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“Migrant mothers’ group becomes an entrance to the mainstream?: Japanese women marriage migrants in Sydney’s west”

Key words

Japanese woman, marriage migration, Australia, gender, ethnic community

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the extent in which an increasing number of Japanese women marriage migrants in Australia remould self and take part in a wider local community, through making and managing a local-based Japanese mothers’ group in their local area. This research details how a small local-oriented and ‘gendered’ ethnic group provides members with a way to integrate into local society, stressing members’ gender roles as ‘Japanese migrant women’ in everyday life, although some of them questioned it when they resided in Japan. In Australia today, increase in the number of Japanese women marriage migrants, who are in a cross-national marriage with a local resident, disables these Japanese associations for reaching its hands, due to the expansion of their residence, accompanied by their local partners. Meanwhile, in remote suburbs, these Japanese women have begun to associate with small local-oriented Japanese groups made up of other local Japanese women.

My research demonstrates that the focused local-oriented Japanese group, compared to major Japanese ethnic associations in capital cities, views itself as a ‘local mother’ group. This small Japanese women’s group aims to share ‘common issues’ about home-making, child-caring, and children’s education with other mothers, highlighting their minority (migrant) situation in the region. This gendered Japanese group has the prospect to engage with a wider local community, sharing common concerns and practice of ‘mothering.’ Although this gendered Japanese group may become a springboard in the mainstream society through identifying self with Japanese femininity, which they could not accept in Japan. This paper finally argues that reassessing their femininity reveals the social circumstances where minority women are situated, and shows that these migrant women can only employ limited social recourses in the new society.

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HAMANO Takeshi is Associate Professor of Faculty of Humanities, the University of Kitakyushu, Japan.. He received his PhD from the University of Western Sydney in 2011. His research interests include the transformation of gender and family ideas, and the development of global justice and human rights, in the context of international migration such as marriage migration. He has published a book and several articles in both English and Japanese, about Japanese migration to contemporary Australia.