

Kokusai Kekkon - A Qualitative Research Study on Intercultural Marriages between Chinese and Japanese

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Abstract

This study focuses on intercultural marriages (*Kokusai Kekkon*) between Chinese wives and Japanese husbands. According to the statistics of registered foreigners by nationalities in Japan by Ministry of Justice, Japan (2017), Chinese wives have been the majority among all foreign wives since 1984. Despite the common categorization that China and Japan are both collectivistic cultures, more and more scholars call for more thorough examinations within collectivistic cultures (i.e. Markus et al., 1997; Sueda, 2009).

Using a qualitative research method, this study conducted in-depth interviews with ten Chinese wives who married Japanese. Four are currently living in Japan with two of them having obtained Japanese citizenship; whereas the other six are wives of Japanese expatriates who were residing in Beijing, China at the time of interviews.

The research questions focused on the participants' perceived conflict and conflict management between themselves and their husbands, which directly related to their perceived marital satisfaction. Utilizing the Grounded Theory approach in categorizing and coding the interview data, the following themes emerged as topics that are most frequently mentioned by the participants with regard to their marital relationship: first encounters and impressions, reasons of getting married, attitudes toward intercultural marriage, gender roles which involve housework, child rearing and education, work, relationships with in-laws, money issues, naturalization, self-understanding and identity as well as some other perceived differences and perception of marriage and future plans.

These emerging categories suggest that Chinese wives perceived themselves to be more

interdependent of insiders (ingroups) than their Japanese husbands; Chinese wives feel stronger independency as individuals; Chinese wives perceive their identities to be closely related to and reflected in their meanings of having a career, and decisions of whether to get naturalized or not; Chinese wives value self-positive face in conflict and try to communicate through conversations, whereas their Japanese husbands tend to have more self-negative face need and try to avoid the conflict.

In summary, one significant finding of this study is that both collectivistic and individualistic characteristics can be observed in the Chinese wives. Despite the common generalization of Chinese and Japanese as being collectivistic in most research studies, Chinese wives in this study reported differed definitions of insiders, reflecting a much stronger interdependency than their Japanese spouses, who were reported to be more independent with their perceived insiders. Seemingly contradictory, the Chinese wives claimed their strong willingness to be independent both financially and mentally as individuals, which is closely related to their perceived self-identities that can be realized and reflected in being career women. This result is partly attributed to the influence of the One Child Policy that started in 1979 in China aiming to refrain the sharp increase of population. Most of the participants have received higher education as they are the only child in the family, and the family have invested all their resources on the only child. This background helped shape the participants' perceptions of their identities as well as how they see the world and people around.

Another finding is that to the Chinese wives an ideal marital relationship is an egalitarian one where gender roles should be equally distributed, suggesting a major difference from the norm of gender roles in Japan, where women are still the main labor force for domestic responsibilities such as house chores and child care. This difference in gender roles has become one of the major causes of conflicts in the participants' intercultural marriages.

In managing conflicts, the Chinese participants tended to value self-positive face more by

trying to communicate with the husbands hoping for and seeking more understanding and support, whereas the Japanese husbands were viewed as more self-negative face oriented because they tended to avoid or try to get away from the conflicting situations.

The results of this study have had a few major findings of intercultural marriage between Chinese wives and Japanese husbands through in-depth interviews; while the number of interviewees may be a weak point for generalization, the result of this study has reported some important findings, and revealed that variables such as the country/region and levels of acculturation have an effect on the intercultural couple's marital satisfaction. More studies on intercultural marriages between Chinese and Japanese who live in Japan can be an important focus in the future. Another limitation lies in the questioning skills while applying the Grounded Theory, asking follow-up questions without stirring the interviewees' hostile feelings or resistance is a challenge that requires more practice.

Future studies can focus on how the Japanese husbands view their intercultural marital relationships, their perceived challenges, and how they manage the challenges which relate to their marital satisfaction. Examining both parties' perspectives should bring a more objective picture and deeper understanding of intercultural marriage between Chinese and Japanese.