

Intermarriage between Nepali Migrant Men and Citizen Women in Japan

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Introduction

In Japan, like Korea and Taiwan, during the last two decades rates of cross-border or international marriages have risen rapidly. By 2005 the rate was 5.8 percent, tripling from 1.7 percent in 1985. A major cause of the increase is attributed to a chronic shortage of brides which has prompted international match making services to provide Japanese men with the means to marry women from economically less developed Asian countries (Sadamatsu 2002; Nakamatsu 2003). Meanwhile, an influx of migrant workers from neighbouring countries has also contributed to an increasing number of such marriages between local citizens and foreign nationals (e.g., Piper 1997; Suzuki 2000). In the context of Japan's rigid immigration and visa policies, marriage to a local citizen constitutes a strategy for migrant women and men to achieve legal and economic security. This indicates the importance of analyses of processes in which a labor migrant becomes a citizen's spouse while contributing to local industry as a worker.

Recent statistics, however, reveal complex patterns of cross-border marriages that vary by gender, class, nationality (ethnicity) and place of marriage registration. In 2004, 78 percent of the international marriages registered within Japan (n=39,511) occurred between citizen males and immigrant females, mostly from China, Philippines and other Asian countries (Nihongo Kyoiku Shimbun 2006: 20-21). By contrast, in the same year, 85 percent of the international marriages registered abroad (n=8,903) entailed Japanese females marrying males from the United States and a wide range of other countries. Thus, for Japanese, cross-border marriage is a phenomenon sharply divided by gender and country of registration.

The high proportion of international marriages between citizen males and Asian immigrant females in Japan explains the fact that most studies on Japanese international marriages focus on such couples.¹ These women comprise two categories of immigrants. The first is those women who had been working on short-term contracts as entertainers in bars and clubs where they met their future husbands (e.g., Suzuki 2000). The second is those women who met their future husbands through introduction in the women's homelands and later arrived in Japan as their spouses (e.g. Nakamatsu 2003). Existing studies have examined demographic, social and economic contexts of such marriages, and of family relations and social adaptations among immigrant wives (Kojima 2001; Sadamatsu 2002; Suzuki 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, this volume; Nakamatsu 2003, this

¹ The word, "Asian," here refers to countries in Asia other than Japan.

volume; Burgess 2004; Satake 2004). These studies reveal that behind the increasing number of exogamous marriages there are diverse individual and structural forces that shape motivations, expectations and desires of each sex (see also Piper and Roces 2003; Constable 2005).

In recent years, there has been a numerically smaller, but gradually increasing, incidence of marriages between partners of the reverse combination of sex and citizenship: that is, Japanese women and Asian men of various nationalities. A majority of these men arrived in Japan in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s with short-term visas (such as those issued for tourists, students and business personnel) and remained in the country after their visas expired. They came from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, Thailand and Nepal, among many other Asian countries. They met their future wives, while working in labor short industries (i.e., manufacturing, construction and service), and have subsequently married them and lived in Japan as legal residents.

The growing incidence of such unions has led Japanese researchers to investigate marriages between these Asian men and Japanese women. Most of the existing studies concentrate on couples comprising Pakistani husbands and Japanese wives (Terada 2001, 2003; Takeshita 2001, 2004; Fukuda 2004, 2006, In press; Kudo 2000, 2002; 2005a, b). They discuss occasions on which couples met, the legal procedures required to normalize a husband's visa, principal economic activities of husbands, and cultural adaptation of Japanese wives to husbands' Islamic religion. While shedding light on this largely neglected type of cross-border marriage, most of these studies investigate couples in which the majority of husbands came from one specific country (e.g., Pakistan), and practiced a distinct religion (e.g., Islam). Most couples in these studies lived in Japan's Kanto Region, including the Greater Tokyo Metropolitan Areas. This has left a void in studies of couples comprising Japanese wives and Asian husbands of other nationalities and residing in other regions.

In this article, I intend to contribute to filling that void by offering a case study of intermarriages between Japanese women and Nepali migrant men who live in the Tokai Region of central Japan. The study is based on interviews with five such couples conducted between December 2005 and January 2007. Like the Pakistani men discussed above, all but one Nepali man in my study had overstayed their visas while working as temporary laborers in manufacturing industries. Their marriage to Japanese women was thus deeply intertwined with their experiences as foreign workers who were in demand by the local industry but were denied their rights by the government. I therefore pay special attention to social processes of alienating these Asian men as 'others,' despite the fact that they are married to Japanese and are therefore legal residents. The article begins with discussions of perspectives on cross-group marriage and gendered patterns of intermarriages in Japan, and proceeds to analyses of marriages between Nepali men and Japanese women in Tokai.

Results from this study suggest three major points: (1) the importance of examining effects of growing transnationalism among Japanese, especially the chances that young women, have to meet and marry non-Japanese men; and (2) continuing socioeconomic insecurity of immigrant husbands as temporary workers in the local industries that rely heavily on them. The study also identifies various forms of bureaucratic and everyday discrimination against foreign nationals, especially those from less developed countries. In the face of such institutional barriers, internationally married

couples adopt a variety of strategies to counter them. This study thus describes: (3) forms of everyday resistance and personal agency that each partner develops to empower him/herself. I conclude the article with a discussion of the policy and research implications for communities and societies that are rapidly becoming multicultural at the grassroots.

Assimilation, Hypergamy and Transnational Networks

Marriage between individuals of two different nationalities, ethnicities or ‘races’ (henceforth intermarriage) provides insight into social relations between the two populations. In most human societies, endogamy is the common practice. If a significant proportion of marriages occur across group boundaries, it signifies changes in inter-group relations and in the societies in which such relations are embedded. Thus, to some American sociologists, rates of intermarriage indicate changing levels of assimilation into the dominant culture achieved by immigrants or ethnic minority groups (Gordon 1964). For example, a high incidence of intermarriage between non-Hispanic white men and Asian women in the United States has generated many studies. Implicit in these studies is the assumption that the more highly educated and skilled Asians have become, the closer the contacts they have had with the dominant white group, thus increasing the chances of intermarriage between the two groups (Sung 1990; Lee and Yamanaka 1990; Lee and Fernandez 1998). However, that assumption does not explain why there remains a large gender gap in the rates of intermarriage between Asians and whites (Shinagawa and Pang 1986).

Another term that is often used in analyses of intermarriage is “hypergamy.” This concept is derived from the caste system of Hindu India. There, endogamy among ranked castes is generally required, but within some castes there are ranked sub-castes that require or expect women to marry men of higher rank than their own. This, scholars have termed hypergamy. The reverse (women marrying men of lower status than their own) is often called “hypogamy.” There have been many inconclusive debates over the concept and the words that describe it.²

As has been discussed above, in East and Southeast Asia, where economic globalization has increased contacts among people across national and ethnic boundaries, rates of intermarriage have risen significantly. There, the majority of intermarriages occur between men from ‘rich’ countries (such as Japan) and women from ‘poor’ countries (such as the Philippines). In their analyses of such patterns of intermarriage in Asia, Constable (2005) and her colleagues (e.g., Oxfeld 2005; Freeman 2005) employ the concept they call, “global hypergamy,” but they find it useful “only insofar as it can be used to raise questions rather than to foreclose on them” (Constable 2005:10).

A question then arises: in cases where women from rich countries marry men from poor countries, are such marriages to be labelled “global hypogamy”? I believe that such economic generalization ignores, first, women’s agency in pursuing their goals, and

² Since the 1940s, American sociologists (e.g., Davis 1941; Merton 1941) have applied the concept in attempting to explain black-white interracial marriages in the United States. For a review and empirically grounded critiques of these studies, see Rosenfeld 2005.

second, the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of women that define their position in societal and historical contexts.

At the same time, contrary to the assimilationist assumption that it is the narrowing of inter-group gaps that increases the chance of contacts between groups, in present day Japan the social distance between citizens and immigrants seems to be widening. This is partly because the media often portray immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, as dangerous criminals (e.g., Yamanaka 2003a). Moreover, immigrant workers are concentrated in small factories where the workforce is segregated by gender, class and nationality. As a result, immigrants tend to remain isolated from mainstream Japanese society.

I argue that a key to understand intermarriage between Japanese women and immigrant men rests in the intersections of transnational social networks: (1) one such network that exists among Asian labor immigrants (for example, Nepalis in Japan) that links them among themselves and to their families in their homelands, and (2) the other is one that connects Japanese tourists, students and workers, especially young women, to people in all parts of Asia and beyond. As I have discussed elsewhere (Yamanaka 2000a, 2003b, 2005, in print), Nepali migrants are highly global in search of economic opportunities while maintaining close ties with their families and communities in Nepal. At their overseas destinations, Nepalis actively participate in community affairs to enhance solidarity and autonomy among themselves while preserving their cultures away from home.

During recent decades, Japanese have been equally transnational. Their economic and social ties across borders are expanding rapidly with Japan's global economy and the transnational activities that accompany them. Following Yamashita (in print), I emphasize that young Japanese women are spearheading overseas tourism, study abroad and international careers. They pursue their goals actively outside of Japan when they find it difficult to pursue them in Japan. These goals include tourism to exotic countries, mastery of a foreign language, acquisition of a higher academic degree and establishment of a professional career. In so doing, Japanese women interact with people at their destinations and exchange goods and information across national borders, thereby building extensive formal and informal social networks around the globe.

According to Pries (2001a), recent technological advancement has uncoupled geographic and social spaces that once were located within the territories of nation-states. The constant circulation of people, goods and information throughout the globe has given rise to new "transnational social spaces" (Pries 2001a, b) in which migrants, travellers and their families are able to interact frequently with one another and at the same time establish familiar economic and residential bases in multiple places across borders. As my research reveals below, it is the opportunities and resources embedded in such transnational social spaces and information networks that have enabled Nepali men and Japanese women to encounter each other and later tie the knot.

Gendered Intermarriage in Japan

In this article, intermarriage is defined as a formal union of man and woman in which one partner is a non-citizen. It comprises two combinations of sex and citizenship: (1) citizen male and non-citizen female; or (2) citizen female and non-citizen male. A

non-citizen spouse can be: (1) a resident, either documented or undocumented; or (2) a marriage migrant who arrives with a spousal visa.

Since the 1990s, in Japan the rate of cross-border marriage has risen rapidly (see Table 1). It doubled from 1.7 in 1985 to 3.5 in 1997, and more than tripled to 5.8 in 2005 (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2007).³ Breakdowns of these statistics by gender reveal that 79.8 percent of total intermarriages in 2005 occurred between citizen males and non-citizen females.⁴ In the same year, three nationalities of immigrant wives accounted for 83.8 percent: Chinese (35.2 percent), Filipino (30.9 percent) and Korean (18.3 percent). In contrast, immigrant husbands' nationalities were more evenly spread among Korean (24.9 percent), American (18.5 percent), Chinese (12.1 percent), British (4.1 percent) and Brazil (3.1 percent). The largest proportion (32.7 percent) was accounted for by a category designated, "Other," that combines all nationalities that were not listed individually.

Furthermore, the average age at the first marriage for each spouse varies widely by the sex of the Japanese spouse. In 2005, for the couples comprising Japanese husbands and immigrant wives, the average age at the first marriage was 38.6 for the husbands and 28.1 for the immigrant wives (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2007). The ten-year age gap between the spouses is considerably larger than 1.6-year age difference between the endogamous Japanese spouses at their first marriage in the same year (29.6 for husbands and 28.0 for wives). In contrast, for the couples comprising immigrant husbands and Japanese wives, the spousal age gap is within a year on the average (30.1 for immigrant husbands and 29.1 for the Japanese wives).

These statistics on internationally married couples clearly indicate gender as a key institution in explaining causes, processes and consequences of their marriages. The above statistics also reveal different meanings and significance attached to intermarriage by each sex and its families. The majority of Japanese husbands have chosen their wives from a small number of neighbouring countries that share common historical and cultural ties with Japan (such as China and Korea). This suggests that they and their families desire a woman as wife and daughter-in-law who accept the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal marriage prevailing in Japan. Typically, in such a marriage division of labor is clearly defined for husband and wife, assigning a breadwinner role to him and a reproductive role to her (Suzuki 2005, this volume; Wang and Tien this volume; Ableman and Kim 2005). Moreover, the fact that Japanese husbands are on the average ten years older than their immigrant wives, indicates that husbands enjoy triple advantages over their wives based on their citizenship, culture and seniority.

Compared to 'traditional' images of marriage between Japanese husbands and immigrant wives (as discussed above), the statistics on marriage between Japanese wives and immigrant husbands do not provide a clear view of their "marriage-scapes"

³ In Korea, it was 3.7 in 2000 and 13.6 in 2005. In Taiwan, it was 24.8 in 2000, 31.9 in 2003 and 20.1 in 2005 (see Table 1).

⁴ The percentage of marriage between such couples is 72.2 in 2004 in Korea (Seol this volume) and 94.4 in 2005 in Taiwan (Kung this volume).

(Constable 2005: 4)⁵. First, the nationalities and other demographic characteristics of more than 30 percent of husbands are not reported in the government statistics.⁶ Second, the wide range of nationalities of immigrant husbands itself demonstrates the fact that the couples met on a variety of occasions in Japan as well as many other parts of the world. This is well supported by the 2004 statistics that 85 percent of intermarriages registered abroad occurred between Japanese women and non-Japanese males (Nihon Kyoiku Shimbun 2005). This contrasts sharply with the two common ways in which Japanese husbands met their wives: through arrangement by international match making services (Nakamatsu this volume); or in bars and clubs where the wives worked as entertainers (Suzuki this volume). Third, the virtual absence of age difference at marriage between immigrant husbands and Japanese wives indicates that each sex is relatively free from social rules that guide individuals to a socially acceptable marriage.

In short, these discussions lead to a tentative conclusion that intermarriages between immigrant husbands and Japanese wives are much less traditional or passive in their marriage decision than those between Japanese husbands and immigrant wives. This observation is similar to what Constable found about women who married men in other countries in Asia. She wrote: “The paradox of such marriages is that while the men seek what they imagine to be traditional wives, the women often seek and hope for more modern husbands and marriages than are possible in their homelands” (Constable 2005:8).

I now turn to analyses of my case study to examine marriage experiences of Japanese women and their Nepali husband in Tokai.

A Case Study of Intermarriages between Nepali Men and Japanese Women Research, Site and Numbers

Between December 2005 and January 2007, I conducted a case study of intermarriages between Nepali men and Japanese women in industrial cities in western Shizuoka Prefecture and adjacent eastern Aichi Prefecture. These cities of varying populations comprise a large part of the Tokai industrial belt along the Pacific Coast. The main economic activities of the region revolve around the automobile manufacturing industry that, in turn, centres on several large multinational corporations including Toyota, Suzuki, Honda and Yamaha. Each of these corporations employs a dense hierarchal network of subcontractors that produce the automobile parts that will be assembled to become vehicles. Labor shortages are more severe the smaller the subcontractors are. This is because intensive labor and inferior working conditions characterize smaller subcontractors’ factories. Foreign migrant workers are employed in these establishments to fill the labor gap.

⁵ According to Constable (2005:4), cross-border marriages form “marriage-scapes that are shaped and limited by existing and emerging cultural, social, historical, and political-economic factors.”

⁶ *Statistics on Foreign Long-Term Residents*, published annually by the Japan Immigration Association, provides a breakdown by nationality of long-term foreign residents for the 27 visa categories issued by the Ministry of Justice, including the category, “spouse or child of a Japanese.”

In Tokai, with the special residence visas issued by the Japanese government for people of Japanese ancestry, large numbers of Japanese-Brazilians (and far fewer Japanese-Peruvians) work as temporary workers in bigger factories owned by larger subcontractors (Yamanaka 2000b; Roth 2002; Tsuda 2003). Most Asian workers are without Japanese ancestry, and therefore are undocumented, and as a result must work in factories owned by smaller-scale subcontractors where wages are lower and labor is more demanding (Higuchi and Tanno 2003).⁷

For more than ten years prior to this analysis, I studied migration experiences of undocumented Nepali migrants in the Tokai Area.⁸ Estimated at 500, the Nepali population in Tokai is small but is characterized by a strong sense of community that links members with one another and to their families in Nepal based on their shared nationality, ethnicity and interests (Yamanaka 2003b, 2005, in print). The majority of Tokai Nepalis belong to Tibeto-Burman language speaking groups from the Himalayan middle hills of western and eastern Nepal.⁹ Since the early nineteenth century men of these groups have served as foot soldiers in the British and Indian Armies. As overseas employment became available in the Middle East and East Asia, foreign military service has been replaced by dependence on remittance from the many males working abroad as global workers.

By the late 1980s, Japan was the most popular destination in Asia for Nepali migrants. According to Japanese immigration records, by the mid-1990s more than 4,200 Nepalis, mostly working age males, remained in the country by overstaying their visas. Almost all of them worked in the labor short industries in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area and the Tokai Area. They were usually hired by Japanese brokers who sent them as temporary laborers to the factories or construction projects where they were to actually labour. My analysis of the survey and interview data (Yamanaka 2000b) revealed that 70 to 80 percent of the Nepali men (and women) who participated in the study were married and remitted their savings to Nepal where their spouses and children lived.¹⁰ This enables me to estimate only a small proportion of the unmarried men available for marriage with local Japanese women in Tokai.

In Japan's exclusionary immigration policy, as stated above, marriage with Japanese is the only way through which an undocumented migrant can obtain a resident visa. Because of this, government officials and the general public tend to regard a

⁷ There is also a category of immigrant workers who enter Japan for three years as industrial trainees. Despite their title, most of them engage in taxing labor and are paid wages much lower than those for regular workers.

⁸ Between 1994 and 1998 I collected data based on interviews and surveys with a total of 189 migrant workers (159 men and 30 women) in both Japan and in their Nepalese homeland (for results, see Yamanaka 2000b). Since then until the present, I have continued research on the Nepali Tokai community by participating in community events and interviewing leaders and other individuals.

⁹ A small minority of Nepali migrants in Tokai include upper caste Hindus, such as Brahmans and Chettris. Another important Tibeto-Burman language speaking group present in Tokai is the Newar originally from the Kathmandu Valley, central Nepal.

¹⁰ A large proportion of married Nepali women in the study had joined their husbands in Japan, leaving their children in care of relatives in Nepal (Yamanaka 2005).

migrant's marriage with a Japanese as that of convenience. Within the Tokai Nepali community, the incidence of marriage between a Nepali man and a Japanese woman is also viewed with strong suspicion.

Despite the negative stereotype, the frequency of intermarriage between Nepali men and Japanese women has gradually increased in Japan throughout the 1990s and the 2000s. According to the annual *Statistics on Long-Term Residents* (Japan Immigration Association 2006), in 2005 a total of 6,953 Nepali nationals lived as long-term residents in Japan.¹¹ Among them, a total of 536 Nepalis possess a visa issued to a spouse or child of a Japanese (Table 2). This number includes both sexes and all ages. Fifteen years ago in 1990 there were only 96 Nepali nationals in this visa category. Moreover, Table 2 shows that between 1990 and 2005 the number of Nepali permanent residents also grew quickly. In 1990 it was only 18, increasing to 602 in 2005.

It should be explained here that the Ministry of Justice issues a spousal (*haigusha*) visa to a foreign spouse when the marriage is registered. A few years later the foreign spouse becomes eligible for a permanent (*eiijusha*) visa, provided the marriage is intact.¹² Many immigrant spouses prefer the permanent visa to the spousal visa, applying for it as soon as it becomes available.¹³ These statistics about Nepali spouses and permanent residents indicate that by 2005 a substantial number of intermarriages occurred between Japanese and Nepalis in Japan.¹⁴

Personal Profiles of Five Couples

The five Nepali husbands and their Japanese wives I interviewed in Tokai for this study were among those internationally married couples.¹⁵ All lived in cities that distributed widely between western Shizuoka and eastern Aichi. The Tokai Region, consisting of four prefectures (Shizuoka, Aichi, Gifu and Mie), has been the second most popular region in which to live among Nepalis in Japan. According to published statistics, the region was home to 26.2 percent of all Nepali legal residents in Japan (Japan Immigration Association 2006). The percentage represents an increase of eight percent since 1998. Although the Greater Tokyo Metropolitan Area has always been the

¹¹ Long-term foreign residents refer to those who stay in the country longer than 3 months.

¹² In case an intermarriage ends in divorce or a Japanese spouse dies, the immigrant spouse loses the status as spouse and is required to leave Japan. However, if the immigrant spouse has custody of a child from the marriage, he or she will be granted a long-term resident (*teijusha*) visa (Yamada et al., 1990).

¹³ A permanent visa allows a foreign national to stay in Japan indefinitely independent of his or her relationship to a Japanese (such as spouse).

¹⁴ A high proportion of Nepalis with a visa issued for a spouse or a child of a Japanese are men married to Japanese women. This is for two reasons; first, at birth most children born between Japanese women and Nepali men are registered as Japanese, and second, until 2005, Nepali women have accounted for less than 30 % of the total of Nepali long-term residents (see Table 2).

¹⁵ Details on interviews with the five couples are summarized in Appendix 1.

most popular place for Nepalis, a growing popularity of Tokai indicates the region's attractiveness to the Nepalis because of its strong manufacturing industry.¹⁶

In an interview I asked each couple about their history as a married couple, the main economic activity for each spouse, and institutional and cultural inequalities that the couple encountered in their daily lives.

Table 3 shows personal profiles of the five couples coded from A to E. Characteristically, all couples in my study were of working ages, from 31 to 42 for Nepali husbands, and 33 to 44 for their Japanese wives. Despite their relatively advanced age for marriage, this was the first marriage for each party of all five couples. The close ages of each couple in this study match the statistical finding that immigrant husband-Japanese wife couples tend to be close in age with one another. An exception is Couple B in which the wife is seven years older than her husband. These statistics substantiate my earlier observation that in their marriage decision couples comprising Japanese wives and immigrant husbands are relatively free from social rules that guide individuals to a socially acceptable marriage. However, their less traditional behaviour at the time of marriage may not necessarily result in their less traditional cultural practices in marriage, including conjugal relations and child raising patterns—a subject that lies beyond the scope of this study.

By the time of the interview, four husbands (A, B, C and D) had lived in Japan for between nine and 17 years. Prior to marriage, these men lived in Japan as undocumented migrants by overstaying their short-term tourist visas. In my previous research, Nepali migrant men held an average of 4.1 jobs over a period of 43 months (3.6 years) of residence (Yamanaka 2000b:83). The far longer years of stay by these husbands than the average has resulted in a greater than average familiarity with Japanese language and culture. They have also become highly skilled machinery operators.

Husband E was exceptional in that he had arrived as husband of his Japanese wife only two years prior to this interview. The couple had met on a Pacific island where both were working. Upon graduation from a junior college, the wife-to-be worked as an airline employee for seven years in the northern Japanese city where she had grown up. There she saved enough money to study twice in England in order to learn English. Upon her return to Japan she found a job as a tourist agent on an island where a majority of the tourists were Japanese. There she met her future husband through the introduction of a colleague. He was a Nepali who worked as an electrical engineer for a local company. They married on the Island. When wife E became pregnant, she returned to Japan to insure the safe delivery of their child. Her husband then return to Nepal where he awaited for his spousal visa issued a month later in Japan.

When I asked the other four couples where and how they had first met, they too cited social or occupational occasions that resulted from the intersection of Japan's globalized economy and transnational actions taken by Japanese citizens.

Couple A epitomized such a case of transnational encountering. Ten years prior to marriage, wife A, a professional graphic designer, travelled to Nepal with her friends. When she arrived in Pokhara, Nepal's principal western city, she and her friends hired a

¹⁶ In 2005, 56.8 percent of the total long-term Nepali residents lived in one of the four prefectures (Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo and Kanagawa) that comprise the Japan's largest metropolis.

local female trekking guide. Her husband-to-be was the guide's cousin. When his parents learned about the Japanese trekker from Tokyo, they asked her to carry a gift to their son who was working in Hamamatsu, a city 260 km southwest of Tokyo. She agreed to do so and upon reaching Tokyo, she delivered the gift. The son proved to be unmarried and of similar age. There followed a seven-year courtship that resulted in their marriage.

Likewise, several years before my interview, wife D, then a bank teller in a Tokai city, visited Nepal with her friends on holiday. Upon her return to Japan she heard of a ritual to celebrate Buddha's birthday to be held in a Buddhist temple in the area of her residence. The Japanese priest of the temple was a famed expert on Tibetan Buddhism, who had visited to Nepal many times. His Buddhist ceremonies attracted many Nepali migrants working in the area. As a spiritual leader, the priest helped the Nepali community fulfil its religious and social needs. Nepali husband E was one of those who occasionally participated in events held in the temple. He and his future Japanese wife met one April Sunday on Buddha's birthday. They were married there three years later.

The remaining two couples (B and C) also met their future spouses in the multiethnic workplaces that are common among small- and middle-sized factories in Tokai. Short of labour, some factory owners hire undocumented Asian workers through labour contractors who dispatch them upon request to the factories. Young to middle-aged Japanese women commonly work as clerks or accountants in the offices of factory managers and labour contractors. Wife B was a clerk in a labor broker company that hired temporary workers, including undocumented immigrants. There she met her future Nepali husband as he came to pick up his monthly salary. Wife C also worked in the office of the factory where her future husband had been dispatched to work by his labour contractor.

When asked about parents' responses to their decisions to marry Nepali men, two Japanese wives reported that there had been strong familial opposition to the marriage. Wife A said that while her parents were supportive of her marriage, one of her cousins refused to meet her husband. Wife A observed that the cousin was prejudiced against men from 'poor' countries. If her husband to-be were American, she said, the cousin would have had no problem in accepting him. Wife C recounted her mother's negative response to the marriage proposal to her daughter from an undocumented migrant Nepali man. The mother was suspicious that he might be using her daughter to obtain a visa to stay in Japan. Husband C was determined to marry her. In his visit to her parents, he bowed deeply to them while saying, "Please give me your daughter." Soon the mother's opposition evaporated. The couple had the wedding in Nepal in the presence of his relatives and many of her immediate family members.

Three to six years after their weddings, four of the five couples were raising a child between the ages of one and four. This meant that the family life cycles of two of the wives, A and B, began when they were over 40 years old. Although their children were still pre-school age at the time of interview, all parents discussed education of the child at some length. Couple A thought it best to send their son to a private English medium boarding school in Nepal because they considered English language to be the key to his future success. Couples B, C and E each favoured Japanese school for their child.

Our conversation on their children's education led to one on the couples' future relocation and retirement. Their long-term plans revealed the fact that internationally married couples often constituted a transnational family whose life trajectories and opportunities transcended the border of one nation-state, in this case Japan or Nepal. For example, Wife A cited Malaysia and Britain as the countries that would be available for her family's relocation. This was because her husband was born in Malaysia in the 1960s when his father was serving in the British Army there. This entitled Husband A to the right of residence in both countries. Wife A also discussed a plan for the family to relocate to the husband's hometown, Pokhara, where the majority of his family still lived. As a self-employed graphic designer, using the internet for communication with her clients in Japan she would be able to work in Pokhara. Because of much the cheaper prices in Nepal than in Japan, she estimated that her household economy would be better off in Nepal.

Likewise, Husband C talked about future immigration to the United States. Several years previously his father, a banker, had been transferred from Kathmandu to a large American city on the East Coast where he continued to live with his wife (C's mother) and daughter (C's sister). Recently he had become a permanent resident and in a few years he will be eligible for U.S. citizenship. Upon acquiring citizenship, he would like to send for his son (Husband C) and son's family to America. Although immigration to America appealed to Husband C, at the time of interview he was not sure what he thought of such a plan because it would abruptly uproot his family from Japan while requiring them to start their lives anew in a strange country.

The remaining three couples (B, D and E) appeared to be determined to continue their lives in Japan. As will be discussed below, immigrant husbands and their wives often encountered institutional inequality and cultural discrimination in their daily lives. Despite such negative experiences, four of the five couples did not consider relocation to Nepal as an option. This was primarily because Nepal is perceived to be a developing country where living standards are much lower than in Japan. Its culture would be alien to Japanese wives while its economy would deny the family a bright future. However, when asked about their old age, some Nepali husbands favoured Nepal as the country where they would like to retire with savings earned from Japan.

Employment and Welfare

Marriage to a Japanese woman is in many ways a blessing for a formerly undocumented migrant man. Most importantly, his marriage enables him to reside and work legally in Japan as long as he remains married. My interviews with the five Nepali husbands, however, revealed that despite their legal visa status, their economic position had not yet substantially improved (Table 4). Among the four, only B was hired as a permanent employee. It was in the factory where he had worked for many years with all fringe benefits that came with his employment, including the Employee Social Security Plan that provides an employee with health insurance and an old age pension. Three to six years after their marriage, the remaining four husbands (A, C, D and E) were still temporary employees dispatched by their labor brokers. As a result, the four were neither entitled to fringe benefits nor to the Employee Social Security Plan. Only C was covered by a health care plan, offered by his labor contractor. Others (A, D and E) relied for their

health care on the National Health Plan open to the self-employed and others who are not employed.

A further look at B's permanent employment reveals the fact that his case was a lucky anomaly. The Nepali friend who introduced me to the couple reminded me that his wife's father owned a small factory in the same city as where his factory was located. It is likely that close business ties among local factory owners have obliged B's company president to hire him as a permanent employee.

Partly because the employment status of their non-citizen husbands was insecure, almost all wives in this study were continuously employed. Wife A worked at home as a self-employed graphic designer, while caring for her newly born son. Wife B helped her father as an office clerk in his factory to augment her family income. Wife C continued to be employed as a clerk in the management office of the factory where her husband also worked. Wife D served as a clerk for a charity organization. Only Wife E was not employed at the time of my interview, but she planned to work in a few months when her 3 year-old daughter would be enrolled in a day care program. All couples, but B, lived in rental apartments. Only couple B enjoyed home ownership—a newly built two-storied modern house. Three couples (B, C and D) had their wife's parents living in the same area as they, as a result of which they were in frequent contact with their in-laws.

During my year of research, however, economic activities of two of the couples changed. In January 2007 I found that couple D ran a small retail store that sold ethnic food and spices on weekends to mostly migrant customers. As the owner, husband D attended the store while maintaining his job in a factory. Similarly in March 2006, when I called wife E, she told me that the couple was planning to open a Nepali (and Indian) restaurant. When the business began, both husband and wife planned to work in it.

In immigration studies, it is commonly found that an immigrant employee moves up the occupational ladder by owning a small family business (e.g., Wong 1998). In recent years Tokai cities (such as Hamamatsu and Toyohashi) have witnessed the opening of Nepali restaurants and ethnic food stores. The two examples in my study indicate the strong desire of Nepali residents to establish themselves as self-employed rather than being factory employees.¹⁷ However, for Nepalis the choice of a business has been limited to a restaurant or ethnic food store. In Tokai cities, as more Nepali merchants have opened businesses, there is a growing competition among them.

Inequalities, Discrimination and Strategies of Counteraction

In interviews, my informants frequently referred to institutional and cultural inequalities that they had suffered before and after marriage. Most of their complaints revolved around three categories of problems: (1) complex legal and administrative procedures for marriage registration that began with legitimizing the husband's irregular visa status; (2) unequal employment and welfare systems that discriminate against husbands of foreign nationality; and (3) widespread Japanese racial prejudice against people from developing countries that have subjected them to negative stereotypes and practices.

¹⁷ A high proportion of Pakistani husbands of Japanese women become self-employed by trading used cars from Japan to customers in South Asia and the Middle East (Fukuda 2004, in press; Kudo 2005).

The first of these problems arose as soon as a couple visited the local immigration office of the Ministry of Justice to apply for a spousal visa for the undocumented fiancé. To some informants, the legal procedure was complex and humiliating, because it required submission of various official documents from the country of the foreign spouse, including a birth certificate and proof of one's unmarried status. In many rural areas of a developing country like Nepal, most of the required official documents, including birth certificate, simply do not exist. Moreover, since 1996 a civil war had been raging throughout the country, creating serious disruptions in the bureaucracy. As a result, acquisition of official documents was a difficult and time-consuming at best.

After having satisfied all administrative requirements for legal marriage and residency, the international couples then faced the exclusion of the Nepali husband from the necessary Japanese family registry. By definition a family registry (*koseki*) includes only Japanese nationals.¹⁸ Upon marriage a Japanese spouse establishes his or her new family registry in which the non-Japanese spouse's name is recorded as a footnote. Moreover, on the residence card (*juminhyo*) that is issued to the head of every household, nowhere does a foreign spouse's name appear. This is because the Ministry of Justice is in charge of registering foreign residents, issuing each individual a foreign registration card (*gaikokujin toroku* card). As a result of the dual registration system, a non-Japanese spouse is likely to be left with a sense of alienation based on his or her foreign nationality. In my study, husband B expressed his frustration with the system by this ironic comment: "But it is I who pays the tax for my family to the state despite the fact that I am excluded from the family registry."

In addition, the Japanese government's assimilationist policy has created problems for internationally married couples when they attempt to register the birth of their child. For example, Couple B encountered great difficulty when they registered their new born son to the municipal office. The local administrators had never before dealt with registration of a child of an internationally married couple, and rejected their son's Nepali name as alien. They ordered the couple to obtain a letter from the Nepalese Embassy in Tokyo in order to prove the authenticity of his Nepali name. Once having accepted the son's name as legitimate, the local bureaucrats argued against the Japanese characters the couple had chosen to represent the Nepali name. The couple had to fight the uninformed local officials to get the characters of their son's name right. In the interview, wife B shared her emotion with me: "When I finally saw his name (correctly written) on his passport, I was so relieved that tears overflowed from my eyes."

As for employment, four Nepali husbands (A, C, D and E) continued to work in the factory as temporary employees dispatched by their labor brokers. Despite their legal status as residents, their factory owners did not hire them as regular full time employees with fringe benefits (such as annual and sick leaves, seasonal bonuses and social security for old age). This had been a serious concern to all husbands because they were raising their families and reaching middle age. For example, husband A had negotiated with his company for years in vain despite the fact that it often required him to work overtime and weekends. Similarly, husband C had requested his manager for regular employment. In response, the manager asked him if he had already obtained his permanent residency. He

¹⁸ See Yamada et al. 1990 for laws, administrative rules and procedures on international marriages.

had planned to apply for it when his spousal visa expired within the year. However, he and his wife (who worked in the same company) were not confident of the company's willingness to promote him, even if he obtained his permanent residency.

In their daily lives, my respondents constantly encountered many forms of "racial" and ethnic bigotry. These appeared in everyday conversation and interaction with work colleagues, friends and neighbours. According to Husband C who often spoke of Japanese racism, his Japanese colleagues constantly reminded him of his foreign origin by making exclusionary remarks against him. His anger and frustration were palpable. In his words: "The Japanese always erect a wall around them to isolate me from them although I work closely with them and frequently go out with them after work. They say, 'Oh, C, sorry, sorry, you are a foreigner and do not understand Japanese ways of thinking.'" Likewise, Wife B received it as a grave insult that she was repeatedly asked by her Japanese acquaintances about remittances to her husband's family in Nepal. "When I married him, I made it clear that no money was to be sent to Nepal. This is because, as a couple, we must save money for our life here in Japan. But Japanese are bigoted against people from a poor country, repeatedly asking 'How much money do you send to Nepal every month?' This hurts me."

While feeling vulnerable in the face of everyday racism, my informants also combated it by empowering themselves with a variety of resources available to them. For Nepali husbands, a source of personal strength was their pride in being recognized as hard working, honest individuals, highly valued by their Japanese employers. Although they possessed little power to improve their marginal employment status, these men were well aware that they and many other undocumented foreigners contribute significantly to the local economy that in fact relies heavily upon them. This in turn created a small but dynamic space for them to individually negotiate with their employers for the wages and other working conditions. Wife A made this comment when she discussed a series of temporary jobs her husband had taken in the past ten years: "My husband and his fellow Nepali workers are very proud. They would not work for employers who do not respect their skills and experience. They say that they are supporting the Japanese economy from the bottom. Without us, they declare, many local factories would go broke."

Similarly, Japan's rapidly changing demography gave powerful ammunition to Husband C when he encountered racist remarks by his Japanese colleagues. In recent decades, Japanese of both sexes have postponed marriage until their late twenties. As statistics show that average ages at marriage were 29.6 for men and 28.0 for women in 2005. This means that significant numbers of Japanese men and women remain unmarried until their middle age. In his workplace, Husband C found most of his Japanese male colleagues to be still unmarried and co-living with their parents in their thirties and forties. By contrast, C was married at 27 and became a father at 28. He shared with me his self-vindication in the face of his bigoted colleagues; "I tell them (whenever they exclude me): "You guys are not even married. Even a small worm would reproduce itself. You are worth very little."

Likewise, wife B pointed to their new house saying to me: "We have built this house to combat neighbour's prejudice against us." She also informed me that her husband participated in the middle-aged men's club (*sonenkai*), a branch of their neighbourhood association (*chonaikai*). In Japan's impersonal urban life, not every household participates in community activities sponsored by the neighbourhood

association. Husband B's membership to its core branch thus sent a powerful message that he was a legitimate and willing member of their neighbourhood.

When I asked if there was a group, network or association of internationally married couples for socializing and solving common problems, each couple told me that there was none at the time of interview. However, two wives expressed their interest in such a group. Wife A told me that there had been informal talk among Japanese wives of Nepali men to establish an association. The idea has not yet materialized. Wife B showed some interest in such an association when she talked about her friendship networks. She said: "I share my family concerns with Japanese wives of Nepali men far more than I do with other Japanese women I know. I can talk with Nepali wives on our relatives and customs in Nepal. But I cannot bring these topics to other women."

Conclusion

This analysis of internationally married couples comprising Nepali husbands and Japanese wives demonstrates that their marriages are products of Japan's highly globalized economy and its resultant increasingly multiethnic population and culture. The concept of transnational social spaces proves to be useful in explaining how cross-border activities of a wide range of people, including migrants, travellers and professionals, interact freely with one another, establishing new relationships and subsequently economic and familial bases in multiple sites around the globe. The international couples discussed here are active participants in such transnational social spaces as multiethnic workplaces, cross-cultural social events, international tourist destinations, study abroad programs, etc., pursuing their desires and hopes for more desirable spouses and educational and occupational opportunities of broadening horizons.

The study also reveals that Japan's globalized work force is highly 'racialized' based on nationality and ethnicity of workers. The fact that four of the five Nepali husbands were denied regular employment by their companies indicates that the legality of their residence did not make a difference to the companies. What does make a difference in their hiring practice is that the Nepali men are foreign-born, thereby comprising a vulnerable workforce without citizenship. However, citizenship as a bastion of individual rights does not help at all in the reality of Japan's well-established pattern of gender segregation in employment (e.g., Brinton 1993). Being a Japanese national does not protect women from labor exploitation. Moreover, the increasingly competitive economy has forced employers to hire more temporary workers than ever before. The recent change in law that has relaxed the use of dispatched workers no doubt facilitated this trend. According to the latest statistics, one quarter of Japanese workers aged between 25 and 34 years do not have regular employment (Asahi Shimbun 2007). For non-Japanese workers, foreign nationality contributes to permanent disadvantage as in the case of Nepali men who are otherwise recognized to be good workers.

This study has a number of implications for policy makers and the general public. Most importantly, it points to the importance of recognition that Japan is already a multiethnic and multicultural society. Increasing intermarriage rates and resulting growing numbers of multiethnic families provide concrete testimony to that fact. The extent of increasing multiculturalism may go even deeper and wider than what such statistics may suggest. As the five couples' marriages described here have shown, the constant circulation of people, goods and information across borders are rapidly

expanding people's social spaces and changing their identities in everyday practice. It is important to emphasize that this is happening not only in major metropolitan areas such as Tokyo but in smaller cities as well. The burgeoning multiculturalism requires the state to address the changing meaning of Japan's nationhood, and to reform the nationality-based family registration and social welfare provisions. It also requires Japanese citizens to come to terms with the reality that Japan is home to more than 2 million foreign nationals who live among them as neighbours, work with them as colleagues and share in employment, education and recreation. They are no longer strangers but equal members of families, communities and the nation.

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Table 1: Percentage of Marriages in which One Partner is Immigrant in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, 1985-2005

Year	Japan	South Korea	Taiwan
1985	1.7	n/a	n/a
1990	3.5	1.2	n/a
1995	3.5	3.4	n/a
2000	4.5	3.7	24.8
2001	5.0	4.8	27.1
2002	4.7	5.2	28.4
2003	4.9	8.4	31.9
2004	5.5	11.4	23.8
2005	5.8	13.6	20.1

Source: For Japan, from 1985 to 2003: Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2004; for 2004, Nihon Kyoiku Shinbun 2005; for 2005, Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2007. For South Korea, Seol this volume. For Taiwan, Tien and Wang this volume.

Tale 2: The Number of Nepali Long-Term Residents in Japan, 1990-2005

Year	Total N of Long-Term Residents	Females	Spouse and Child of a Japanese	Permanent Residents
1990	447	101	96	18
1991	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1992	676	145	117	21
1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1994	1,056	242	157	31
1995	1,314	311	176	37
1996	1,671	386	211	53
1997	2,173	498	261	63
1998	2,836	687	321	67
1999	3,212	800	372	90
2000	3,649	933	413	141
2001	4,081	1,125	456	184
2002	4,593	1,315	439	275
2003	5,181	1,531	452	370
2004	5,929	1,792	472	500
2005	6,953	2,057	536	602

Source: Japan Immigration Association 1991-2006.

Table 3: Personal Profiles of Five International Couples

Couple's Name Code	A	B	C	D	E
Age	H: 42 W: 42	H: 37 W: 44	H: 31 W: 32	H: 35 W: 34	H: 32 W: 33
Arrival Year (duration)	1989 (17)	1989 (17)	1997 (9)	1992 (14)	2004 (2)
Purpose of Arrival	Employment	Employment	Employment	Employment	Marriage
Visa before Marriage	Overstay	Overstay	Overstay	Overstay	n/a
How the couple met	Wife met relatives of future husband in Nepal	At work	At work	Met in Buddha's birthday celebration	Met while working abroad
Year of Marriage (duration)	2002 (4)	2001 (5)	2000 (6)	2002 (3)	2003 (3)
Children (age)	1 (1)	1 (4)	1 (3)	No child	1 (3)

Table 4: Employment and Welfare of Nepali Immigrant Husbands

Couple's Name Code	A	B	C	D	E
Husband's occupation	Factory Worker	Factory Worker	Factory Worker	Factory Worker	Factory Worker
Husband's employment status	Temporary employee	Regular employee	Temporary employee	Temporary employee	Temporary employee
Husband's social security	No	Yes	No	No	No
Husband's health insurance	National Health Insurance	Workers' Health Insurance from his company	Workers' Health Insurance from his broker	National Health Insurance	National Health Insurance
Wife's occupation	Self-employed professional	Office clerk	Office clerk	Office clerk	Not employed

Appendix: Interviews with the Five Couples

I had known Couple A prior to this study. I met the remaining couples through a Nepali friend in common. The time and place for interview with each couple is detailed below.

Couple's Name Code	A	B	C	D	E
Date of Interview	December 25, 2005	March 12, 2006	1. March 26, 2006 2. January 8, 2007	1. March 26, 2006 2. January 14, 2007	December 25, 2005
Place of Interview	The couple's apartment	The couple's house	1. Nepali restaurant 2. Nepali restaurant	1. Nepali restaurant 2. The couple's apartment	The couple's apartment
Interview Participant	Husband and wife	Husband and wife	1. Husband 2. Husband and wife	1. Husband 2. Husband and wife	Husband and Wife