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Mixed Marriage in Japan -the Feminist Critical Perspective and Regional Counterargument⁽¹⁾

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1 The Issue and its Backdrop

1-1 Introduction

Marriage in recent times is supposed to be based on the idea of the

⁽¹⁾ Part of this work has already been presented at the 3rd International Conference on Gender and Equity Issue on January 4-6, 2001 in Bangkok. I would like to thank Ms. Amporn Srisermbhok, dean of the faculty of humanities, Srinakarin Wirot University Thailand, who invited me to attend this conference to exchange research findings of recent gender studies in Asia and Western countries. I also thank Professor Yonemura Shoji, who organized the research project, 'Cultural Adaptation of Foreign Residents: Case Study of Foreign Labors and Marital Residents in Contemporary Japan', supported by a grant from the JSPS. My field research in Yamagata prefecture in 1998-9 was supported in part by a grant from his research and a short survey in the Philippines in March 1999 was from Professor Kajiwara Kageaki, who conducted a study, 'Residential and Traffic Problems in Metropolitan Manila'. Thanks are due to professors of the University of the Philippines for valuable advice about Filipinos' perspective for Mixed Marriage with Japanese.

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modern family ideology that free individual should marry by voluntary decision and mutual agreement. However, the sociology of family ironically shows that marriage is controlled by socio-economic factors, one of which is endogamy in class and ethnicity, and by individual tactics to promote social status by available partner's social resources.⁽³⁾ Of course, this is the sociological explanation of marriage from the viewpoint of reproduction of generation and society. For couples, in their subjective decision, marriage is the result of romantic love.

Though nowadays we cannot and/or would not like to imagine calculated marriage among couples, their family, and kin, several decades ago Japan had arranged marriages, in which bride and bridegroom looked at each other for the first time at their wedding ceremony. Parents of couples selected those whose house rank is corresponded to theirs and decided for their children. Those times, when family and clan took priority over the individual in marriage, are not so far off.

However, many people may be surprised by the fact that there are men who look for brides and married within a week with women from other countries in order to be regarded as a man, for their household to continue. Currently there are Japanese men marrying East/South East

⁽³⁾ The Japanese patriarchal family system, *Ie* and *Dozoku* (patrilineal household and household corporation between head and branch), reproduced themselves by the arranged marriage system between households of the same social status in feudal and pre-modern Japan. After W.W.II the old civil code, which included patrilineal household system was dissolved. Although the younger generation have preferred to love marriage and its ratio has exceeded arranged marriages, they seem to meet and love those from the same educational and social background. Love marriage is the result of personal choice, but its choice depends on social conditions of matching. We consciously and/or unconsciously reproduce family by marriage.

Asian woman through an introduction of a marriage broker.

This paper overviews the recent circumstances of mixed marriage⁽⁴⁾ in the Mogami district of Yamagata prefecture, then contributes some findings. Mixed marriage/international marriage perhaps contains two issues: 1) cultural conflict and acculturation caused by mixed marriage between different nations⁽⁵⁾; 2) national and local administrations' means of dealing with growing foreign migrants who came as laborers and brides for Japanese. Family sociology studies the former issues, and ethnicity research adds multi-cultural identity in local area to the latter. Both issues concern a legal procedure that foreign spouses get a residential license, and the several problems they face in their life and work. We cannot discuss recent mixed marriage in Japan simply by just one viewpoint, because it is too complex. Rather, it is important to consider it from several perspectives⁽⁶⁾.

⁽⁴⁾ In this paper 'mixed marriage' is used for the Japanese word 'Kokusai-Kekkon.' Of course, international marriage can also be used for this Japanese word. And 'inter-national' marriage seems to be a literal English translation, if we focus on nationality law and census registration. However, from the viewpoint of sociology, the concept of 'mixed' marriage includes those between races, nationalities, and persons of different culture and social order, thus it is wider than that of international marriage. Moreover, this case study places weight on a mixture of different family strategies between men and women, as well as industrialized societies and developing ones. And I have to add the historical fact that during colonial times, there were mixed marriages, but no international ones.

⁽⁵⁾ Samante, Filipino researcher studied Filipino-Japanese couples in Japan. She did not concern about this mixed marriage controversy, but found variables of causing marital dissatisfaction, communication-gap due to language problems. And an interesting finding is a variable of economic security to offer satisfaction to foreign spouses. Elena L. Samante, 'Filipino-Japanese couples: Communication Variables and Marital Satisfaction,' *Sikolohiya* 1-1: 1-11 1997, U. P. Philippine.

⁽⁶⁾ According to recent historical research on mixed marriage, Japan dealt with it not

1-2 The problem of “brides from Asia”

In the later half of the 1980's, the Japanese mass media paid attention to the fact that a local municipality in mountainous area introduced a non-Japanese spouse to a local young man, and reported this incident as “a bride from Asia.”⁽⁷⁾ In the first stage, Southeast Asian women from countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, and Sri Lanka were the majority of those from “Asia,” and later the number of South Korean and Chinese women surpassed them, accompanied by the more recent North-east Russian city of Vladivostok.

Such mixed marriages were mediated by brokers who collected brides and sent them to Europe, already known as “Mail Order Brides” in South East Asia. Moreover, A new labor law was acted in the Philippines in 1974, and it came to export manpower to foreign countries positively for foreign currency acquisition and as an unemployment measure. As a result, many workers have entered Japan on the pretext of entertainers and trainees, among whom there was the one that marries the Japanese.⁽⁸⁾

by nationality law (it was forced in 1899), but by temporary regulations of mixed marriage that strongly reflected the patrilineal family system. A Japanese woman could lose her rights and obligations as a Japanese if she married a foreign man, however, a Japanese man could not be allowed to marry into a foreign family. Conversely, a foreign woman could be Japanese if she married and a foreign man could if he married into a Japanese family. Itsuko Kamoto, ‘Historical and Sociological Types of “Kokusai-Kekkon,”’ *Japanese Sociological Review* 52-2 2001 pp.62-82

⁽⁷⁾ Mainichi Daily News 1988/4/12.

⁽⁸⁾ Asian migration, sometimes called a Diaspora by some Southeast Asian scholars, increased in the 1980s in Japan, whose economic boom generated a labor shortage in Japanese industry. This drew Asians migrants not only from Southeast Asia but also the Middle East. Among those, the number of Filipinos grew rapidly.

The number of Japanese men who married with non-Japanese women is 20,026 cases in 1990, which has increased about ten times since 1970. Most of their wives were the Korean, Chinese, and American in 1970 and Philippine women were 217. However, the number of Philippine women in 1990 were 5711 and Thai 1585, and their number had grown same amount until 1994⁽⁹⁾.

The reason that an international marriage was taken up by media is not that “Brides from Asia” came in the middle the 1980’s, but that the administration’s starting the international marriage mediation was considered “Advanced work” by other local administrations who worried

The Philippine growth index was 2.21 for 1985/80, 4.00 for 1990/85, 1.51 for 1995/90, and 1.26 for 1997/95, in contrast with the Asian totals, 1.08, 1.17, 1.12, 1.05. And the ratio of Philippine and Thai female were 85%, and 72% respectively, and 53.6% of the Asian total in 1997. As for Filipinos, their visa status are spouses and children of Japanese, and an extreme ratio of entertainers. Susumu Watanabe, ‘The Economic Crisis and Migrant Workers in Japan,’ *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 7-2, 3 1998 pp.238-243 For a bibliography of the Philippine migration, see *Migration From The Philippines, 1975-1995*, SMC 1996 And for the recent situation of Philippine migration and its act and management of government, see Benjamin V. Carino, *Filipino Workers on the Move: Trends, Dilemmas and Policy Options*, Philippine Migration Research Network 1998.

Filipino women, who have worked away from home as nannies and maids, are not lower class workers, but sometimes have bachelor degrees and are teachers, etc, however, they chose to go overseas due to higher salaries, which is several times higher than in the Philippine. See, Abraham D. Rasul, ‘The Phenomenon of Women Overseas Workers,’ *Solidarity* 141-142 1994 pp.86-91 Mixed marriages of the Philippine women is on the flip side of feminization of Philippine labor migration, which has causes in their economy structure, as well as the family system. For further details of gender problems in the Philippines, see Belen T. G. Medina, *The Filipino Family*, UP press 1991.

⁽⁹⁾ Takako Migiya, ‘Recent situation of mixed marriage couple in Japan and their juridical problems,’ Combined Office of Mogami Municipalities, p.4-7 (Japanese)

about “the Shortage of Brides” for successors of agrarian families. In short, “International Marriage” of farm village men was focused, even though the number of arranged marriages in the urban and rural area were almost the same.

At that time, an urban feminist, Kyoko Yadoya, wrote a book titled, “Brides from Asia.” She argued that the construction of the problem “Shortage of Brides” by local agrarian people is a legacy of the patriarchal family system that regards a woman as a tool for reproducing the successor of the household. And she criticized the fact that local people had not reflected enough on why even daughters of agrarian families do not like to marry with the eldest sons of patrilineal agrarian families, as a result they utilized “Asian Women” to accept the inferior status and traditional way of life of woman in local areas, paying as much two million fifty thousands yen for the commission fee to a marriage broker.⁽¹⁰⁾ Such discourse, which accused Japanese of discrimination

⁽¹⁰⁾ The argument over ‘Brides from Asia’ was introduced by an article in a Filipino newspaper, the Manila Chronicle (October 17, 1988), pointing out the negative side of international marriages, quoting internal documents of the criteria for selecting Filipinas: 1) high school graduate, 2) no experience of working in Manila and no knowledge of Japanese (this means not prostitutes), 3) aged between 18 and 25, 4) having no diseases, 5) no need for remittance to their families. Conversely, no special conditions were required of male applicants. This article stated, ‘The ideal bride is obedient, diligent and frugal -a doll. ---They are expected to be a good Japanese as soon as possible. Their pride in being Filipina is increasingly undermined.’ According to Cahill, press-coverage of intermarriages in Japan, focusing on rural areas, was overly negative and not balanced by the positive, successful marriages in urban areas. And it seemed to overlooked the government’s policy of importing labor, as well as simultaneously seeking to discourage illegal marriage brokerage and sex tourism. Desmond Cahill, *Intermarriages in International Contexts*, SMC 1990 pp.51-73

against “Women and Asia,” has been main criticism in discussing “Brides from Asia.”⁽¹¹⁾

⁽¹¹⁾ Although mixed marriages between Filipino women and Japanese men have been criticized by NGOs and human right advocates, referring to the negative side, and unbalanced treatment of women, as for intelligent Filipinos, they do not criticize just a Japanese, but point to the main cause of these mixed marriages in the Philippines. One of the professors at UP said, ‘as always, it is difficult to generalize. I am sure that in both arranged marriages as well as marriages of the heart, relationships can turn out both good and bad. In this sense, a quantitative sociological study to determine the profile of such marriages would probably be very informative. One reality of course, is that the poor economy in the Philippines will always play a major role in the decision of Filipina brides who come from low-income families to travel to and live in Japan. The social and cultural living conditions in Japan are of course quite different from the Philippines, and thus comprise a major factor in the long-term success of such arranged marriages. I would reflect that a substantial number of the lower-income Filipinos would eventually hope to be able to return to the Philippines with (or without) their husbands. Unfortunately, it is probably the lower-income groups who will have a much more difficult time adjusting to an industrialized society like Japan. Again, I think a quantitative study on the incidence of successful versus unsuccessful arranged marriages would be quite informative to policy-makers in the local and national government.’

I have to add the limitations of his comments due to his background. He is one of the UP professors who studied in Japan, and knows various dimensions of Japan and the Philippines. For the majority of Filipinos, as Dr. Samante wrote, ‘Japan will probably remain as being only good for its technology and business and little else.’ Samante, Elena L., ‘Philippine-Japan National perceptions from the 1900s to the Present: A Socio-Psychological Analysis,’ *Asian Studies* 29-1 1991 p.89

According to my document survey, there is a tendency of Philippine academic research to deal with psychological, cultural, and linguistic issues, such as marital satisfaction of mixed marriage couples; their language choice and communication gaps. There is little research directly concerning national relations between the Philippines and the Japanese in terms of human rights. This style could be of journalists, or it may be difficult for researchers to make comments like that, if

2 The shortage of brides in rural areas

2-1 The period of shortage of brides

The difficulty of searching for brides in rural area dates back 1) to the period between WW I and WW II, 2) after WW II, and the age of high economic growth since the 1960s.⁽¹²⁾ In the first period young women from rural areas went to Tokyo in search of jobs and marriage so that young farmers there lacked spouses. However, this problem was soon solved by the urban sprawl that diminished farmland. After WW II the deaths of millions of young soldiers, and internment in Siberia, caused an imbalance in the ratio of young men and women in rural areas. Thus young women could not easily find husbands, because they could not go to war-devastated cities as they had in the first period. This problem was also solved by rapid economic reconstruction. Recent marriage difficulties have continued since the end of the 1950s and it was said that in the 1960s rural parents talked about their son's marriage difficulties in casual conversation. The unwed ratio of men aged 30-34 in 1990 by district is, in order of severity, 1) mountain farm areas (unwed ratio over 35 years of age is 56.9%), 2) middle mountain farm areas (40.5%), 3) flatland farm areas and 4) city areas.

scholars were supported by Japanese grants and given opportunities for direct contact with those mixed marriage couples. Such mixed marriage are criticized by outsiders. Yet, they are not in the position of having no way to solve their family and economical problems. Regardless, those couples have already started their new lives. Just a criticism for the sake of journalism is meaningless.

⁽¹²⁾ Koji Mitsuoka, *Marriage Hardship and Aging Problems in rural Japan*, Mineruba, pp.5-46 1996 (Japanese)

2-2 Mountain rural communities

Marriage hardship for agricultural heirs is serious in mountain and middle mountain rural community areas, which account for 70% of Japan's area and 55% of communities. The Japanese government has tried in vain to develop these agricultural areas, which are disadvantaged in social capital, by the Mountain Village Promotion Act and Depopulated Areas Act. If farmers found opportunities for off-farm work, they gave up farming on small land with low productivity.

And with producer's rice price slashed, farmers growing rice, the only stable crop, are forced to adopt austere management. Such circumstances progressed causing young people to leave villages to pursue higher education, jobs and marriage, as a result of which depopulation became the most serious problem in rural areas.

Recently, the word 'indigenous' or 'spontaneous' development in rural areas has been popular in those areas, which are the attempts of local inhabitants to revitalize communities by use of natural and historical characteristic of areas, agriculture, forestry, the fishing and processing industry and tourism. Even when researchers and local administrations used this word, they advocated a protectionist policy to prevent the direct influence of the world agricultural product market and industrial economy. How will mixed marriages be considered when approached with this theory? Of course, the introduction of non-Japanese women as spouses to prevent depopulation cannot be regarded as indigenous development by communities. However, to what extent could the mobilization of human resources be politically and ethically allowed to protect such communities? As a last resort, is the mixed marriage of local government initiative and participating young farm heirs a desirable choice?

3 A Case Study of Mixed Marriage in Yamagata Prefecture⁽¹³⁾

3-1 The Case of Yamagata Prefecture⁽¹⁴⁾

In 1997 There were 4043 non-Japanese residents, of which 1211 were mixed marriage permanent resident women (600 in 1992). 526 were in

⁽¹³⁾ To examine the Filipino's perception of mixed marriage in Japan, especially of married women, as well as persons concerned in their home country, would require another research. Here, however, I would like to explain why our research team and I abandoned direct research of those people.

Initially we planned to do such research, and I was assigned the task of coordinating a research project in Yamagata prefecture. When I made a request at the provincial government office of Shinjo district and Okura village, officials indirectly refused to assist our project, explaining that they had conducted a numbers of projects for over ten years, which aimed at facilitating administration for foreign married residents so that they could settle in those regions. They have not been treated as foreigners, but as residents that are the same as Japanese. In addition, they complained of deterioration of married couples' privacy by such research that targeted mixed marriage as a social issue and academic problem. One official, kindly but sternly asked me whether our team planned to deal with it administratively and/or academically. If we were from Yamagata prefecture and staff of Yamagata University, we could meet their expectation. In fact, we were just researchers from outside, coming to collect data. Therefore, except for the officials mentioned, I just interviewed Japanese residents in those regions, asking how they associated with foreign residents in their daily lives and in community events.

⁽¹⁴⁾ School board of Yamagata Prefecture, *Wind from the World*, 1997 International Relations of the Planning division of Yamagata Prefecture, *Statistical Report of Foreign Permanent Residents In Yamagata Prefecture*, 1995, pp.22-24, 32-43 Kunihiko Matsumoto, 'Administrative Activities for Foreign Residents In Yamagata Prefecture,' Bulletin of Faculty of Humanity, Yamagata University, 1995 pp.79-118 Kunihiko Matsumoto and Kunika Akitake, 'Mixed Marriage in Community: Local Acknowledgement and Consciousness in Yamagata Prefecture I II,' Bulletin of Faculty of Humanity, Yamagata University, I 1994 pp.1-35 II pp.1-29 (Japanese)

Murayama district, 245 in Oitama, 226 in Shonai, and 214 in Mogami. The last district tends to attract attention in Yamagata prefecture because its village and municipal office of it initiated mixed marriage, however, recently official arrangement of marriage has disappeared due to the criticism by the mass media accusing them of buying brides from developing countries. There are actually more mixed marriages, some mediated by marriage brokers and some through personal introduction, in suburban areas rather than in actual mountain farming areas.

In the past decade the office of international relations in Yamagata prefecture has coordinated international exchange programs between foreign permanent residents including trainees, students, employers and foreign spouses. In 1997 both village and municipal governments and local volunteer groups in Yamagata prefecture established 1) five offices to provide information on official and legal procedures to obtain a resident license and consultation for medical care such as periodic physical examinations for children and; 2) thirty six branches of Japanese languages classes, most of whose teachers were trained through local volunteer training seminars.

According to the international relations officer of Yamagata prefecture, one of most important new tasks is to provide legal information for foreign spouses. They have to update their spouse visas every three years, and if their husbands die or they divorce each other, they have to change their status from 'spouse' to 'permanent resident'. They will lose their residential qualification in Japan without this procedure, which is not automatically changed by local government, but must be claimed for special reasons by the residents themselves. Besides, although they may have the right to claim estate inheritance in the case of a spouse's death and settlement money in the case of divorce, foreign spouses are at a disadvantage. Property of an agrarian household cannot easily be

divided without the agreement of the deceased's siblings and kin, and it is headache even for Japanese spouses to deal with such problem.

The age structure of mixed marriage permanent residents is 1) the Republic of Korea/Korean spouses registered in their 20s are 8.7%, 65.8% in their 30s, and 24.8% over 40 years of age; 2) Chinese (in the same age group, 33.1%, 52.8%, 13.4%); 3) The Philippines (58.6%, 40.2%, 0%); 4) Brazil (38.6%, 45.6%, 14.0%). Although most of them are in their 20s, 30s or early 40s, their husbands were in their late 30s and mid 40s when they married. As a result husbands will die much earlier than their spouses. Therefore, early or late mixed marriage spouses will face the problems of qualification for permanent residency and of property inheritance for financial security.

The fact that mixed marriage spouses rarely change their nationality suggests that one of their future options is going back to their home country with their children. But the families of mixed marriage couples, especially old parents, tend to hold onto their grandchildren, who they considered to be heirs to continue the family name. And their children are Japanese and speak only Japanese, thus, they will encounter family problems.

So far researchers of mixed marriage in Japan and from foreign countries have tended to focus on the cultural gap and marital satisfaction of couples and their impact on communities. These studies pay attention to the first stage of mixed marriage in the family and community. The next stage has already started for the early mixed marriage couples and that is the point researchers should study.

3-2 The Case of the Mogami District

The Mogami district is located in northeastern Yamagata prefecture, consisting of one city and several towns and villages, most of which are

at basins, surrounded by forests, constituting 75% of Mogami district. Due to heavy northwest periodic wind and snowfall this district is covered by snow 112 days a year, and in summer fog rising from riverbanks damages rice fields. Full time farmers are only 4.4%, others with side jobs are 26.8%, while those with main jobs outside farming are 68.6%. Adding to the low profitability of farming, there are few industries and shops in the city to employ rural residents. The average per capita income in this district in 1994 was 2,659,000 yen, 86.2% of that in Yamagata prefecture. We cannot say they are poor, yet they are not so well off by Japanese standards. Since the economic boom in the 1960s these municipalities have pushed young and middle aged workers out to the Tokyo Metropolitan area and other industrialized areas and even today young people tend to migrate to other places for schooling, jobs, etc.

Social depopulation and migration to outside areas in the Mogami district accounts for 62% of men and 47% of women among all those in Yamagata prefecture. To compare the percentage of population of Mogami, 7.9% of the prefectural total, this ratio of social depopulation is considered to influence communities to a large degree, most of which are targeted by the Depopulated Area Revitalization Act. Population analysis in this district, by age, shows that one-third of high school graduates migrated to other regions and those in their 20s and 30s are smaller in number than children and older people. This suggests the difficulty for single men in their 20s, 30s and 40s to find spouses in a younger age group. They have to compete with younger men for women in their community.

According to Mogami town officials, though the difficulty of marrying was caused by men's occupations as farmers and household background, recently it is the result of depopulation and dead-end situation in terms of economy and social life. If young men return to their home-

towns to take over their households and farms and to take care of their elderly parents, they could not find spouses there. Whatever occupation they have, if they are over 25 years of age, they will face hardship. Moreover, their shy character, as men of few words but of action, formerly considered a male virtue, are ill suited to attracting mates by themselves. Decades ago such a man was rescued by accommodating elders, who arranged marriages in the community, however, this custom is nearly dead. It has been replaced by free choice and even computer match-making services. Those registered female members are usually not interested in men who live in rural areas. To resolve this marriage bottleneck, municipal offices concerned with depopulation and the lack of brides became intermediaries in arranging mixed marriages with Asian women.

3-3 The Case of Okura village

Okura village was the first one to initiate mixed marriage in the Mogami district. As for population it had 4800 people in 1996 (5500 in 1980), and half of the households were engaged in farming, 76.5% of whom had other jobs. It has six elementary schools and three middle schools, but high school students have to commute one hour to a remote city by bus.

The Village office had come to consider the marriage problem of agricultural heirs to cope with the depopulation problem since 1982, because several parents had requested the office to support arranged marriages with urban women for their sons. After the introduction of several matchmakers to them, the village mayor entrusted the chief of the planning division to undertake mixed marriages. He tried to inspect other municipalities that had initiated arranged marriage projects and met with foreign wives from Asian countries.

When he actively visited barangay, a Philippine community and small mountain tribe village, he was inspired and felt that the Filipinos' sense of free and easy openheartedness would help to break through the homogeneous and conservative rural community. As an artist, and actually well known avant-garde dancer and part-time lecture of Tohoku Institute of Art and Technology, he was moved by the Filipinos' vitality, which he expected would change Okura village. He said that Philippine society had not exactly succeeded in modernization due to retaining traditional customs and social institutions, but succeeded in breaking with their past and lived in the present. He went ahead and planned a trip to arrange marriages coordinated by a local marriage broker. In the first year ten young villagers participated in that tour with the positive resolution that they would not return home without brides. The next year it was held once again. He was astonished by the courage of the young men who chose the last resort and the strength of the village community to welcome the Philippine brides. Of course, he made careful preparations for villagers to participate in a film festival, cultural exchange, and organizing inspection tour, which helped them understand this project.

After abandoning the tour by village initiative due to critical publicity from the mass media, Philippine spouses called their cousins and remote kin for brides and/or villagers asked a Japanese marriage broker to arrange such tours to Korea and China, whose culture was preferred by old parents because of a feeling of kinship to Japanese. These foreign brides have been integrated into Okura village. Philippine women are prominent among them, especially during cultural festival dancing, and at the post office where there is special notice board in Tagalog information among their network. Most of them have two or three children going to elementary school, and went to work at factories in a nearby city by car. One of the villagers said, 'there are rumors saying that brides from The

Philippines tend to spend money recklessly on dining-out and leisure activities without saving money earned from part-time jobs. But this is a difference in thinking between the younger and older generations. It is difficult to pool the family members' incomes and use it under the approval of husband or older mother-in-law in a three-generation family. As for the brides, there is no longer the sense of them being foreigners.'

4 Two Perspectives on “Mixed Marriage from Asia”

For the past decade “Mixed Marriage from Asia” has been a subject of controversy. As previously stated, Feminist and NGO activists have criticized it, however, the regions where mixed marriages from Asia have been arranged have justified their choice.

4-1 The Perspectives of NGOs and Psychiatry

Mr. Norihiko Kuwayama, a psychiatrist and an active member of the Japanese Volunteer Center, has engaged in medical care for mixed marriage Philippine wives and wrote revealing papers on ‘multi-cultural psychiatry’ and books on “Mixed Marriage from Asia.”⁽¹⁵⁾ According to his diagnosis of mental breakdowns of Philippine wives in Yamagata prefecture, they suffered from stress caused by the communication gap in families that results from the difference in language and culture.

Of course, this problem is inevitable for the first phase of mixed marriage couples in Yamagata. They have married without courting and nurturing romantic love, simply holding the same objectives to

⁽¹⁵⁾ Norihiko Kuwayama, *Mixed Marriage and Stress*, Akashi Shoten, 1995 ed. by Norihiko Kuwayama, *Gender and Multi-Culturalism: Minority Group and Life*, 1997 pp.217-226

advance their lives economically and socially. It is a form of marriage of convenience in recent times. After the marriage ceremony they cannot communicate with each other, because the husbands speak only Yamagata dialectal Japanese and wives cannot understand their language at all. There are no users of an intermediate language such as English. If they could, they would not be in rural areas as farmers and laborers. After wives have learned Japanese for three months or so, they can enjoy limited conversation. Each family member helps them to teach dialectal Japanese and routine household work. Therefore, it is not so hard for foreign wives to adjust to rural life and the community.

They also become depressed due to another factor. Mr. Kuwayama critically pointed out that first, the lack of self-esteem and self-assertion of husbands caused stress among Philippine wives. Some husbands whose wives are patients of his became alcoholic, because they could not bear cooperating with their wives' long trial and error learning process and came to regret marrying foreign women, feeling self-contempt that they could not get Japanese wives as other men had. He also discussed their lack of independence caused by codependence between mother-in-law and son. Added to this is the conventional way of life in Yamagata, with its ethos of patriarchal households. Since the economic boom in the 1960s the family structure, in which fathers were absent while working in Metropolitan areas every winter, produced sons controlled by their mothers. This created the 'mother complex' and immature sons who cannot deal with mature Japanese women. His in-depth analysis of the characteristics of Yamagata men suggests that after ten years of marriage foreign wives tend to rebel against their husbands. That is, some Philippine wives felt disgust with their husbands and were said to enjoy going out at night and/or having extramarital affairs in nearby cities. In evaluating their attitude he regarded it as a possible adjustment to reduce

mental stress.

His view of foreign wives is positive and gentle, yet for Yamagata sons and mothers it is negative and harsh. According to his observation the inferiority complex of mothers is stronger than their sons so that such mothers want to rear their grandchildren to be perfect Japanese, for example giving them Japanese names that have no hint of foreign influence. He describes how their careful raising of their grandchildren is a psychological compensation for not making their sons marrying Japanese women. Now that Yamagata prefecture has reached this stage of multi-cultural symbiosis through the introduction of foreign brides, villagers in this region have not been awakened and unconsciously strive for typical “Japaneseness.” For Mr. Kuwayama, this is regrettable.

4-2 The Perspective of Regional Revivalism

Mr. Kuwayama has not been viewed positively by Mogami district officials and those of other municipalities who deal with foreign relations, because he strongly supports his patients, foreign wives. Rather, they support Mr. Gisuke Shibata, a computer institute teacher, law school graduate and legal expert, who has written numerous guidebooks for foreign wives advising them on legal procedures and has conducted seminars for mixed marriage couples in concerned municipalities.⁽¹⁶⁾ He is admired as a brain of the Mogami district and regarded as taking an active role in advocating the interests of foreigners in the Mogami

⁽¹⁶⁾ Gisuke Shibata, *Juridical Problems of Mixed Marriage: Internationalization of Elementary School in Mogami District*, 1993 Gisuke Shibata, *Security of Mixed Marriage Couple's Rights in Mogami District*, 1994 Gisuke Shibata, *Juridical Issues of Mixed Marriage Couples: New Trend of Case and Conveyance from the Ministry of Justice*, 1997 All published by Training Program of Internationalization of Mogami District (Japanese).

district. The reason is that his institute has accepted many foreign students to make up for the lack of Japanese students due to depopulation, so that he had to carry out many legal procedures such as securing visas, work permits and guarantors for their apartments. He also helped with the complex problems of foreign brides living in his hometown. He respects couples' privacy and does not interfere with their lives, only when he was asked for legal assistance to solve their problems. He does not discuss the pros and cons of mixed marriage.

Contrary to Mr. Kuwayama, who focuses on the negative dimensions of mixed marriage, municipal officials and local people tend to not only deal with administrative problems to conduct their lives, but also utilize the new blood of foreigners, for example, to set up international exchange associations for local youth, and to produce local specialty goods. Tozawa village, which accepted more than ten Korean brides, built a Korean Museum on the national highway by the Mogami River, which is a well known sightseeing spot. In conjunction with it, there are shops selling both Korean and local goods, among which Kimchi made by Korean wives is the most popular specialty, and a Korean restaurant where Korean wives work as cooks and waitresses. This project was initiated by a voluntary association, named 'the Ajuma club,' consisting of two male and seven female members, Korean wives, and a chief of the planning division of the village office. In the Mogami district there are other voluntary associations such as the 'the Kawayan club' of Philippine and Okura villagers, and the larger PWAM (Philippine Wives Association in Mogami).

5 Conclusion

Can we combine these viewpoints of "Brides from Asia" to one

unifying or comprehensive conclusion to satisfy each advocates, as well as mixed marriage couples themselves? Of course, subjects of this controversy cannot be polarized to just critical feminists and the regionalism of administrators and locals. There are varieties of arguments depending on advocates with their own worldviews and social backgrounds. However, we can see several problems in this controversy, which are summarized as follows:

Gender discrepancy, men and women, is the critical point to consider these mixed marriage, because Japanese men have the economical power to be able to marry young Asian women, utilizing marriage brokers, wherein those women are objects to be chosen by men. If those men unfortunately can not be the objects to be chosen by Japanese women, they are still superior to Asian women in power.

Economical discrepancy has two dimensions in world economy and domestic one, such as a) industrialized countries and developing ones; b) industrialized areas and backward ones. The former is the direct factor that enables Japanese men to marry Asian women. The latter is an indirect factor like the social backdrop of depopulation causing a relative shortage of single women and a vulnerable social foundation placing local young men in an inferior position for marriage.

Territorial or regional discrepancy, rural and urban, is correlated to the way of thinking about marriage and family. Even in recent times in rural areas, to continue the family name and homestead, is the higher priority for the eldest sons or daughters, who have to bear this burden that originated from Japanese patriarchal ideology. On the contrary, urban citizens, most of whose relatively small households and homesteads are not so valuable for succession, particularly those with modern consciousness, regard the marriage of their children as a matter of free choice. Their parents do not dare suggest their sons to marry with

foreign women, regardless of having hardship to marry. City women, even if they are not feminist, may naturally consider it as distorted type of marriage.

From my viewpoint of gender analysis, the shortage of brides in rural areas signals the liberation of rural women who have suffered from hard agrarian work and a patriarchal family system. The administrative initiative for mixed marriage from Asia and local people's active participation in this project unconsciously aims at continuing the conventional social structure that is advantageous for local male residents, replacing Japanese women's suffering with Asian women's. Those women also have a strategy of leaving from their home countries where they have to endure economic hardship, as well as gender biased social structure in their countries. Their decision to marry foreign men that they had met just two days before marriage ceremony stems entirely from their personal wish for a better and more comfortable life. Their husband know this, and women did not chose them according to their character, but by their social position that enables spouses to be happier rather than settling in their countries. The decision of mixed marriage couples is not only individualistic, but also enforced by the social structure mentioned above. Certainly, they had alternative options other than such mixed marriages, yet those were more limited to compare to those in urban industrialized cities.

Nevertheless, it should be confirmed that Japanese men could carry on in their country with Asian women who had left from their countries. It is sufficient to note that even though regionalist opinions claimed that there are too many contradictions in local areas in Japan and they must be solved by even problematic means such as mixed marriage from Asia, we should not neglect new problems that result. Simultaneously, we have to think positively about local activities to ease problems. Just

criticism from outside will crash the spirit of locals, but what we should do is to empower them.

Through this paper, I do not have the intention of stating my opinion on the pros and cons of evaluating the controversy of “Mixed Marriage from Asia.” Rather I would like to show actual mixed marriage in rural Japan and the concerned viewpoints elaborated by Japanese.