase women’s dependency on third parties (Helwes 1998). With Japan having emerged as the strongest economic power in the East/Southeast Asian region, it is not surprising that it also has the largest sex market for Asian women (IOM 1997). This is, however, not only a question of economic strength,

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9) In the context of Thailand, for instance, Truong has provided an in-depth account of the historical emergence of prostitution (1990). In another piece, she describes different forms of sexual services in a class-specific, historical context(1983).

but also of a specific socio-cultural and ideological system structuring gender relations.

### ***Racialised sexism***

In the entertainment and sex-related industry, there has historically always been a hierarchy among women - either racially or in terms of class (Matthei & Amott 1990 ; Truong 1983). With the large presence of foreign women working in this sector in Japan since the 1980s, however, the hierarchy is now more than ever firmly established along racial lines. It is most unlikely for Asian women to work in bars and clubs in top areas such as 'Ginza' (in Tokyo) where Japanese women predominate (Muroi & Sasaki 1997). In such places, higher wages are paid and prostitution is far more the individual woman's 'choice' than in lower class establishments - in particular those run by the Japanese mafia.

There is a clear link between sex tourism and racialisation. The existence of a deeply racist mythology of Asian women used by travel agencies to attract foreign men has been well documented (Lee 1991). Racialized stereotypes of Asian women as truly feminine and subservient also exist in the Japanese mind - a fact which is partly based on Japan's past as a colonizing imperial power. Crimes committed by the Imperial Army against the euphemistically called 'military comfort women' during the Pacific War constitute a well-published case in point (Howard 1995 ; Matsuda 1992). As noted by Sano : "There is a racial and nationalistic arrogance, a tendency to sexualize a hierarchical relationship that these Japanese assume exists between their country and other Asian nations" (cited by Allison 1994 : 139-40).

One aspect which is exacerbated by 'race' is the image of 'poverty' in the context of development and out-migration. In many discussions of international labour migration in general, and of Filipino migrants in particular, 'poverty' is emphasized as the primary determinant of migrants' cross-border movement (Matsui 1987 ; Iyori 1987).

With regard to Asian women, public discourse in Japan (i. e. in the media and by government sources) promotes an image of “poverty-stricken women using sex as a means to a better life” (Tyner 1996 : 77). This image, however, is based on racialisation. As argued by Harris (1995), there is no evidence that it is deprivation that drives the bulk of migrant workers out of their countries. Many of the poorest countries do not experience substantial out-migration. Also, much of the movement across borders is rather highly sensitive to the demand for workers at the destination and selective in terms of nationality (as reflected in immigration policies and visa requirements). In actual fact, emigration is concentrated on the more skilled and educated groups of the population, one reason for which is that the highly skilled are - by world standards - badly paid, and overpopulation aggravates the continuing problem of educated un- or underemployment (Harris 1995). A number of studies have concluded that “it is not the poor that migrate, particularly internationally where the costs and risks are high” (Harris 1995 : 150). It has been suggested that economic development itself causes rising, not declining, migration. Thus, the more developed the world becomes in a context of geographical disparities in income and opportunities for migration, the greater the movement of people (Castles & Miller 1993)<sup>10</sup>.

#### ***International Migration : from worker to wife***

In 1993, 75 % of all international marriages were between a foreign wife and a Japanese husband. Of those 32 % were Filipinas, 25 % North/South Koreans, 23 % Chinese, and 10 % Thai<sup>11</sup> (Sadamatsu 1996 : 68). From these statistics, it becomes clear that the case of Japanese men married to East Asian women is the most salient one of all cases of international marriage in Japan. Although Filipinas constitute the largest part of international wives, Koreans are not far off.

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10) Another important aspect, of course, is information and access to information. The level of ‘global awareness’ in general, and knowledge about where best to migrate to specifically, seem to be more widespread among more educated sections of a given society.

11) Only 25 % of the cases were marriages between a Japanese woman and a foreign man (of whom 42 % were Koreans, 21 % Americans, 12 % Chinese).

As indicated above, it has been suggested by support groups working in the field of labour migration that increases in international marriage between Asian women and Japanese men have to be seen in the context of rigid immigration policies and, therefore, as an alternative way of entering Japan<sup>12)</sup>. Once married, the process of acquiring a permanent residence permit seems to be based on highly arbitrary decision-making on the part of the immigration authorities : according to an interview with a senior representative of the *Kokusai Kekkō o Kangaeru Kai* (Association Concerned with International Marriage), ‘white’ spouses tend to get permanent residence permits much faster than their Asian counterparts which is linked to ‘racial’ status and professional background of the applicants. Asian women tend to be associated with entertainment and illegality, so that - in the words of the same interviewee - their treatment by immigration authorities could be seen as a case of “shigoto no sabetsu”, i. e. work-related discrimination. In view of the numerous reports of marital problems including domestic violence, a secure residence status is, however, important for women seeking divorce. A further issue is the birth of children out of wedlock. It is only since 1996 that foreign mothers can obtain visa, but only on the basis of parenthood being recognized by the father.

When ‘moving’ from the primary status of foreign worker to that of wife, areas in which foreign women are vulnerable - such as in the domestic sphere - tend to coincide with “women-as-wife’s” vulnerability in general (i. e. including Japanese wives). The element of ‘ethnic’ or ‘racial’ difference, however, exacerbates these foreign wives’ stance so that their legal and social exclusion is informed not only by sexism, but also by racialisation.

Immigration of foreign women is not only temporary, and settlement is taking place mainly in form of international marriage which can be either the result of, or the cause

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12) This has, of course, been exploited by the media depicting this matter in a purely negative way emphasizing the non-Japanese nationality of these women, rather than taking a feminist critique of marriage on board.

for, migration (Piper 1997). In both contexts - labour migration and settlement - numerous accounts of abuses and violations of women's rights have come to the knowledge of NGOs and support groups working on behalf of migrants in Japan as well as in the migrants' home countries. The legal aspect of integrating foreign wives is, therefore, a very important issue which needs to be paralleled by social integration.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, I have attempted to contextualize inter-ethnic marriage with a gendered analysis of socio-economic development and labour migration set within the framework of the global political economy and a global patriarchal system. Whether voluntary or involuntary, patriarchal relations influence women's migratory movements, and they need to be investigated from a global and historical perspective with both the sending and receiving countries involved.

In Japan, the general tolerance of prostitution is historically rooted in a licensed prostitution system originating from the feudal era and the socio-legal subordination of women. In a more contemporary context, advanced capitalism and Japan's corporate culture have promoted the commercialization of sex. Today's corporate warriors ask for 'contemporary comfort women' - a demand largely met by Asian migrants in Japan's huge sex and entertainment industry. In this context, the issue of sex and reproductive work has to be seen as a product of existing power inequalities between the genders, between rich and well-connected interest groups and the majority who are underprivileged on the domestic level, and between races and nations in a hierarchically organized global system. The situation of many Asian wives of Japanese men today, in particular those who originally entered Japan as labour migrants, is reminiscent of Japanese women's experience during the Meiji period. Only in today's context, the process of globalisation, advanced technology and a highly competitive economic system have resulted in unprecedentedly high levels of cross-border movements.

Apart from the need to analyze inter-ethnic marriage from a macro-level perspective, a further shift in focus suggested in this article is a gender-based as opposed to an ethnicity-based, point of departure for analysis. Migration for marriage is often associated with economic and social mobility (Chant and Radcliffe 1992). Hence, Asian wives of Japanese men are often portrayed as “bogus wives” in a “marriage of convenience”. Such images, however, fail to consider that women in general often find themselves pressurised into marriage because of stronger economic and social constraints existing for women than men. Problems such as those related to communication, for instance, “are not only about having different mother tongues ; many communication problems are gender-related and common to most, if not all, marriages. In the final analysis, all marriages may be said to be cross-cultural in that they bring together the different worlds and experiences of men and women. “ (Refsing, in : Breger & Hill 1998 : 193). An additional area in which problems for international marriages occur can arise - and that is specifically linked to different ethnicity or nationality - are dealings with bureaucracy, citizenship rights, and an racialising image in the media. With the slow rise in women’s rights starting in the ‘west’ and gradually spreading to Asia, women have more freedom in marriage choices within certain parameters of acceptability. But just because there are no longer any legal barriers to spouse choice does not mean to say that informal barriers are not effective. And these informal barriers are based on a combination of patriarchal systems and racialisation.

With regard to academic studies on inter-ethnic marriages in Japan, it is striking that until fairly recently, there has hardly been any in-depth research on Korean-Japanese marriages - a fact that might be partly explained by ethnic diversity of Japanese society having been a taboo topic for a long time. Koreans themselves also prefer to hide the fact of their ethnic background, using Japanese names in their

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13) It seems to be mainly the Korean “elite” in Japan who have come out in increasing numbers, by using their Korean names e.g. According to Korean support/interest groups, such as KCC, the working classes still hide their ethnic background. There might also be regional differences, though, with Osaka being more open to ethnic diversity because of the large Korean community there (in fact, the largest in the whole of Japan).

everyday life and avoiding the use of the Korean language<sup>13)</sup>. There are, therefore, a wide range of aspects left for future research, such as the male perspective of such marriages and the “double” children of ethnically diverse parents.

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——1999.11.10受稿——