

Transnational intimacy of Turkish - Japanese couples and
the balancing of moderate Islamic Turkish model with Japanese culture

DANE COSKUN, Zeliha Muge
PhD Candidate
Waseda University
Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies

The increasing impact of globalization and the resulting high level of interaction between transnational communities have been blurring boundaries between cultures and facilitating people's movement across borders to a larger extent. This in return has resulted in the increase of transnational couple formations and marriages as well as the transfer of social mobility opportunities through marriage to the international level. As the emergence of family is considered to be the outcome of historical and social circumstances to be evaluated through individual experiences in terms of time, place and social situations; in this complex global era the decision making process for transnational family formation sums up to more than its emotional, social and economic components. Transnational marriages require a quite complex intimacy balance on behalf of the spouses as these entail; bargaining and blending of cultural differences as well as overcoming a possible language/communication barrier and challenges of bi-cultural child rearing.

This paper focuses on transnational relationships and marriages that are negotiated across and beyond Turkish and Japanese national and cultural boundaries. The aim is to analyze the transnational intimacy of these couples in relation to problems they face and solutions they formulate with emphasis on the blend of Turkey's relatively moderate Islamic based culture with Japanese culture. This paper analyzes the dynamics of these marriages with reference to forces that; draw them together, preserve their unity as a family and break them apart.

Keywords: *international migration, transnational marriages, Turkish – Japanese couples.*

Transnational marriages in Japan are to a large extent covered in the academic literature based on a classification by the foreign spouse's nationality. Consequently, in accordance with numbers and proportions of immigrant groups most of the literature focuses on marriages between Japanese men and Asian women or Japanese-American families (Nitta, 1990; Suzuki, 2003; Sellek, 1994). Willis and

Murphy-Shigematsu (2008) underline that the largest number of foreign spouses for Japanese men are; Koreans, Filipinas and Chinese (ibid; 30). This is one of the main reasons why most of the literature on transnational marriages in Japan remains focused on foreign female Asian spouses (Faier, 2007; Constable, 2005; Oishi, 2005; Piper, 2003; Suzuki, 2003). However, Takeshita (2010) and Kudo (2011) focus on the increase in Japanese women's spouse choices from Muslim countries, especially from Pakistan and Iran. Takeshita (2010) demonstrates that the number of Pakistani and Iranian husbands have increased by 86,1% and 154,9% respectively from 1995 to 2000. This portrays a shift and diversification in Japanese women's foreign spouse choices although Japanese men's spouse choices remain focused on East Asian spouses.

Decision making for marriage includes many factors at different levels and priorities in spouse choices diverge greatly from one individual to another. This process is rendered even more complex with transnational marriages as foreign spouse choices for Japanese women and Japanese men are different in composition. In terms of Japanese men's choices of foreign spouses socio-economic factors play an important role, the high rate of Chinese and Filipina spouses are closely related to increasing marriage migration from Asian countries to Japan. Single Japanese men living on the countryside are having difficulties finding Japanese wives due to their social status and residence in the rural which is less preferable for contemporary Japanese women, who prefer to live in urban areas and pursue careers (Nakane, 1967). Being a farmers' wife or living in rural areas with the husband's parents according to the *ie* system is quite demanding and is a task Japanese women are no longer willing to carry on. Consequently, Japanese government has launched assistance agreements with neighboring countries to find Asian spouses for these men and today many of these foreign brides come from China, Philippines, Korea, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

In terms of Japanese women's foreign spouse choices, traditional roles projected on them by Japanese society and its incompatibility with modern lifestyle choices plays an important role. This is closely related to the gender based division of labor in traditional Japanese household for which men are breadwinners and women bear the housework with the responsibility for taking care of their husband. This has become a burden for Japanese women who are still expected to be full-time housemakers on top of their professional employment. Furthermore, Japanese women's social upward mobility through western foreign spouse choices seem to also play an important role. This upward mobility is motivated especially by the willingness to escape discrimination faced in the workplace and within society (Borovoy, 2005). On the other hand, according to Kudo's (2007) research, Japanese women's choices of

non-western Pakistani husbands is largely based on qualities attributed to these Muslim men as being; honest, kind, caring and very much family oriented. Thus more involved with the household compared to traditional Japanese husbands. Under this framework, the divergence in Japanese men's and women's foreign spouse choices is best explained by their differing approach to marriage and priorities in marital life choices.

There are many different patterns of interaction within families in different countries, cultures and religions, and their blending through transnational marriages often lead to rise of conflicts in the process of cohesion. These conflicts are either overcome by different modes of negotiations among spouses or leads to divorces. This paper has focused on the negotiations and adaptation process that sum up to make Turkish - Japanese transnational marriages work.

The first section of the paper demonstrates the diversity in terms of Japanese men's foreign spouse choices and Japanese women's foreign spouse choices as outlined above. Under this section, the example of Turkish spouses is used in order to emphasize the diversity within Muslim spouses. Turkey presents a moderate Islamic model that is culturally proximate to the west due to its geographic allocation and historical close relations with Europe dating from the Ottoman era, stretching to present date with close economic ties with the European Union.

The second section of the paper presents the ethnography of Turkish – Japanese couples based on field research conducted in both Turkey and Japan with Turkish – Japanese couples. Three topics are chosen for this section; Japanese spouses' impressions on and approaches to Turkish culture, the role and attitude of in-laws towards their children's transnational marriages and negotiations in the bi-cultural child rearing process of these transnational marriages.

There is a great variety in the negotiation mechanisms that Turkish – Japanese couples have developed throughout their marriage years, and gender roles assigned by both societies seem to play an important role in the creation and maintenance of the balance of power within these transnational families. One common point to all spouses interviewed for this research was the awareness of the necessity to make cultural concessions in order to make their transnational marriage work. The aim of this research is to examine the mechanisms created by these transnational couples in order to balance their cultural differences and overcome their transnational marital problems.

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