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“Japanese Migrants in an Imagined Paradise, Australia: Caught between Ideal and Reality”

Key words

Australia, Japan, migrant, multiculturalism, media

Abstract

Post-war Australia-Japan relations have been fuelled by economic, political, and cultural interactions as a consequence of globalisation. Former opponents during World War II now have mutual relations and actively cooperate in various fields. In the political arena, this may be seen in bilateral agreements, such as the 1976 Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and the 2007 joint security pact. In business, both countries rely on one another and remain important trade partners. Along with these macro-level contacts, grass-roots interactions between Australians and Japanese have emerged through tourism, education, a working holiday program, and migration. The research informing this paper explored one aspect of the mobilities between these two shores: “international marriage”.

Japanese migrants’ migration experience in post-war Australia was a relatively uncharted area of research, other than research concerned with war brides. This is possibly because, in the past, primary Japanese migrants in Australia were business expatriates and their family members. They usually lived in a relatively exclusive suburban area of metropolitan Australian cities, and most of them temporarily lived in Australia, returning to Japan upon completion of their term. Because of their residential pattern and period, their interactions with local Australians and communities, as well as their settlement experience, were limited. However, contemporary long-term Japanese residents in Australia represent more diverse groups of Japanese migrants, including life-style migrants and marriage migrants. Marriage migration is a particularly significant phenomenon because it has contributed to the recent increase in the Japanese population in Australia. Contrary to business expatriates, marriage migrants spread to various cities, suburbs, and states across Australia, and even to regional areas.

To investigate the experience of marriage migrants, this study applied a qualitative research method, conducting in-depth interviews with Japanese women in Queensland. In interviews with the participants, two pre-perceptions of Australia emerged: (1) Australia’s natural environment and wildlife, such as kangaroos, koalas, and beaches and (2) Australia’s multicultural society and commitment to multiculturalism. The natural environment of Australia is a predominant image for the Japanese because of Australia’s popularity as a tourist destination. Previous studies demonstrate this account as well; when Japanese people think of Australia, its natural environment is centered more than any other aspect. The other image of Australia involves the perception of its multicultural society, which is often compared to the perceived monoculture in Japan. This image influenced participants’ pre-perceptions of their settlement. Their imagined multicultural

Australia implied a harmonious society without racial prejudice or discrimination. Nonetheless, some participants faced racial prejudice and harassment in Australia, and these experiences challenged their perceptions of the harmonious Australia and their anticipated settlement experience. Some scholars draw attention to such gaps between migrants' imagination and reality, illuminating the role of media in creating the disparity. They demonstrate how circulated cultural texts create particular images of migration destinations, leading to people's fantasies about migration. This paper, drawing on such arguments, manifests gaps between Japanese migrants' fantasies and the reality in Australia.

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Atsushi TAKEDA is an Assistant Professor of Faculty of Foreign Studies at Reitaku University. He received his doctorate in Sociology from the University of the Sunshine Coast (IPRS recipient). His primary research interest is cross-border marriage of Japanese nationals in the context of globalization and transnationalism. He has delivered papers at various international conferences in Australia and Japan. His recent publications include: "Japanese migrant women's weblog narratives: Consequences of international mobility and migration," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (2013), "Reflexivity: Unmarried Japanese male interviewing married Japanese women about international marriage," *Qualitative Research* (2012), "Emotional transnationalism and emotional flows: Japanese women in Australia," *Women's Studies International Forum* (2012), and "Critical Reflections: Interpretation and Analysis of Japanese Women's Settlement Experiences," *The Qualitative Report* (2012). His current work examines subjective meaning of citizenship for Japanese marriage migrants in Australia.