CHAPTER EIGHT

COMMERCIALLY ARRANGED MARRIAGE MIGRATION: THE AGENCY AND INNER STRUGGLE OF CHINESE WOMEN

Hao Hongfang*

INTRODUCTION

In Japan, commercially arranged marriage, also called international marriage through a broker, started around the 1980s (Shukuya 1988) and continues today, although the local government’s mediation at the beginning was replaced by marriage broker companies.

The commercially arranged marriage discussed in this chapter follows this process: 1) A Japanese man contacts the broker company and chooses a woman he would like to date; 2) The man asks the woman if he can date her; 3) If the woman agrees, then they start communicating under translation of brokers through letters, e-mail or internet telephone service; 4) The man goes to China to visit her; 5) They date and become engaged if both agree; 6) The man returns home and they continue communicating as before; 7) The man visits China again for the wedding ceremony; 8) The woman obtains a visa, comes to Japan and the couple begin living together as husband and wife in Japan.

This chapter looks at examples of Chinese women who have moved to Japan through those marriages and, by looking at the stories behind their immigration as well as their life in Japan, analyzes the inner struggle and agency of those women, a point mostly overlooked in previous studies.

Section 1 of this chapter offers an overview of previous studies on this subject in Japan. In Section 2, the research method and the viewpoint of the author are explained, and the interviews with three Chinese women are explored in detail. In Section 3, the agency and inner struggles of the marriage migrants revealed in each interview are analyzed and conclusions are drawn.

* Translated by Emily A. Sato and John E. Burton
1. THE REPRESENTATION OF “ASIAN WIVES” IN JAPAN

This section reviews research conducted in Japan on international marriage, and critically examines the characteristics of studies of “Asian wives.” Most studies of international marriage in Japan concern “wives.” Saihan Juna (2006) classifies these studies by type of marriage into the following three categories: “Western wives marrying Japanese husbands,” “Japanese wives marrying foreign husbands,” and “Asian wives,” who are from other Asian countries, marrying Japanese men.

According to Saihan Juna, there are few studies focusing on Western wives marrying Japanese husbands. Those that do exist include a study of the division of labor by gender (Imamura 1990) and studies of cultural differences and adaptation to different cultures (Nitta 1992; Diggs 2001; Shibusawa 1994; Sato 1989). In these studies, “differences between Japanese society and the wives’ societies of origin are emphasized as a premise” and the focus is placed on “issues of maladjustment when a woman encounters a different culture and communication difficulties” (Saihan Juna 2006: 78).

On the other hand, there is a rich vein of studies of Japanese wives marrying foreign husbands. The topics of these studies include: Japanese women and international marriage during the period of national isolation and the Meiji Period (Koyama 1995; Takeshita 2000; Kamoto 2001); “war brides” who married US military servicemen after World War II and went to live in the US; Japanese in the days when Taiwan was a Japanese colony (Takeshita 2000; Sakaoka 2004) ; inter-religious marriages; and studies of the wives of US servicemen as an extension of studies on “war brides.” These studies of Japanese wives “focus on the processes and patterns of adaptation to the husband’s culture, religion, lifestyles, and, if the wife lives abroad, her assimilation into the host society” (Saihan Juna 2006: 80).

Studies of marriages between “Asian” (for example, Chinese or Filipina) women and Japanese men have mostly been conducted in the area studies of regional sociology and rural sociology, and more recently in psychology. These studies mainly discuss international marriage from one or other of two perspectives: international marriage and its perception in the social context, or the adaptation of Asian wives. The former include a survey of local residents in Yamagata Prefecture by Matsumoto and Akitake (1994, 1995), a study of the changes in rural communities and ie (families/ households and the social consciousness surrounding them based on the Japanese family register system) accompanying international marriages by Utani (1998), and a report by Shukuya (1988) criticizing Japan for