

Farmers' Successors and the Immigration of Female Asian Spouses in Rural Japan

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Purpose:

Over the past two decades in rural Japan there has been a dramatic increase in the number of marriages between middle-aged Japanese males and Asian female immigrants. The objective of this study is to document this trend in the rural district of Yamagata Prefecture and to investigate potential problems stemming from this newly emerging marriage pattern.

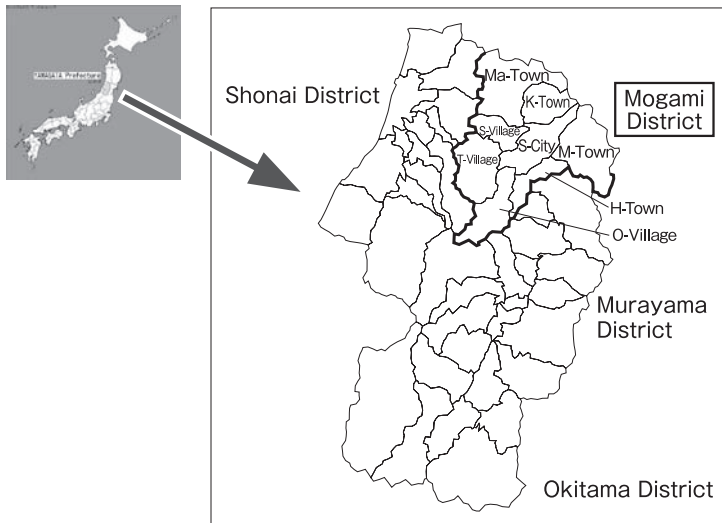


Figure 1 Mogami District of Yamagata Pre.

Methods:

- (1) Geographical area: This research deals with Mogami District (County) in Yamagata Prefecture, which consists of one small city, four towns, and three villages (See Figure 1).
- (2) Comparison: This research analyzes the overall trends seen in the Japanese census data concerning unmarried men and women in an effort to compare and verify the data collected by field work.
- (3) Field work: This research analyzes the data collected by field work interviewing bicultural couples in this rural area.

Hypothesis:

First it is necessary to clarify key concepts.

In 1953, Mataji Umemura, a professor emeritus of labor economics at Hitotsubashi University, classified the concept of labor relocation into two types to explain the changing circumstances in the labor supply, namely the “life-cycle type” and “economic-cycle type” of labor relocation (Umemura, 1953)

The life-cycle type of labor relocation is like the life-cycle from birth to death that proceeds continuously and regularly throughout life from employment to retirement. This is considered to imply steady supplies of labor because labor is an inevitable and normal function of life regardless of fluctuations in the labor market.

The economic-cycle type of labor relocation, on the other hand, is thought to be due to a labor force that floats between employment and unemployment workers who participate in the labor market as occasional laborers or as temporary and part-time workers.

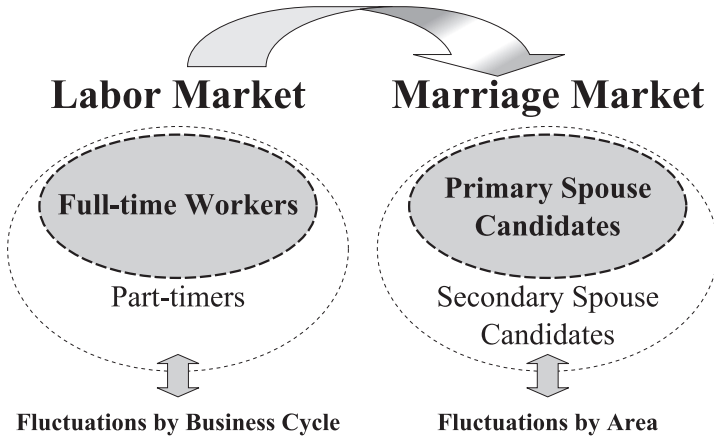


Figure 2 Labor Market and Marriage Market in Rural Japan

The late Professor Umemura called the former the “permanent labor force,” and the latter the “marginal labor force.” In recent years, the marginal labor force has extended beyond national boundaries and become a globalized phenomenon in the world economy.

I think that these concepts of labor relocation give a hint towards explaining the nature of the marriage market in a rural area.

Let us call Japanese women the “primary spouse candidates” corresponding to the “permanent labor force” that the youth in the rural area choose as life-cycle bride candidates; let us call Asian women the “secondary spouse candidates” corresponding to the “marginal labor force.”

In recent years, the number of “secondary spouse candidates” has been increasing. In conjunction with economic changes after the high economic growth and the relative advantages and disadvantages of urban cities and rural areas how has this surge emerged ?

Hypothetically, because the socio-economic status of rural areas is relatively lower than that of cities, many Japanese women in rural areas tend to migrate to urban cities. As a result, it becomes hard for young males in rural areas to find “primary spouse candidates” and they are likely to seek Asian females as “secondary spouse candidates (Figure 2).”

As the “permanent labor force” and the “marginal labor force” in the labor market become fluid due to business fluctuations, it is conceivable that the “primary spouse candidates” and the “secondary spouse candidates” become fluid due to changes in rural situations. In reference to this hypothetical framework, this research attempts to provide a partial understanding of this new trend in international marriages analyzing the census and other relevant statistical data at

Table 1 Population Changes: from Aged 20 to 49 & Ratio of Unmarried Men

Year & Age		1975	1980	1985	
Male	Total population (20~49)	22,128	16,379	20,295	
	Unmarried men (20~49)	5,377	4,652	5,966	
	Age (%)	Total	24.30	28.40	29.40
		20-24	88.35	91.79	90.43
		25-29	41.44	53.35	57.06
		30-34	9.46	16.91	25.87
		35-39	3.06	6.26	11.06
		40-44	2.16	2.49	5.50
45-49	1.40	1.76	2.59		
Female	Total population (20~49)	22969	16526	19848	
	Unmarried women (20~49)	3110	2572	3180	
	Age (%)	Total	13.54	15.56	16.02
		20-24	59.57	70.10	74.04
		25-29	13.64	15.70	23.60
		30-34	4.26	4.15	4.98
		35-39	3.29	3.25	3.24
		40-44	2.57	3.16	2.94
45-49	2.46	2.68	2.95		

Date: Japanese Census

the macro, population level. I also undertook a survey interviewing couples in Mogami County where international marriages are prevalent.

Table 1 shows the changes in population and the percentage of unmarried men and women aged 20 to 49 in the Mogami District from 1975 through 2005.

As the overall population in the Mogami District has increased over 30 years, the percentage of unmarried men among 20 to 49 years of age has gradually risen. However, unmarried men aged in their 30s and 40s, in particular, mark an especially high percentage. For instance, in 2005, while 11.28% of women 35 through 39 years old were unmarried, the unmarried men hit high of 30.70%. Furthermore, if we take a look at the 40–44 age bracket in 2005, we can see a clear differ-

and Women in Mogami District

1990	1995	2000	2005	2005 (nationwide)
19,046	18,649	16,850	14,519	25,222,395
5,660	6,023	6,064	5,659	11,709,028
29.72	32.30	35.99	38.98	46.42
89.37	89.69	88.22	87.34	93.44
58.83	60.91	62.17	59.83	71.42
31.70	34.02	39.99	40.79	47.07
17.51	23.31	24.75	30.70	30.00
9.20	14.91	18.63	20.37	22.03
4.92	8.21	12.06	16.41	17.14
18527	17790	16460	14476	24,705,347
3084	3235	3405	3319	8,736,677
16.65	18.18	20.69	22.93	35.36
77.20	78.16	78.30	76.68	88.70
31.10	36.75	42.96	42.96	59.02
7.78	12.62	17.15	21.56	31.97
3.86	5.08	8.63	11.28	18.38
2.96	3.35	4.49	7.51	12.06
2.81	2.89	3.37	4.31	8.21

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 ential percentage of unmarried men and women -- the men account-
 ed for 20.37% and the women, 7.51%.

Many rural farming households in Japan are considerably wealthier than their salaried urban counterparts, and they often find the rural lifestyle quite attractive. Therefore, when economic conditions are favorable, most young women opt to remain in their rural communities; however, when there is an economic downturn, the number of rural females who decide to relocate to urban areas increases significantly. Consequently, in many rural communities, male successors who must continue the farming household have considerable difficulty finding suitable brides, particularly during an economic recession.

Table 2 Populations Trends: Unmarried Females to Unmarried Males over

		1970	1975	1980
Unmarried Males by age (number)	20-24 age	3257	3177	2807
	25-29	1092	1665	2098
	30-34	187	288	682
	35-39	90	105	178
	40-44	53	83	83
	45-49	33	59	71
Unmarried Females by age (number)	20-24 age	2286	2139	2235
	25-29	358	493	572
	30-34	149	129	147
	35-39	143	122	90
	40-44	136	112	109
	45-49	106	115	107
Male Ratio (Female: 1)	20-24 age	1.4	1.5	1.3
	25-29	3.1	3.4	3.7
	30-34	1.3	2.2	4.6
	35-39	0.6	0.9	2.0
	40-44	0.4	0.7	0.8
	45-49	0.3	0.5	0.7

*Data : Japanese Census

Results:

The Japanese census confirms that in recent years the population of rural unmarried middle-aged males is increasing much more rapidly than the unmarried female population.

I will examine by cohort analysis about unmarried men to unmarried women in Mogami District from 1970 to 2005.

As Table 2 demonstrates, in 1995 within the 35 to 39 age-bracket, there were 4.6 unmarried rural males for every one unmarried rural female. In the year 2005, this figure was 3.7 for the 45 to 49 age-bracket, indicating that rural middle-aged men were having considerable difficulty securing brides. Thus there has been a remarkable demand for Asian brides in Japanese rural communities. As Table 3 indicates foreigners by nationality and sex in Yamagata Prefecture and nation-

time from 1970 to 2005

1985	1990	1995	2000	2005
2221	1682	1949	1843	1600
1981	1675	1379	1533	1360
1072	1085	979	903	968
448	711	798	689	656
159	367	598	627	546
85	140	320	469	529
1865	1588	1621	1479	1292
819	898	858	1003	925
190	268	360	404	497
114	147	173	243	256
88	101	126	152	206
104	82	97	124	143
1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.2
2.4	1.9	1.6	1.5	1.5
5.6	4.0	2.7	2.2	1.9
3.9	4.8	4.6	2.8	2.6
1.8	3.6	4.7	4.1	2.7
0.8	1.7	3.3	3.8	3.7

Table 3 Foreigners by Nationality and Sex in 2005 (Yamagata Pre. & Nationwide)
% (numbers)

		Korea	China	Philippines	Others	Total
Yamagata	Male	17.4 (331)	21.0 (572)	4.3 (28)	39.2 (430)	21.3 (1361)
	Female	82.6 (1573)	79.0 (2154)	95.7 (629)	60.8 (666)	78.7 (5022)
	Total	100.0 (1904)	100.0 (2726)	100.0 (657)	100.0 (1096)	100.0 (6383)
Nationwide	Male	45.7 (213,046)	40.0 (138,611)	19.0 (23,508)	56.9 (351,479)	46.7 (726,644)
	Female	54.3 (253,591)	60.0 (208,266)	81.0 (100,239)	43.1 (266,765)	53.3 (828,861)
	Total	100.0 (466,637)	100.0 (346,877)	100.0 (123,747)	100.0 (618,244)	100.0 (1,555,505)

source : census, 2005, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan

wide in 2005. Female immigrants outnumber male immigrants in Yamagata Prefecture, but nationwide male immigrants are at the same level as female immigrants except for immigrants from the Philippines. It is clear that Asian females have come to Yamagata Prefecture for marriage to middle-aged farmers.

Also, Figure 3 indicated the number of bicultural marriages has increased 10-fold from a mere 40 in 1989 to 595 in 2005 such unions in Mogami alone. We are able to confirm that the vast majority of these Asian brides are coming to Japan from China, Korea, and the Philippines.

Discussion & Conclusions:

As you can see from this list of problems, I found that there were a number of common difficulties shared by many of these bicultural couples in the Mogami District. Perhaps the one problem that stands out the most is the sheer speed with which so many of these

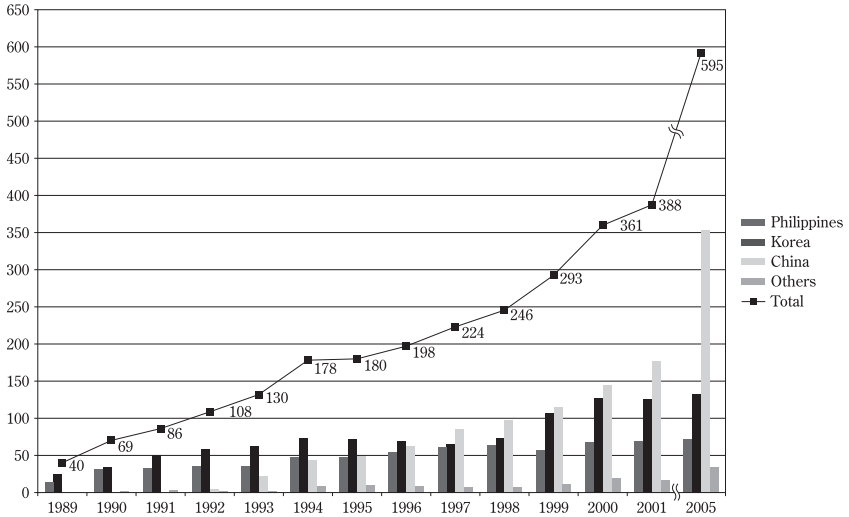


Figure 3 The Number of Marriages in Mogami by Year & Nationality
 Source: District Office and Census.

marriages are arranged by Japanese marriage brokers.

Clearly, the immigration of Asian brides to Japanese rural communities is a trend that seems very likely to only strengthen further in the coming years. In order to promote successful bicultural marriages in Japanese rural areas and to meet the needs of these young Asian women, we need to encourage a longer period of contact between the prospective spouses, so that both partners can have ample opportunity to assess the chances of their marriage's success. (Figure 4 documents the high rate of divorce among these bicultural couples.)

These problems the successors of farming households face affect not only themselves, but also local communities as a whole. In agriculture management based upon family business, even if there are successors, the household will become extinct without brides and

it will become impossible to continue agricultural farming. This directly leads to the decay of local communities.

In order to solve this crisis, a local government became a marriage broker for Asian women. The village of Asahi in the Murayama area was the first broker in 1985, and the village of Okura in Mogami in 1986 succeeded in making arrangements with Filipino females and brought ten brides in to the village (Kuwayama, 1995)

The marriages arranged by local governments expanded throughout Mogami County and the number of marriages increased from 40 in 1989 to 595 in 2005. The 16 years witnessed the rapid expansion of government-arranged marriages (Figure 3).

However, because the government's involvement was criticized as a promotion of a female slave trade, local governments withdrew from the business of marriage arrangement, and currently concentrate on developing an environment that encourages permanent residency of the foreign brides. Consequently, marriage to Asian females today has been arranged by private brokers.

Common Problems Related to International Marriages:

Based on my field work I could identify five major common problems related to international marriages many farming families encounter.

First of all, there is a problem with the quick arrangement of the marriage. The ordinary introduction of prospective partners starts with the exchange of their photographs and resumes. Once the mutual agreement is established, a Japanese male goes overseas to meet the prospective bride and both partners sign the marriage

agreement, register the marriage, finish the wedding ceremony, and the bridegroom comes back home alone.

The shortest process of marriage arrangement takes only eight days. Since it takes time to obtain an immigration visa, the bride comes to Japan two to three months later. In the meantime, the Japanese bridegroom prepares himself for his new foreign bride.

According to a marriage broker with a high success rate arrangement, among other brokers I surveyed, both males and females have to fulfill certain conditions. As for the males, they are required to have certain assets, be healthy and display no tendency towards violence and alcohol abuse; as for the females, they are required to take root as a bride of the farming family and to be able to give birth to children.

Because they stay together only for a short period of time before getting married, they are likely to face problems in their daily life when some cultural differences including the language barrier and traditional customs become issues.

Second, there are issues of children. There are more than 200 children born of international marriages in Mogami County.

With respect to the rearing of children there are conflicts between the Japanese families that want their first son to succeed to farming and the foreign wives who desire their children to be well educated. A mother-in-law who is conscious of preserving family traditions gives the first son (and grandson) special treatment. This also causes a problem with the foreign wives.

There are cases where these biased attitudes on the part of the Japanese family break up the marriage and foreign wives leave the

rural area. Even after they leave the area, the children are left behind as successors of the farming family. This portrays an aspect of the traditional family consciousness.

Third, there are problems in the daily life of foreign wives. Unless they obtain a driver's license, they are unable to establish friendships with local people or they lose friendships if there were any. They have to be able to read Japanese to pass a license test. Their language skill was poor to start with, and if they fail to obtain the driver's license, they cannot establish or expand friendships. Unless they expand friendships, they cannot improve their language skill. This is a vicious circle.

Furthermore, even though they become eligible to obtain Japanese citizenship after staying for five years, some wives decline to do so. If they are naturalized, they have to go through the process of applying for a visa to return to their native county. More than that, they seem to have a desire to keep their citizenship to escape to their native country if something intolerable happens. This is rooted in their deep anxiety about their life in Japan.

There is also an issue related to religion. When local events such as a fair or an athletic meet that community members participate in take a place on a Sunday, it is foreign wives' priority to attend worship at church. Because they skip these community activities, they are severely criticized. It becomes an issue as to whether or not they visit the family's grave or pray even if they do visit. These seemingly minor cultural differences are encountered in daily life and can cause frictions.

Fourth, there is a problem with the family's financial management.

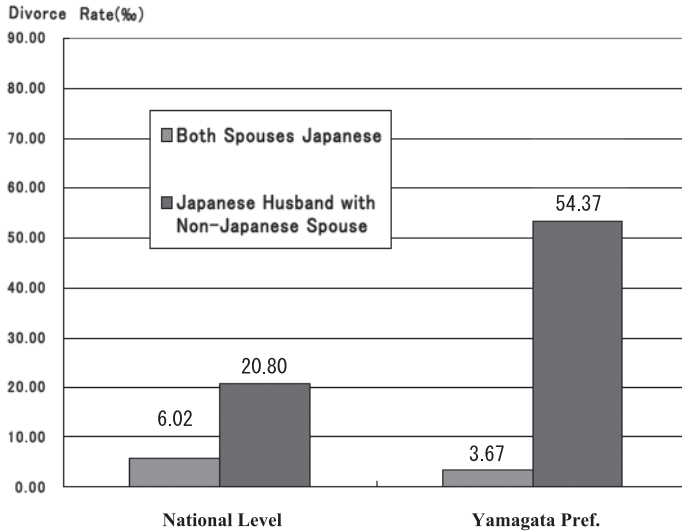


Figure 4 Divorces Per 1000 Married Women in 1995

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare

Most of the income foreign wives earn working at a factory is taken away as a part of the family budget. Because a mother-in-law manages the budget, foreign wives who believe that the money they earn is theirs are dissatisfied with the management of the budget and they feel they are not properly respected.

Fifth, there is a high rate of divorce for married population. There are four types of relationships of husband and wife according to population censuses: “married”, “unmarried”, “widow/widower” and “divorced”. “Divorce rates for married population” can be obtained by dividing the number of divorces by married population classified by sex. Figure 4 indicates the rate of divorce per 1,000 married women (Figure 4).

The divorce rates of Japanese spouses and international marriages at the national level count are about 6‰ and 21‰, respectively. It is

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clear that the divorce rate of international marriages is three times that of Japanese spouses. The divorce rate of Japanese spouses in Yamagata Prefecture in turn is approximately 3.67% which is lower than the national average. But the divorce rate of international marriages in Yamagata is as high as 54.37% which is 15 times the rate at the national level.

Of the 102 divorce cases I surveyed in Mogami 92%, or 81 divorces or separations took place within the span of five years of marriage and about 70% of them were seen in less than two years. About 40% of divorces or separations at the national level occurred in less than five years.

These alarming rates of divorce or separation warn us that there are many serious problems with the arrangement of international marriages in the rural areas in particular.

What Is to Be Done:

Many foreign wives are living in rural areas as secondary spouses with many difficulties and Unhappiness as well.

In order to promote healthy local communities, it must be necessary to share different cultures through international marriages, to respond internationally and compassionately to the various issues at each level: individual, family, community, and governmental.

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