

**Building Transversal Skills among Marriage  
Migrants in Japan**  
*Japanese Language and Communication Skills in Local  
Multilingual Classrooms*

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# **1 Introduction**

The course of true love never did run smooth. For international marriages in Japan, the consummation and continuation of the marital relationship can be extremely difficult. Marriage migrants in Japan tend to face a series of administrative hurdles before entry to Japan, followed by human rights crises in their daily lives, leading to a high divorce possibility, domestic violence, and other problems. A lack of nationwide integration and adaptation programs also contributes to housewifization and segregation of the labor market, which further fixes the economic and cultural dependence of wives to husbands.

This paper focuses on the individual skill-building of marriage migrants throughout their adaptation to Japanese society. By exploring the needs of marriage migrants, this study outlines a skill-building paradigm and framework that is practical for marriage migrants to follow chronologically. Further discussions on the functions of the local Japanese classroom beyond its role in language learning are provided. In addition to devoting much attention to Japanese language learning and multiculturalism, this study also draws from first-hand fieldwork data in the Kyoto City Networking Salon for Community Welfare and Multicultural Exchange and second-hand literature on local Japanese language classrooms to provide policy suggestions for facilitating marriage migrant resocialization and social participation through linguistic empowerment

Basically, the present paper tries to answer the following four questions: What skills and capabilities are required for marriage migrants in Japan? How do Japanese language skills facilitate or impede the adaption/integration of marriage migrants in Japan? How can marriage migrants build up their Japanese language skills through natural acquisition or by classroom learning? What roles does the local Japanese classroom play?

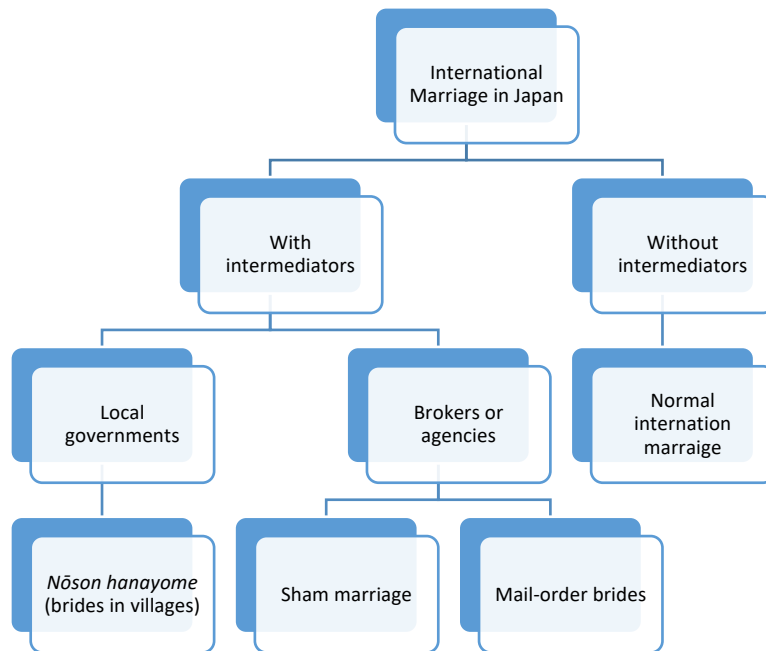
## **1.1 International Marriages in Japan: A Short Historical Review**

Contemporary international marriage in Japan started with Japanese women marrying American soldiers, possibly for economic reasons, shortly after WWII (Sellek 2001). Under rapid economic development since the 1970s and the increasing gap between urban and rural areas, masculinization and difficulty associated with marrying a female in rural areas became much more severe as difficult work and the perpetuation of tradition pushed village-born women to urban areas (Iwabuchi, Kim, and Hsia 2016, 6).

Until the 1980s, international marriages in Japan tended to be the union between a Japanese bride and a non-Japanese groom. However, the feminization of marriage migrants to Japan started in the 1980s, initially due to the emergence of international marriage intermediated by local government—"brides in villages" (*nōson hanayome*) in rural areas (Sellek 2001,175). The restrictions on "low-skilled" labor further promoted sham marriages in which workers sought work opportunities in Japan through marriage. With the rising number of marriage migrants introduced by the local governments, more Asian females came to Japan via the "entertainer visa" (*kōgyō biza*) and worked as *japayuki-san*—a derogatory description designated for Southeast Asian entertainers working in the sex industry, with implications of prostitution—and some later marrying Japanese men out of fear that this category of visa might be abolished (Takahata 2020; Kamoto 2008, 53-54).

In the 1990s, the entry and immigration restrictions were changed after emendation of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (*Shutsunyūkoku kanri oyobinanmin'nintei hō*) that had been in effect since 1990 (Kamoto 2008, 36). The Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act divided migrants into "professionals and technicians" and "low-skilled laborers," and the latter were formally not accepted, with the exception of *nikkeijin* (foreign residents of Japanese descent) as a "back door" to ameliorate acute labor shortages during the "bubble economy" (Masakazu 2015; Oishi 2005, 38). This exception of incorporating *nikkeijin* is interpreted as Japan's preservation of patriarchal *jus sanguinis* citizenship, "which accords citizenship on the basis of a blood relationship with the dominant ethnic group in each nation-state, conventionally determined by the male line of kinship" (Iwabuchi, Kim, and Hsia 2016, 3-4). In addition to *nikkeijin*, other low-skilled laborers were brought in by employers under "trainee visas" (*kenshū biza*) and "student visas" (*ryūgaku biza*) to fill the shortage of labor, especially in the manufacturing and construction sectors during the bubble economy (Liaw, Ochiai, and Ishikawa 2010). This large inflow of migrant workers also promoted international marriage in Japan. The 1990s also marked the emergence of an agency-intermediated marriage increase, where marriages between people from northeastern China (historically Manchukuo, a colony of Japan) and Japan increased dramatically (Yamaura 2020, 35). Such a marriage is also known as a "mail-order" marriage, with stigmatized objectification of the marriage migrants. In the case of marriage intermediation, international marriage in

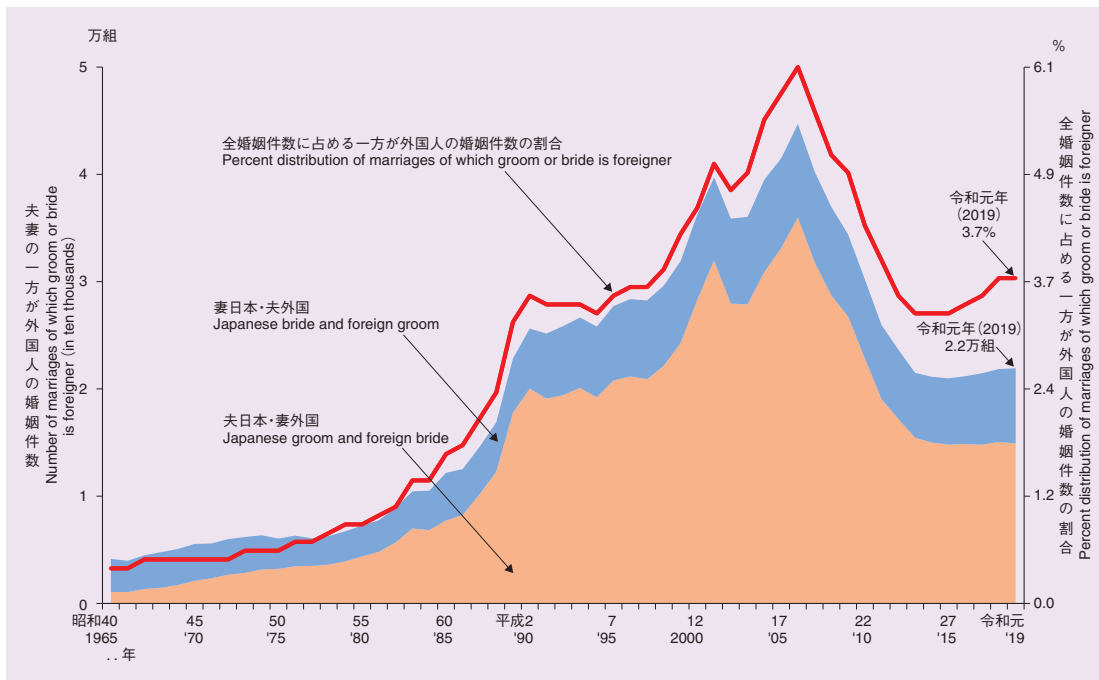
Japan can be categorized into four groups (Figure 1).



**Figure 1 Types of International Marriage in Japan.**

**Source: made by the author based on Kasama (1996, 172-3)**

In general, the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act of 1990 largely promoted migration to Japan and indirectly boosted international marriage. Regarding the general trend of international marriage in Japan, the number of international marriages peaked in 2006, when 6.1% of all marriages were international marriages, and has remained stable over the past decade (Figure 2). Migrant marriages make up a sizeable proportion of all the marriages in Japan and also follow the trends of increasing and decreasing general marriage rates in Japan.



**Figure 2 The Number of International Marriages in Japan, 1965–2019.**

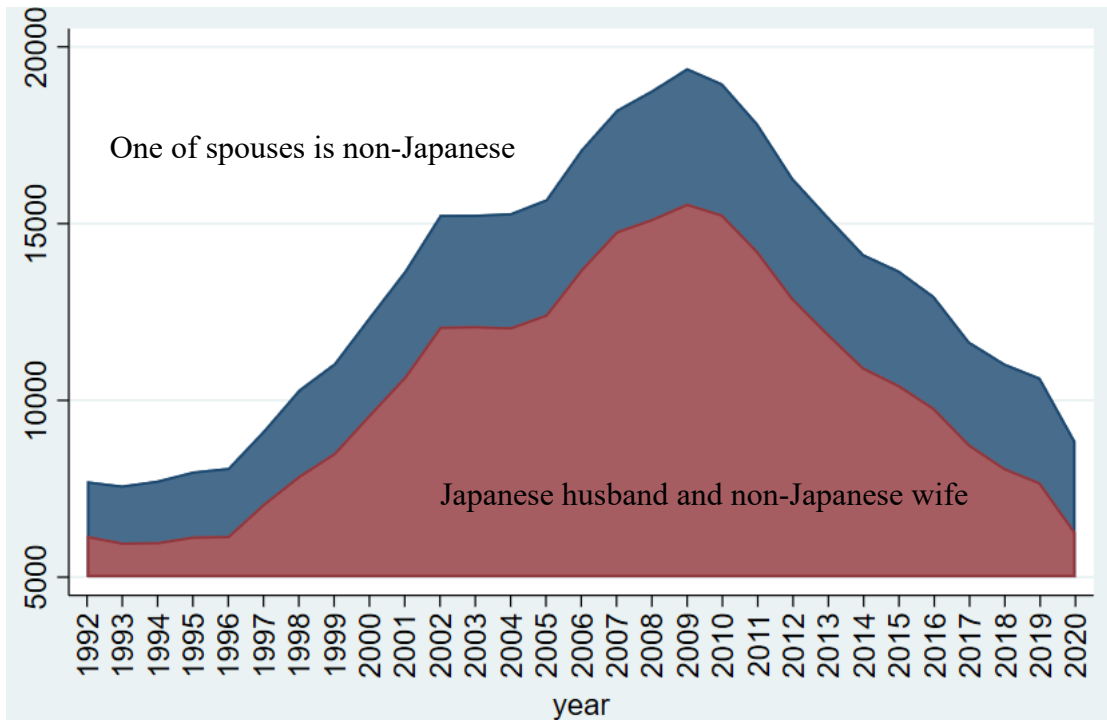
**Source: Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare: Vital statistics of Japan 2019, pp. 43**

In 2019, there was another partial emendation of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act with the introduction of a new residence qualification—the "specific skill visa" (*Tokutei ginō biza*) (Nagayoshi 2021,7). This emendation reflects the general tendency of the Japanese government to attract immigrants with certain skills and experience instead of "low-skilled labor." Even though marriage migrants have relatively more freedom in residence and the choice of work, they might still need further training and skill-building for smooth integration into Japanese society.

## 1.2 Problems of International Marriage in Japan

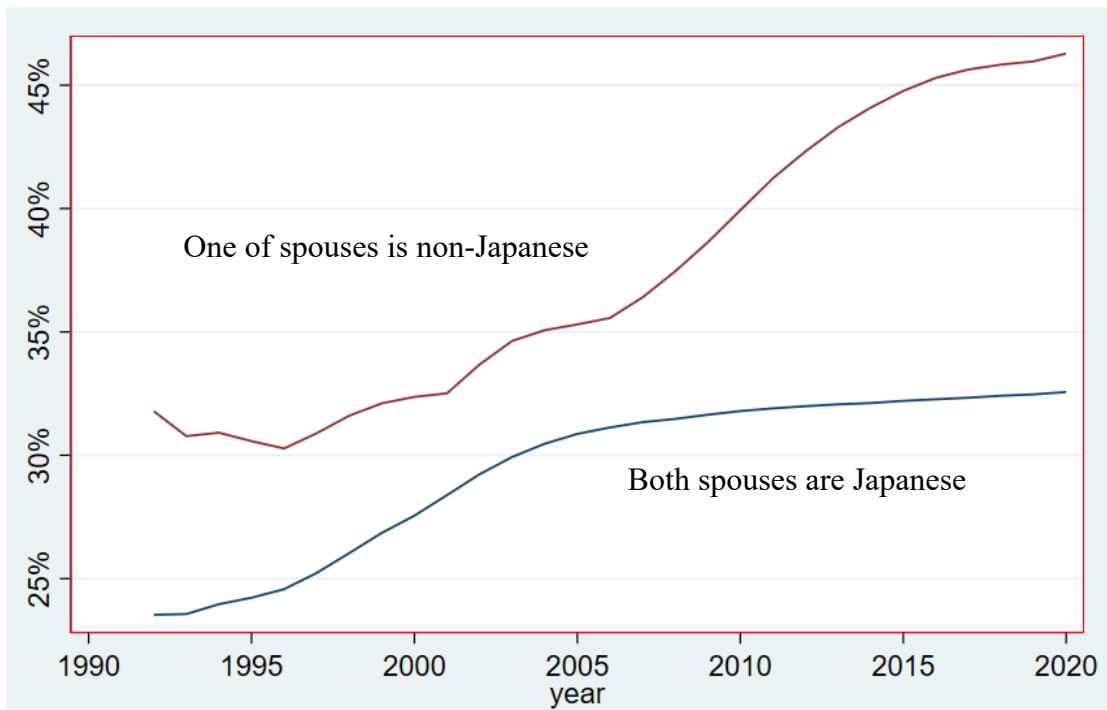
### 1.2.1 High Divorce Rate and Reasons

One significant problem of international marriage is a high divorce rate. The cumulative divorce rate is calculated by adding the cumulative number of divorces since 1992 and dividing by the cumulative number of marriages. The cumulative divorce rate of international marriage with a non-Japanese wife has risen in the last decade to 45%. In comparison, the cumulative divorce rate for couples of both a Japanese wife and Japanese husband have remained relatively stable since 2005 at approximately 32% (Figures 3 & 4).



**Figure 3 The Number of Divorces in Japan, 1992–2020**

Source: Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare: Vital statistics of Japan 2020



**Figure 4 The Cumulative Divorce Rate by Nationality in Japan, 1992–2020**

Source: Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare: Vital statistics of Japan 2020



The most frequent reasons for divorce in international marriages from the female side, according to the judicial statistics from all family courts in Japan<sup>1</sup>, are "personalities do not match" (*seikaku ga awanai*), "do not give living expenses" (*seikatsu-hi wo watasanai*), "violence" (*bōryoku wo furū*), and "mental abuse" (*seishintekini gyakutai suru*). These reasons have been the most frequently chosen ones since 2000. Behind the seemingly individualized representation of personalities and domestic violence in divorce cases, there is a more deeply constructed patriarchal ideology that posing a threat to female marriage migrants.

### 1.2.2 The Threat of Patriarchal Dominance

From the aforementioned most frequent reasons leading to the divorce of international couples, the structural risks for international marriage can be summarized as economic problems related to life experience and a patriarchal ideology that gives birth to domestic violence and intolerable personality conflicts.

Wives' reliance on their husbands' family is both ideological and economic. Mental reliance is more from the social norms in sending countries where wives are expected to be subordinate, which can be congruent with the "good characteristics of traditional Japanese women." Such good characteristics are distilled as the belief of the "good wife and wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*), which reinforces the secondary status of females to their husbands (Koyama 2013, 184). This substantial preoccupation with women's subordination is summarized by Faier (2009, 36) as "nostalgia for traditional times and gender roles" from her interview with Tanakan-san, husband of a Filipina woman:

I didn't marry her because she was beautiful...I dated a lot of women before I married my wife, a lot of Filipinas that I met in local bars...I dated them to see if I liked them enough to marry them. You don't know if you want to marry someone until you date them...After I hit thirty I started to like Filipinas...They have the good characteristics of traditional Japanese women. I like that in a woman. They look up to their husbands. They respect

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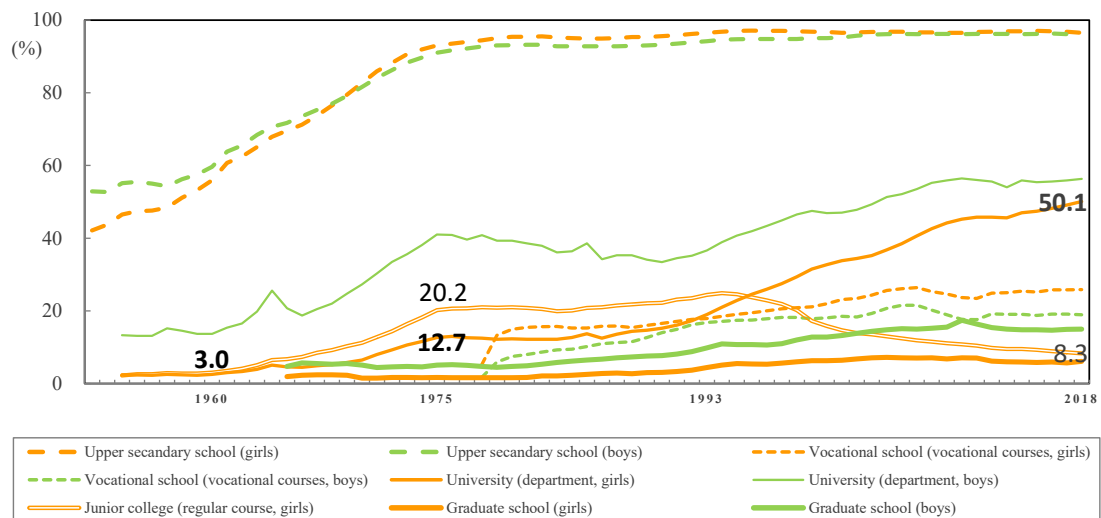
<sup>1</sup> 婚姻関係事件数《涉外》申立ての動機別申立人別 全家庭裁判所  
(*kon'in kankei jiken-sū "shōgai" saru-tate no dōki betsu mōshitate hito betsu zen katei saibansho*)

[https://www.courts.go.jp/app/sihotokei\\_jp/list\\_detail?page=4&filter%5Bfreeword%5D=%E5%A9%9A%E5%A7%BB%E9%96%A2%E4%BF%82%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6%E6%95%B0&filter%5BfreewordMode%5D=1&filter%5Btype%5D=1](https://www.courts.go.jp/app/sihotokei_jp/list_detail?page=4&filter%5Bfreeword%5D=%E5%A9%9A%E5%A7%BB%E9%96%A2%E4%BF%82%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6%E6%95%B0&filter%5BfreewordMode%5D=1&filter%5Btype%5D=1)

them. They listen to what their husbands say...I also liked her (his wife) because she was poor. Because I wanted to help her. (Faier 2009, 35-36)

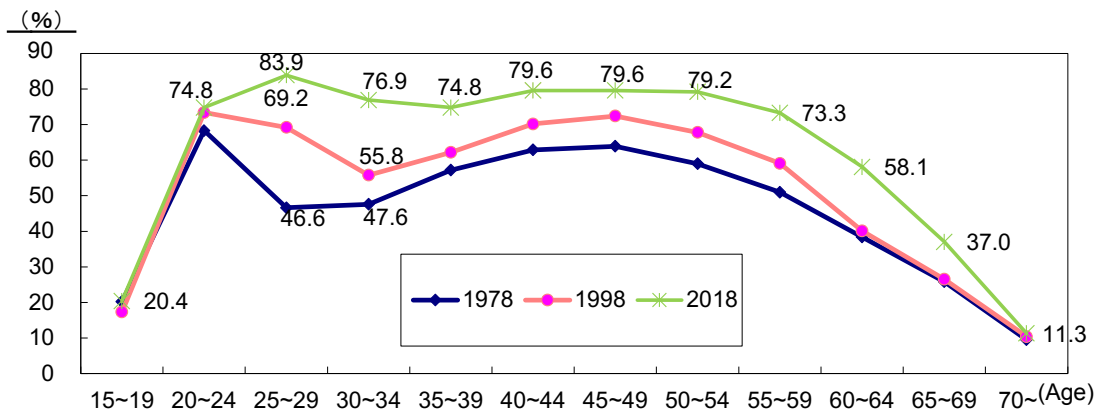
In the interview, Tanakan-san expresses his preference for the Filipinas as wives who are substitutes for "traditional Japanese women." He also substantially follows the social timing and expectation to get married by resorting to the Filipinas who are more accessible and available on the marriage market.

Female marriage migrants come more as substitutes for young Japanese women because there has been an increase in Japanese female education level and labor participation in the past few decades (Figures 5 & 6). With higher education levels and economic status, Japanese women have chosen to delay getting married or even abandon the idea of marriage (Jun, Yoshitaka, Hitomi, and Yukari 2013). These shifts of perceptions are supported by surveys in areas of prominently high rates of international marriages, where women from 25–34 give the following reasons for remaining single (in descending order): "difficult to meet a suitable man," "don't want to sacrifice my freedom," "no interest in marriage," "prefer hobbies," and "prefer concentrating on my career" (Jun et al. 2013, 72)



**Figure 5 Enrolment Rate at Different Levels of Education in Japan by Gender**

Source: White Paper on Gender Equality 2019 Summary, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, p. 3



**Figure 6 Female Labor Participation Rate in Japan by Year and Age Group**

Source: White Paper on Gender Equality 2019 Summary, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, p.19

With the gender awakening of Japanese women with respect to their choices of marriage, marriage migrants are more susceptible to the threat of traditional hegemonic patriarchy and the dominance–subordination relation. Marriage migrants, especially those mail-order brides whose matrimony is arranged through an agency in Japan, "fulfill marriage expectations that promise the traditional roles and values that satisfy male demands in the marriage and the patriarchal structure" (Kojima 2001, 204). This potential threat of male dominance and hegemony is not invisible in the actual matching process of Japanese males with female migrants.

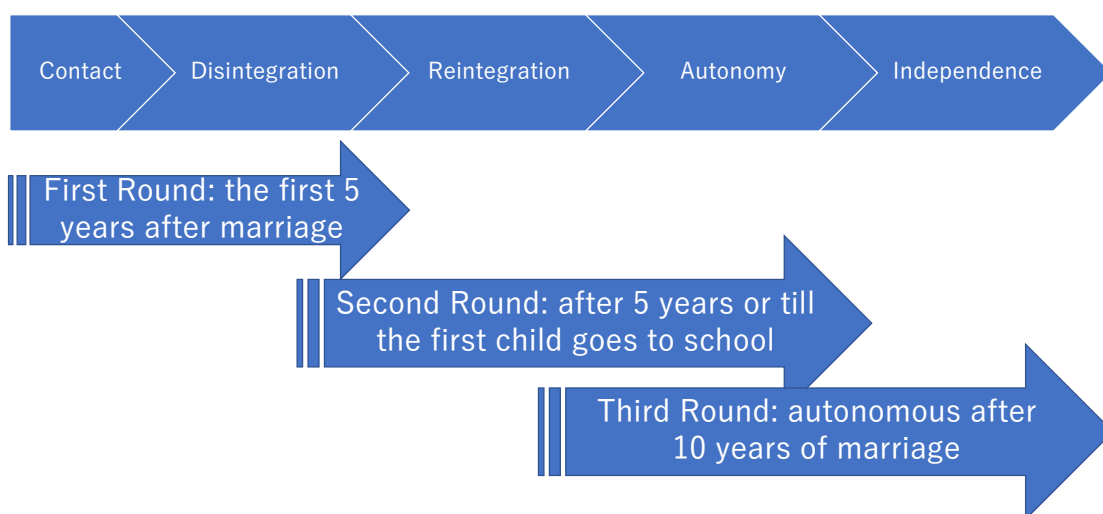
The key to a successful transnational marriage, from the perspective of an experienced China–Japan marriage broker, is first the "gentleness" of the male (*yasashi-sa*), specifically "good at communication" (*komyunikēshon ga jōzu*) (Hao, 2021). Further testimony from another broker indicates that even a poor male can get married as long as he is of good character and good at communicating (Hao 2021, 70). That is, future husbands' economic status is secondary to their potential opinions on gender relations. Contrary to those gentle husbands who may not be strongly influenced by traditional hegemonic patriarchy, there are also cases where Japanese males ask the marriage agency for brides who are virgins or of humble origin (Hao 2021, 50). In this way, marriage migrants are subordinate to their husbands both under the virginity stigmatization—potentially sex and reproduction exploitation—as well as economically.

## 2 The Adaptation Model of Marriage Migrant

This article focuses on the individual aspect, with emphasis on personal adaption to society (i.e., based on the two-way interaction between the individual and society). That is, this article is more concerned with individual capabilities of marriage migrants to adapt to the destination society and the corresponding practices, training, and institutions to strengthen those capabilities and empower the migrants.

Adler (1975,19) has proposed a general adaptation model for migrants that focuses on their perception, emotional range, and behavior in each stage of adaptation. According to Adler, there are five stages for a migrant to fit into a new society: contact with excitement and curiosity; disintegration with confusion and disorientation; reintegration with suspicion, frustration, and rejection; autonomy with self-assurance and confidence; and finally independence with trust, love, humor, and self-actualization.

Focusing on the personal adaptation of marriage migrants after their settlement in Japan, Takeda (2011) pointed out three rounds based on the integration model of Adler (Figure 7). Basically, they are measured as a matter of time since marriage, but there can also be significant events or milestones such as the first child beginning school. The adaption patterns and models provide a temporal framework to examine the process of marriage migrants' adaptation to Japanese society. The time sequence also enables the alignment of other personal attributes that play significant roles in the resocialization process of marriage migrants in a new society.



**Figure 7 The Adaptation Model for Marriage Migrants.**

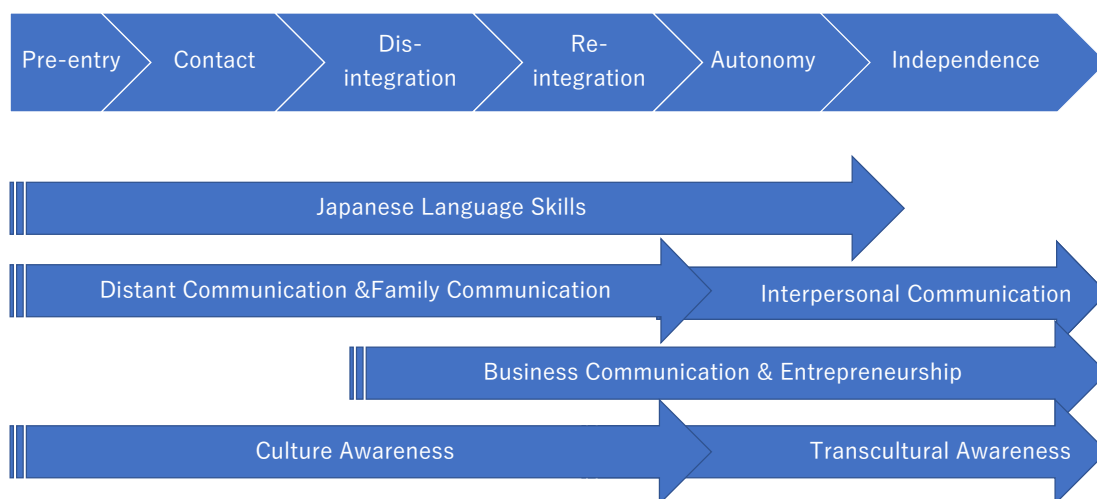
Source: Takeda (2011, 189-190) and Adler (1975, 19)

### 3 Key Terms and Definitions

#### 3.1 Transversal Skills

Transversal skills reflect a person's ability to learn, communicate well, engage in constructive and healthy teamwork dynamics, and demonstrate creativity and problem-solving aptitudes (Tayah 2016). They can also be regarded as the meta-skill, or the skill to learn other skills and solve problems with ingenuity by drawing from other social resources.

In regard to transversal skills for marriage migrants in the adaptation process, several skills in the broader concept of human capital have been identified as important for different phases of their adaptation. These skills are Japanese language skills, culture and transcultural awareness, and communication skills. Communication skills can be further subcategorized into distant communication before entry into Japan; family communication with husband, parents-in-law, and the second generation; interpersonal communication with community members, either local Japanese or other marriage migrants; and business communication for career development, which can be further developed into entrepreneurship. These skills can play different roles in different phases of adaptation; the alignment of the aforementioned transversal skills to the adaptation/integration phases is illustrated in Figure 9.



**Figure 8 Transversal Skills in Alignment with Adaptation and Integration Phases.**

**Source: made by the author**

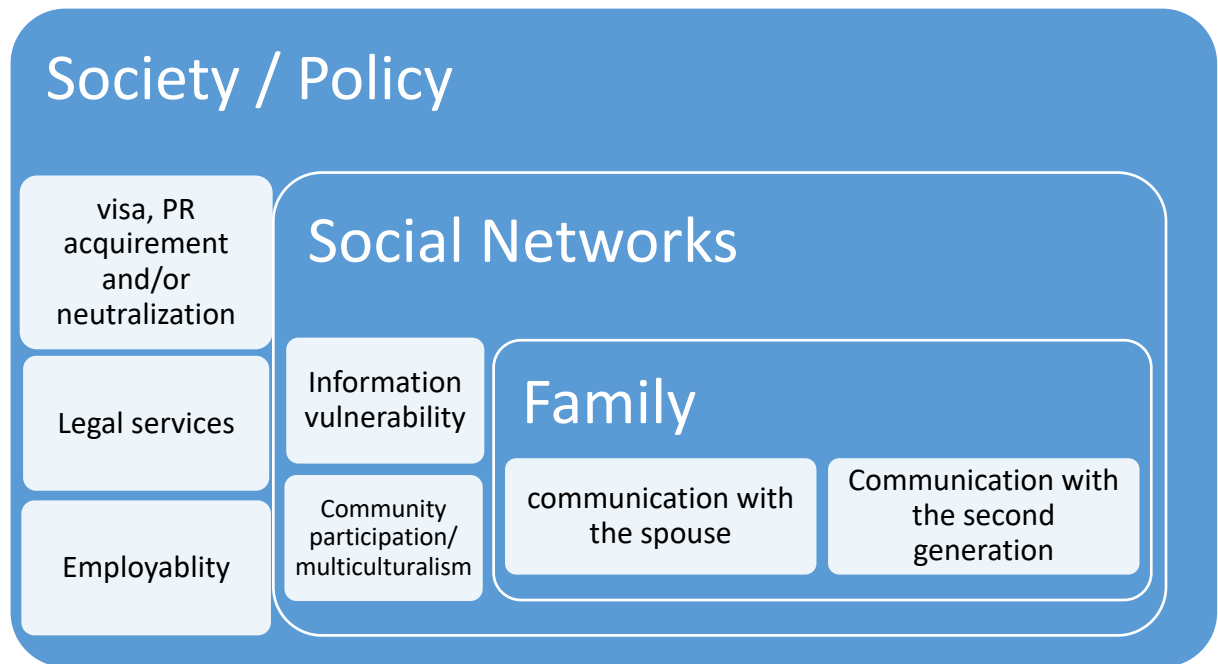
### 3.2 Natural Acquisition of the Japanese Language

Even though the Japanese language is extremely important in marriage migrants' adaptation and integration, the Japanese language itself is nevertheless difficult to comprehend. In the research field of second language acquisition, the process of comprehending a language is distinguished by either learning the language with various resources and supports or acquiring the language naturally through sufficient exposure to it.

Tomiya, Utsumi, and Saito (2009, 133-134) examined the natural acquisition of the Japanese language among marriage migrants and argued the impossibility of acquiring Japanese naturally, especially the reading and writing skills involving *kanjis*. Although conversational Japanese for everyday life can likely be acquired naturally through sufficient daily exposure, there are also risks of fossilization. Fossilization refers to fixed mistakes in language expression that are difficult or even impossible to correct, and marriage migrants without systematic learning and timely correction might show fossilization of the Japanese language. Common representations of fossilization among marriage migrants are the eclipse of prepositions and misuse of grammar. This incomplete comprehension of Japanese also limits the communication independence of marriage migrants, who are forced to rely on family members or people of the same ethnicity. That is, the natural acquisition of the Japanese language is not only difficult but also harmful by circumscribing marriage migrants within a limited social circle.

## 4 Language-related Problems among Marriage Migrants

Taking into consideration the multifarious interactions along with different actors and effectors in the integration process, three groups of effectors—family, social networks, and society and policy—are selected for the alignment of language-related problems among marriage migrants in Japan.



**Figure 9 Mapping of Language-related Problems.**

Source: Made by the author

### 4.1 Visa, Naturalization, and Language Requirements

Even though there are no specific requirements of language proficiency for marriage migrants to Japan, questions about the spouse's language skills and corresponding communication effectiveness are nevertheless included in the compulsory inquiry for processing the spouse visa:

One question is about the language the married couple uses daily. Then, other questions ask the native languages of both; to what extent the couple understands each other's mother tongue; and if the applicant's spouse understands Japanese, how he or she learned it. Finally, a question asks how, in those cases when they cannot converse due to linguistic difficulties, they communicate with one another. (Yamaura 2020, 304-305)

Risks are that the spouse's deficiency in the Japanese language may lead to the denial of issuance of the spouse visa. Even though this policy may only be a proper pretext to reject the entry based on a holistic evaluation of the documents, given that there are also

successful cases where the spouse has little knowledge of Japanese, pre-departure language training indeed facilitates legal procedures.

Beyond this invisible hurdle in the issuance of visas, the naturalization (i.e., the acquirement of Japanese citizenship), on the basis of five years of consecutive residency in Japan, requires "sufficient Japanese language ability (conversation, reading, and writing) that does not impede the daily life."<sup>2</sup> This level of proficiency has been benchmarked to, marginally, Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N4,<sup>3</sup> which requires approximately 300–400 hours of learning. Other visa categories for highly skilled immigrants, such as the "Points-based Preferential Immigration Treatment for Highly Skilled Foreign Professionals"<sup>4</sup> recognize only JLPT N2 and N1, which entail 600–1200 hours of learning. In general, regarding the acquisition and recognition of visa, residency, and nationality, Japanese language proficiency is essential for the institutional and administrative process of integration.

## 4.2 Family Communication and Japanese Language Skills

Language plays several roles in the communication capabilities of marriage migrants. First, the choice of language for family communication embeds a subtle power structure. Second, the effectiveness of communication within the family is related to language proficiency, especially the communication between the spouse and the second generation. In general, Japanese language skill building for marriage migrants can be difficult and even risky.

For marriage migrants, Japanese language skills are largely prerequisites of effective communication within the family and the local community, and more strategies and skills can be applied to strengthen the communication effectiveness beyond the family and local context to a broader socioeconomic scope that includes business and other social or even political participation.

There are generally four perspectives: 1) what language(s) are used in everyday communication among the couple and in the family; 2) how the language usage in the

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<sup>2</sup>

「日常生活に支障のない程度の日本語能力（会話及び読み書き）を有していることが必要です。」 <https://www.moj.go.jp/MINJI/minji78.html#a09>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jlpt.jp/about/levelsummary.html>

<sup>4</sup>

高度人材ポイント制による出入国管理上の優遇制度 [https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/materials/newimmiact\\_3\\_index.html](https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/materials/newimmiact_3_index.html)



family influences the language learning of the second generation; 3) what language is used in the local community, and 4) how the increasing rate of international marriage influences the multilingualism of Japanese society (Kawahara 2009).

#### **4.2.1 Distant Communication Before Entry into Japan**

Normally, among agency-intermediated marriages, the female marriage migrants will prepare visas and other administrative issues for entry into Japan and will maintain communication with the husband's side in Japan. The lack of communication skills, especially through distant communication tools such as SNS and messages, can lead to severe matrimony problems and even breakup. Yamaura (2020, 89) draws from a broker in explaining the importance of communication strategies for distant communication:

Aoki, a broker at Wedding China, told me he was concerned about correspondence between newlywed husbands and wives without the use of a proper translator. Sometimes, couples would use a dictionary or online translation service, which often produce strange translations...They might even break up before starting their marital life in Japan.

#### **4.2.2 Family Communication and Japanese Language Skills**

Language not only plays a role in mitigating misunderstanding when communication is conducted distantly without physical interaction, even for face-to-face communication in the family, but the choice of home language can also strongly affect the relationship between the couple and the second generation.

Kawahara (2009, 296) summarizes six major factors that contribute to the choice of the main language among a couple: 1) the area where they reside; 2) the number of speakers; 3) the scale of the economy of the country; 4) the financial ability of the spouse; 5) the age of the spouse; and 6) language learning before the marriage. The choice of the main language for communication depends not only on the language itself but also the spouse's demographic and economic situation. Unless the husband has learned the language of the spouse before marriage, most cases in Japan involve the female marriage migrant learning Japanese to facilitate communication between the couple.

Japanese language proficiency has unignorable influences on wives' negotiation and communication with their husbands and other family members. Shi (1999) argues that Japanese husbands' attitudes to communication differ regarding the language proficiency of their wives and that Japanese language proficiency plays the determining role in the quantity, quality, and emotional effects of wives' expression. Further, from

the perspective of marriage equality, Takeda (2009) points out the importance of language in the asymmetry of social resources between the spouses—the ubiquity of Japanese as the main language in the family and the community may become a burden to wives without sufficient knowledge of Japanese. This inequality in language resources between the spouses may lead to reliance on the other spouse for gathering and interpreting information.

#### **4.2.3 Information Vulnerability and Divorce**

The acquirement and understanding of daily information through an agency leads to "information vulnerability" (*Jōhō jakusha*), which involves the risk of not being able to obtain the information that is really needed, of being given distorted or incorrect information, and being manipulated (Tomiya, Utsumi, and Saito 2009). In summary, for females, communication and information acquisition through an agency rely largely on Japanese language proficiency.

A more severe situation is the language hurdles in divorces where a legal interpretation service, which is usually highly priced, is paid by the party seeking divorce. It is highly possible that marriage migrants may not understand the special Japanese language used by the court nor are able to afford the interpretation service (Naka 2009). Japan language proficiency can also be a contentious issue in seeking custody: There was a case where the lawyer of a defendant attacked a wife requesting custody in this regard: "as the plaintiff can only speak a smattering of Japanese,<sup>5</sup> it cannot be expected to provide enough education in her custody for the child in Japan" (Tanaka 2000).

#### **4.2.4 Communication Involving the Second Generation**

Because mothers care for and accompany children in most cases, children's development of Japanese language skills might be undermined without sufficient exposure to Japanese by the father as the mother-tongue speaker (Kondo 2009). Yamada (2007) points out the difference between "life language" (生活言語) and "study language" (学習言語), where the former can be quickly picked up by children through interactions in the community within one to two years, whereas the latter is built on enough exposure to Japanese before enrolling in school. A lack of pre-school

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<sup>5</sup> 日本語もかたことしかできないので

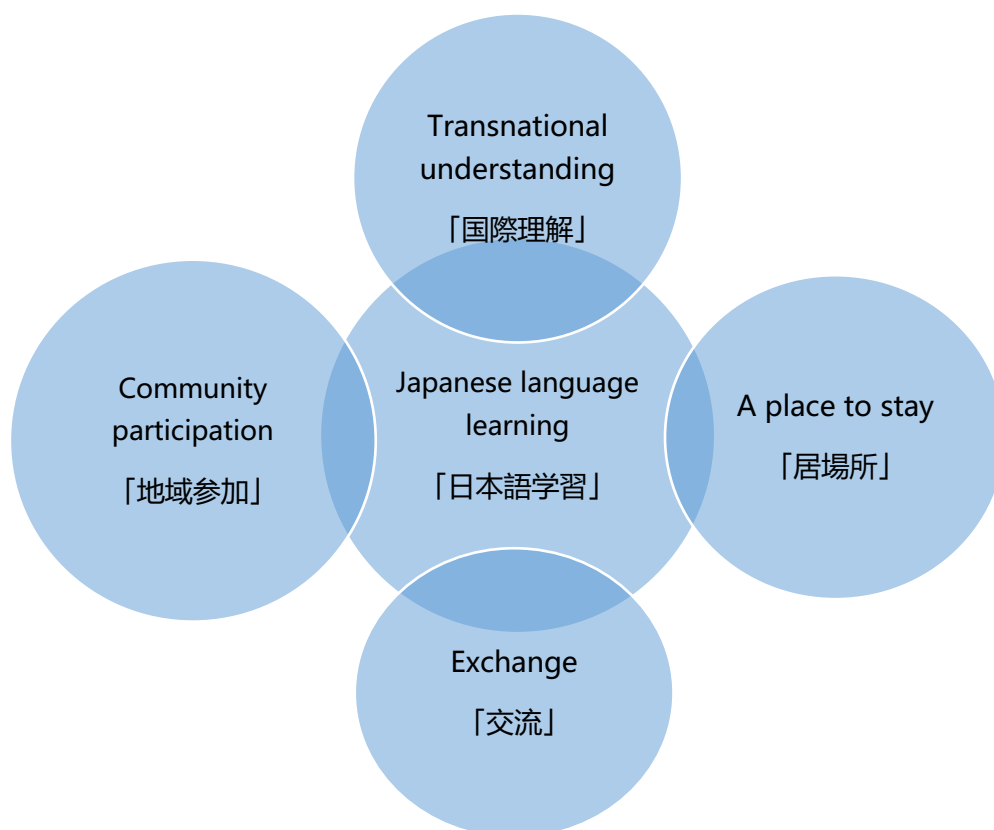
Japanese language exposure and stimulation can lead to unsatisfactory acquisition of "study language" at school, which is regarded as "low learning capability" (低学力). With increasing demands for reading and writing in higher grades, those children may gradually lag behind and lose interest in education, giving rise to a series of problems, including a deteriorating relationship with the non-native parent(s), normally the mother. Below is a narrative from Yuka, whose mother is Chinese and cannot react appropriately to some problems at school:

During the group activity, I was commented by other kids as "strange" (*hennano*) since the bento and other stuff I had brought were obviously different from others. I can still remember the scene where the teacher was so angry maybe because I took the wrong thing. Also, when I said what I had been told by the teacher to my mother, though she answered "yes, yes" (*hai, hai*), many cases were that she could not comprehend the situations correctly; but if I said to my father, I realised at one point that he would understand right away. (Li 2017, 126)

The communication between the mother and children might be negatively affected because the mother cannot understand the situation at school without sufficient language capability and cultural background, which can intensify conflicts between parents and the second generation assimilated into Japanese society. More school-related problems can arise from potential stigmatization of "low learning capability" as the result of not being able to keep up with other Japanese classmates in Japanese language acquisition. Without enough exposure to the written and high-bred language at school, upward social mobility is impossible because educational and professional examinations require high proficiency in this language register. Their adaption to the new society cannot be consummated without sufficient mastery of the national language.

## 5 The Local Japanese Language Classroom

To break vicious cycles, not only should marriage migrants improve their language capability but there should also be a third place for them beyond the home and the workplace. The local Japanese classroom functions as both a place for language learning as well as a multipurpose community center with the potential to provide different activities. Noyama et al. (2009, 75) listed the following five points as "roles and functions of local Japanese language education": "a place to stay" (*ibasyo*), "exchange" (*kōryū*), "community participation" (*chiki sankā*), "transnational understanding" (*kokusai rikai*), and "Japanese language learning" (Figure 10).



**Figure 10 Functions of the Local Japanese Language Classroom.**

**Source: (Noyama et al. 2009, 75)**

Even though the leading function of the local Japanese language classroom is to provide and assist language learning, the local Japanese classroom is in need of updates with respect to confronting the aforementioned problems. Shin'Ya (2013, 24) gives a synopsis of the local Japanese language class, focusing on aim, content, and class procedure:

The acquisition of conversational Japanese language skills is prioritized. Most classes in local Japanese language classes are held once a week, usually for one and a half to two hours, so the content per class activity is limited. For newcomers with only basic Japanese language knowledge, the standard learning process in Japanese language classes is to first practice greetings and self-introductions in Japanese, followed by listening and speaking practice in simple everyday conversation, and then grammar learning. As a result, the study of hiragana, katakana and kanji characters is difficult to reach and tends to be put on the back burner. In many classrooms, character study is not included in every learning activity, and even when it is included, the study time is often only 15 to 20 minutes.

Here also, "life language" and "study language" are differentiated. In public institutions such as Japanese language schools and universities, learning the written language, or the "study language," is one of the main educational goals; however, in the local Japanese language class, the priority is on oral language, or "life language," because the emphasis is on immediate pick-up—something that can be used right away. It is understandable for newly settled marriage migrants to break down the "life language" barriers without much concern for "study language." It is important for marriage migrants to develop their Japanese proficiency on the basis of their life experience and "life language." However, in consideration of the language requirement for naturalization and even "highly skilled professionals," the low intensity and lack of "study language" learning in a local Japanese language class that emphasizes "life language" do not facilitate passing the JLPT test, where reading and knowledge of *kanjis* account for more than one-half of the points, especially at higher levels of N3 and greater.

## 6 Multiculturalism and Multilingualism in Practice

On the basis of the previously presented literature review, the roles and limitations of the local Japanese language classroom focused on "life language" are discussed. However, because local language education and multiculturalism are constantly developed through practice, relevant theories are examined in alignment with multifarious practice.

This section is derived from fieldwork at the Kyoto City Networking Salon for Community Welfare and Multicultural Exchange during July and August, 2022. Through observations of and participation in local multilingual classrooms, including those focused on Japanese, Korean, and Chinese languages, the roles of community-based language classrooms are explored and aligned to theories. In short, multiculturalism is strongly related to multilingualism in this community center where language learning is catered to the needs of community members, which include not only long-term migrants but also local Japanese. Participants in local language classrooms are empowered with multicultural awareness, self-fulfillment, and belongingness.

### 6.1 The *Kanji*-oriented Local Japanese Classroom

Every Thursday at approximately 10:00 am, T-san, the teacher of the Japanese language class walked in and started to set the multipurpose room with chairs, tables, and whiteboards. Students entered the classroom one by one with greetings in both Japanese and Korean to each other and took out first-grade primary school writing booklets, Japanese dictionaries for elementary students, and pencil cases. The content this day was a short article about a music concert at the school, with no more than 100 characters. The booklet is carefully designed for calligraphy practice, with all *kanji* and *katagara* printed in red ink so students can practice the strokes of them with a pencil or a black pen. The class began without a bell or formal etiquette. All students seemed to know exactly what they needed to do without any guidance or instructions from the teacher. After receiving a copy of the day's article, students started to practice the stroke of Japanese *kanji* by tracing the printed model characters in small squares. While students were busy tracing all the characters in the article, the teacher wrote some *kanji* on the whiteboard with stress on the stroke sequence and pronunciations, both *ondoku* and *kundoku*. Students appeared to not devote much attention to what was being taught and instead focused on the writing.

After a while, the teacher led the whole class in reading aloud the article—a task the students performed without difficulty. However, they appeared unsure about the meaning of some *kanji* and sought explanations of *katakana* either from the teacher or in the dictionary. The one-hour class included only twenty minutes of lecturing; the rest was self-guided learning with *kanji* writing. The teacher came to check each student and gave a flower mark on their booklet. The whole class was in rapport, where students chatted extensively with each other during the class in fluent Japanese. They talked about their jobs, grandchildren, and favorite songs from the *Showa* period.

This class is not a Japanese language class in an elementary school but one in a local community center, where seniors participate in learning the Japanese language with the sole focus on reading and writing, stressing *kanji* learning. These seniors with an international background have been living in Japan for a long time and have fully adapted to Japanese society, speaking fluent Japanese. However, their reading and writing skills are so limited that they have to learn from first- and second-grade levels, and this progress was made after two years of participation in this Japanese classroom. The orientation of reading and writing in this local Japanese classroom is based on the fact that ethnic groups have been long established in this community with sufficient oral Japanese capability to take active roles in Japanese mediated instruction. They have full comprehension of "life language" but not "school language." The local Japanese language classroom here does not provide intensive learning in *kanji*, only guided self-taught sessions in which students can use this weekly class to communicate with the teacher.

Even though *kanji* is the language focus during the class, students might also have problems with some academic borrowed words such as "meter" (*meitoru*), where the long dash (ー) might be dropped out. This symbol denotes that the preceding vowel is stretched out, and it is not simple to determine whether a borrowed word requires this pronunciation mark. In fact, the translation of foreign words requires extensive reading exposure as a part of "school language," especially for names and scientific terminology.

Unlike the traditional local Japanese language classroom introduced above with the focus on conversational Japanese, the Japanese language class at the Kyoto City Networking Salon for Community Welfare and Multicultural Exchange provides guidance specifically on writing and reading skills. The students' limited capabilities in "school language" also demonstrate the difficulty of Japanese reading and writing

systems for marriage migrants who cannot naturally comprehend written Japanese but must learn it through intensive, long-term school training. This highly tailored class is based on the long history of this community in multiculturalism and multiethnicity, where the immigrant settlers here have been well established and already integrated into the local community and society. Even though they are accustomed to life in Japan, they still aspire to strengthen their Japanese writing and speaking ability following the route of "school language." This aspiration is strongly connected to an eagerness for continued education to compensate for the lack of good education opportunities during their school years in the 1960s and 1970s. The local Japanese classroom opens another window of self-actualization for senior migrants who acquire self-fulfillment and achievement through learning and knowledge-seeking. Contrary to the aforementioned cases where migrants might feel ashamed and less confident because of their inability to write *kanjis* correctly and beautifully, the migrants here take pride in their *kanji* writing, with the potential to develop it into calligraphy. Nonetheless, this *kanji*-oriented local Japanese language class is special because the community here is quite mature in multicultural coexistence and participants are generally long-time settlers. In general, learning conversational Japanese is useful and necessary for newcomers to be quickly integrated into the local community; however, in a later stage, learning written Japanese and *kanji* can empower migrants to feel confidence, fulfillment, and achievement through a process such as continued education.

## **6.2 Transnational Understanding through Multilingual Classrooms**

After the Japanese class, five out of seven participants that day went to the next-door cafeteria dedicated for seniors to have lunch with the teacher. The fairly priced *Udon* here costs only 250 yen and attracts seniors to eat and relax with others. During the lunchtime, students chatted with each other in both Korean and changed to Japanese from time to time. They were in a good mood until one student reminded the teacher of the Korean language class starting at 12:30. After the teacher left the room, this weekly get-together ended with the seniors bidding farewell to each other and the community staff, although some of them keep in touch via SNS.

Back in the multipurpose room, the upper-intermediate Korean language class began with only three students. The teacher, K-san, first checked all the students' written homework in detail with corrections and remarks and then led the whole class in



reading aloud the text, with attention to some new words and translations of certain sentences when necessary. After the students had the basic idea of the text, the whole text was translated by students sentence by sentence under the teacher's guidance. In addition, new words in the students' vocabulary were dealt with before the students studied grammar. The whole Korean language class was based on the grammar-translation method with content for everyday communication, examples of which are drawn locally, such as instructions for traveling to *Sanjo* by train. The one-hour class was quite intensive and well-organized, similar to a formal language class following the logic of a textbook. The Korean language class lasted three hours in three different levels with different emphasis for three batches of students. This carefully leveled structure of the Korean language class shows how the community, predominantly of Korean ethnic background, promotes multiculturalism by promoting multilingual education.

Compared with the Korean language class, the Chinese language classroom is more laissez-faire, without textbooks and more catered to daily communication. The pace of the Chinese language classroom is also tailored to the participants without preset goals or a teaching plan. Having learned the pronunciation system for more than half a year, students can conduct simple conversations with native speakers; however, students struggle to recognize characters with Chinese pronunciation, which is nevertheless stressed in traditional school-based Chinese language education for Japanese. The teacher, S-san, a Chinese graduate student studying at a nearby university, takes pride in her students, who, after a half year, can pronounce the *pinyin* in the right tone without difficulty. Even though every session per week lasts for only one hour, students manage to utilize the class to the maximum extent, with constant dialogue practice. However, like the traditional local Japanese language classroom, this Chinese classroom shows an obvious limitation in that it is difficult or even impossible for students to make breakthroughs in their writing and reading skills ("school language").

The difference between the Korean language teaching and the Chinese language teaching in the community center show the different language teaching methodologies catering to the varied needs of foreign language learners. These cases exemplify the role of local Japanese and multilingual classrooms in promoting transnational understanding, which cannot be fully achieved without the participation of local Japanese. T-san, the

Japanese language teacher, serves as a unique case of transnational understanding by taking an active role in Korean language learning and making progress in the upper-intermediate class. Like T-san, other teachers of Korean and Chinese classes are also native speakers who live in Japan either temporarily or semi-permanently. This situation opens the door for people of different ethnicity to participate in the community and serves as an example of "community participation."

## 7 Conclusion

On the basis of a historical and statistical review of international marriage in Japan, the problems for marriage migrants were examined and explained. This paper focuses on the individual aspect concerning the adaptation model proposed by Adler (1975, 19) and localized in the Japanese context by Takeda (2011, 189-190). Through a theoretical review of the transversal skills, this paper proposes the application of transversal skills in alignment with marriage migrants' adaptation and integration process. Through the analysis of the importance of the Japanese language skills and communication skills for marriage migrants, this study puts forwards a policy recommendation of providing long-term language learning opportunities for marriage migrants.

The Japanese language skill is important in marriage migrants' adaptation/integration into Japanese society across different aspects—specifically, family, social networks, and society and policy. Given the difficulty of naturally acquiring the Japanese language, Japanese learning forms and contents for marriage migrants should be classroom-based, with systematic mapping of not only conversational Japanese but also reading and writing skills involving *kanjis*. This study delves into migrants' language acquisition and learning processes and sheds lights on the diversity of local Japanese language classrooms targeting migrants in different stages with varied language acquisition needs.

Regarding the diversity of the local Japanese classroom, it is understandable for marriage migrants to first learn necessary "life language" in the local language school to facilitate their adaptation and assimilation. Skill-building in reading and writing Japanese can be achieved through intensive training afterwards to help marriage migrants better embed into Japanese society and communicate with their second generation, who need to comprehend "school language" through education. The study also makes clear the necessity of the local Japanese classroom to play multiple roles beyond language learning for marriage migrants.

Drawing from the practice of the Kyoto City Networking Salon for Community Welfare and Multicultural Exchange in multilingual classrooms enriches the roles of the local Japanese and multilingual classrooms. The multilingual classrooms not only provide a physical *ibasyo* to promote communication among community members but also empower students' self-fulfillment, community participation, and belongingness. On the basis of the experience in Kyoto, this study proposes imperative updates in

teaching content and time distribution to compensate for the lack of "study language."  
"Study language" has been demonstrated to play decisive roles in marriage migrants' empowerment and wellbeing. Further improvements in promoting multiculturalism and multilingualism can also be achieved through the introduction of multilingual classrooms that target community members, including but not limited to marriage migrants.

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