

Beyond the Point of No Return: Settlement Process of Japanese War Brides in Australia

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After the defeat of Japan in the Pacific War, the country was occupied by the Allied Forces, in which Australian troops played relatively small nonetheless significant roles. The presence of the Australian soldiers in Japan continued for about ten years from 1946, initially as part of the Occupation Forces, then as part of the United Nation Forces during the Korean War. In spite of a strict anti-fraternisation policy, which Australian military authorities tried to enforce, many Australian soldiers met and fell in love with Japanese women.

After the Australian Federal Government officially lifted the admission ban in 1952, about 650 Japanese women migrated to Australia as wives and fiancées of Australian servicemen. These women are generally called war brides. As the first group of Asian immigrants in the post-war era, the women arrived in Australia when the “White Australia” policy was strongly enforced, and hostility towards Japan was still prevalent among the general public.

In this paper, firstly, I examine the women’s experiences which derived from the changes in their formal status through marriage and naturalisation. Secondly, the various personal experience of cultural assimilation is also studied. I argue that their motivation for naturalisation could not be interpreted as a sign of their decision to make Australia as permanent home, for there were other motives.

The women realised that they would ultimately settle in Australia rather than search for a possibility of returning to Japan, when they became aware that their children were growing up as Australians, with very weak emotional connections to Japan. The realisation of that fact would bring about an awareness that they had gone beyond “the point of no return”. Now they needed to settle down in Australia for good, rather than to hope to return to live in Japan if they wanted to maintain their family lives.

Consequently, a new perspective in understanding the sense of belonging is proposed through the analysis of the war brides’ narratives. Namely, the women’s sense of belonging was cultivated by not going back to their own past connections, but by internalising the next generation’s belongingness within themselves. Thus, the war brides firmly realised that it was necessary to make Australia as the place of their permanent settlement, not because they themselves have a strong sense of connection to the country, but because their children felt they belonged to Australia.