

## **From an “Internationalist Woman” to “Just another Asian Immigrant”: Transformation of Japanese Women’s Self-Image before and after Permanent Settlement in a Western Country**

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**Abstract.** Young middle class Japanese women who speak English identify themselves as career-oriented “internationalist women.” They hold positive self-images; however, their self-images become convoluted with negative images as they experience changes in their lives. When they marry white males and become permanent residents in Western countries, their self-identities transform into “just another Asian immigrant” out of many. Many Japanese wives of white husbands deny their association with their compatriots when they actually do associate with other Japanese immigrant women. They also deny racial factors in their attraction to their white husbands. I argue that these behaviors are harnessed to redevelop a self-identity by renouncing the stereotypical images of Eurocentric Japanese women. This paper will describe the transformation of Japanese women’s self-images before and after permanent settlement in a Western country and the process of their redevelopment of self-identity.

**Keywords:** *Japanese immigrant women, internationalist, self-identity, interracial marriage, Eurocentrism*

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Who Are Internationalist Japanese Women?**

The typical Japanese “internationalists” are career-motivated middle class young females. “Internationalist” is a translated word for “*Kokusaijin*,” which is associated with Japan’s national project of internationalization.<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Ivy explains internationalization as a process of “domestication of the foreign and the

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<sup>1</sup> Kelsky, Karen. *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 5.



dissemination of Japanese culture throughout the world.”<sup>2</sup> Internationalization “represents a distinct project from these women’s vision of a Japan transformed according to Western liberal values.”<sup>3</sup>

Internationalist women express feelings of inadequacy in Japan and search for a place of belonging.<sup>4</sup> However, these feelings seem to be the result of their self-evaluation, in which they are special and different in an awkward way that is mostly positive. They speak their opinions, and therefore they conflict with the stereotypical image of obedient Japanese women. Bilingual Japanese women claim that they can be themselves when they speak English. By utilizing the English language, they develop a new self-identity that is “cosmopolitan” or “internationalist”. The confidence, vitality, and high hopes of these young Japanese internationalist women are expressed in literature.<sup>5</sup> However, their positive self-images become more convoluted with negative images that they observe in other Japanese immigrants as they experience life changes, especially when they become permanent residents in Western countries.

Many Japanese wives of white husbands deny racial factors in their attraction to their husbands. Karen Kelsky analyzes that Japanese women’s denial inevitably accompanies their desire<sup>6</sup> for white men and white men’s attraction for Japanese women as proof of their non-racism.<sup>7</sup> In addition to Kelsky’s analysis, I argue that this denial is a way for Japanese wives to redevelop a self-identity in a foreign country. Many intermarried Japanese wives deny not only their attraction for white men but also their association

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<sup>2</sup> Ivy, Marilyn, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995),3.

<sup>3</sup> Kelsky, Karen. *Women on the Verge*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Matsui, Machiko. “Gender Role Perceptions of Japanese and Chinese Female Students in American Universities.” *Comparative Education Review*, 39 (3) (1995): 356-78., Yamamoto, Michiko. *America Gurashi no Ikikata Bijin: Kyukutsuna Nihon ni Sumanai Onnatachi* (Lifestyle beauties who lives in America: The Women who do not live in Oppressive Japan) (Tokyo: Aki Shobo, 1993)., Yamamoto, Michiko. *Deyoka Nippon, Onna 31 sai: America, Chugoku wo Yuku* (Should I leave Japan? A 31 Year Old Woman Travels America and China) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993)., Tanabe, Atsuko. *Onnna ga Gaikoku deHataraku Toki* (When women work abroad). (Tokyo: Bungeishunju, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Yamamoto, *America Gurashi no Ikikata Bijin.*, Yamamoto, *Deyoka Nippon*, Tanabe, *Onnna ga Gaikoku deHataraku Toki*.

<sup>6</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 147.

<sup>7</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 230.

with their compatriots when they actually do associate with other Japanese immigrant women. I also claim that by denying association with other compatriots, intermarried Japanese wives are renouncing the stereotypical images of Eurocentric Japanese women. This paper will describe the transformation of Japanese women's self-images before and after permanent settlement in a Western country by employing literature content analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews.

### **1.2. Why Do They Migrate to Western Countries?**

Utilizing Weber's ideal types, Nana Oishi describes the reasons for female emigration from developing Asian nations. They include mothers and daughters who send remittances to support their families and women who escape extreme poverty or abusive relationships in their home countries.<sup>8</sup> Among these women, Oishi calls one particular group of females "adventurous women."<sup>9</sup> They seek new experiences in a foreign country to escape their mundane lives. Being from the lower middle class and having moderate education, they engage in a limited range of occupations such as store clerks or teachers in a host country. Oishi's ideal type of adventurous women may be the closest comparison to Japanese migrant women; however, well-educated middle to upper-middle class young Japanese internationalist women are not interested in limited career mobility. They believe that Western countries offer equal opportunity and career potential. Therefore, these ideals create a desire in career-oriented females to settle in Western countries.

There is no doubt that Japan is a strongly male dominated society, especially when it comes to gender discrimination at work. A tea server is probably one of the most famous female occupations in, and even outside of, Japan. Linda Lindsey describes:

Highly educated women serve tea or are secretaries of male superiors with less education or training... cultural values about the proper roles of men and women in Japan remain largely intact.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Oishi, Nana. *Women in Motion: Globalization, State Policies, and Labor Migration in Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Oishi, Nana *Women in Motion*, 112-124.

<sup>10</sup> Linda, Lindsey. L. *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 152.



Almost all internationalist Japanese women express that discrimination in the workplace is their main motivation to study abroad. Kelsky analyzes that Japanese women use gender discrimination in Japan to “justify their turn to the foreign.”<sup>11</sup> Japanese women anthropomorphize Western countries as fairytale rescuers who save women from unjust Japanese male domination. To this extent, Japanese women have “eroticized desire [of] the white man as emblem of Western modernity in women’s larger imaginary of the emancipatory West. [sic]”<sup>12</sup> In other words, Japanese single internationalist women see white men as their ideal future plan to obtain both career opportunities as well as their romanticized personal fulfillment in a Western country. To live in a foreign country with a white husband is the means and the end in itself for young single Japanese internationalists. To be rescued by a fairytale prince is the solution for the Japanese career-oriented princess. “Green Card Cinderella”<sup>13</sup> is a term for a Japanese woman who has found a foreign fiancé.

### **1.3. Happily Ever After?**

Although the Japanese living overseas are seen as “contaminated” by the foreign culture, it is undeniable that Japan has historically held a notion of the superiority of Western nations.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, marrying white men is seen to be a form of upward international social mobility. This does not necessarily guarantee their financial gain or economic status, but Japanese women increase their social status by separating themselves from the “average Japanese women who can ‘be satisfied with’ Japanese men.”<sup>15</sup> Marrying a white man can be considered to be a part of their personal and career life plan to “move up”. From these perspectives, the following questions should be answered: Do Japanese Green Card Cinderellas realize their dreams in Western countries where equal career opportunities are supposedly offered? Will they also maintain their positive image of an internationalist woman in this host country?

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<sup>11</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 87.

<sup>12</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 87.

<sup>13</sup> Yamamoto, *Deyoka Nippon* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> White, Merry. *The Japanese Overseas: Can They Go Home Again?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 153.

## 2. Japanese Women's Labor Participation

### 2.1. Statistics

Contrary to what is expected, Japanese wives do not participate in the labor market after obtaining permanent residence status. India, Taiwan, Iran, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Japan, Korea and China have an above U.S. average of college graduates.<sup>16</sup> Both Japanese and Philippine women's rates of interracial marriage are the highest among all Asian women.<sup>17</sup> However, Japan has the lowest rate of participants in the labor force (54.2%) while the Philippines has the highest (76.3%).<sup>18</sup>

The percentage of female immigrants from Japan (62.6%) to the U.S. is the second highest rate, with Germany (64.6%) being the highest.<sup>19</sup> The college graduate rate for German immigrants is only 19.1%, however, they have about the same rate of labor participation as Japanese immigrants in the U.S. labor force.<sup>20</sup> The median age of German immigrants is 53 years old while the Japanese median age is 38 years old.<sup>21</sup> In other words, more than three fifths of immigrants from both countries are female. Also older German immigrants with less education and younger college educated Japanese have similar rates of labor participation.

From these statistics it could be assumed that well educated, possibly career-oriented, Japanese females are staying in their home and performing a traditional gender role in the U.S. household. This is a vivid contradiction to their initial and ostensible reason to emigrate, which was to learn English and build a better career. It is ironic that Japanese internationalist women are supposed to hold Western liberal values to realize gender equality. That was their initial reason to migrate to a Western country, but the employment issue becomes less important once they marry and live in a host country.

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<sup>16</sup> Rumbaut, Ruben. "Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in Contemporary America." in Silvia Pedraza, and Ruben G. Rumbaut (eds), *Origins and Destinies, Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in America* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996), 36.

<sup>17</sup> Hwang, Sean-Shong, Rogelio Seanz, and Benigno E. Aguirre. "Structural and assimilationist explanations of Asian American intermarriage" *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59 (1994):758-772.

<sup>18</sup> Rumbaut, *Origins and Destinies*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Rumbaut, *Origins and Destinies*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Rumbaut, *Origins and Destinies*, 34.

<sup>21</sup> Rumbaut, *Origins and Destinies*, 34.



## **2.2. Why Not Work?**

It seems that a Japanese wife's main factor to decide to work or not to work is irrelevant to gaining gender equality or keeping traditional gender roles, but it is relevant to their pride as "internationalists." The fact is they cannot find jobs equal to their professional ambitions or abilities. There is a conflict between their actual abilities and their pride as an "internationalist" woman. The jobs are either too "low skilled" or "too high skilled" to compete with native English speakers with higher education or specialized knowledge. If a job offers "good enough" status for an internationalist, she will take it. If the job is not as desirable, she does not have to take it, unlike other Asian women who need to send remittance to home countries. Japanese wives can choose the job because they can depend on their husbands' earnings.

One Japanese woman, who has been married to a white American man for 20 years, expressed that she wants to find a full time translator position in Colorado, as she was a professional full-time translator in Japan. In California, Japanese-English bilingual jobs may be available, but in Colorado, such jobs are almost nonexistent. Even though she understands this fact, she is still determined to find a full time translator position in Colorado to live up to her pride by saying, "But why should I be a lunchroom lady with other immigrants? I am not that desperate." Reflecting on this, she laughed and said, "I have no job skills with too much pride." This self-mocking comment illuminates how Japanese wives view themselves in comparison to immigrants from other developing nations. The connotation of her comment is that only the "desperate" people like "immigrants" work in a manual labor job and her pride is too vast to put herself in that position. A translator is considered a highly desirable profession in Japan. This former translator would not have any problems finding a regular job, but she would not take it unless she can find a job that is either bilingual or offers the same occupational status as a translator in Japan.

Takeyuki Tsuda reports that Japanese people think permanent Japanese emigrants are somehow abnormal.<sup>22</sup> They are either too intelligent to realize their potential in a narrowly closed society such as Japan or they are just incapable to live in their homeland. Japanese internationalists, who became Green Card

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<sup>22</sup> Tsuda, Takeyuki. *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

Cinderellas, want to keep the positive side of the two extreme images of emigrants. They were these women with “too much ability...to realize their potential.”<sup>23</sup> They don’t have immediate economic needs to take a manual labor job and in their view it is better to be a stay-at-home wife/mom with their white husbands’ earnings rather than ruining their reputation of internationalist. Their pride as internationalists is deeply related to their self identity.

### **2.3. English Proficiency**

The initial purpose to emigrate to English speaking countries for young single Japanese internationalist women was to master English. However, a large number of Japanese immigrants (25%) describe that they don’t speak English well or at all, while only 2% of German immigrants gave the same response.<sup>24</sup>

The Japanese language is fundamentally different from the Indo-European languages. In addition, people think it is somehow charming to have European accents.<sup>25</sup> The positive recognition of their accent would not hurt European immigrants’ confidence to use English proactively. Since Japanese immigrants do not have the charming accent in their English, it is not surprising to see only 16% of Japanese immigrants say they speak English only, while 41% of German immigrants answered with the same response.<sup>26</sup>

When one cannot be confident with his/her language skills, it is difficult to have a strong self-confidence to apply for a professional job. Many Japanese stay-at-home wives want to find a job, yet, they are reluctant to even apply for one. In the interviews conducted for this study, they expressed repeatedly that their English is not even sufficient enough for the application process. When they say “not sufficient”, they mean “perfect English with no accent” which is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for most immigrants who were born and raised in a foreign country. When Japanese people engage in international business in Japan, speaking English is their precious business tool to compete against their colleagues. However, once they settle down in an English speaking country permanently, they quickly realize that speaking English is not “sufficient enough” to compete with the

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<sup>23</sup> Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland*, 106.

<sup>24</sup> Rumbaut, *Origins and Destinies*, 34.

<sup>25</sup> Derwing, Tracey M. and Murray J. Munro. “Putting Accent in Its Place: Rethinking Obstacles to Communication” *Language Teaching*, 42(3) (2008):1-15.

<sup>26</sup> Rumbaut, *Origins and Destinies*, 34.



native speakers when applying for a prestigious position. A few exceptions would be the areas that have a historically strong connection with Japanese companies and businesses in places such as Los Angeles or San Francisco. In the rest of the country, speaking English is just a prerequisite of living in a host country. The Japanese-English bilingual skill is not as admirable or desirable in the U.S. as it is in Japan. Japanese wives get discouraged by the reality, which certainly influences their decisions in terms of their employment.

### 3. Status Change

#### 3.1. From an "Internationalist" Woman to "One of Asian Immigrants"

Single internationalist women have a distinguished yet positive self-image. English-Japanese bilingual skills give permission to Japanese women to be assertive and special. Japanese people think English speakers are civilized and superior to other non-English speakers.<sup>27</sup> Even a Japanese student who spent only a year in a foreign country would be asked to speak something in English by their friends. A simple English sentence can be enough to impress other non-English speakers in Japan. Internationalist women want to keep the image of having "too much ability to realize their potential in Japan."<sup>28</sup> However, the women with "too much ability" soon have to face the reality of living in a Western country after becoming Green Card Cinderellas. Gender discrimination, racism, and ageism in a Western country are as real as experienced in their homeland. They also have to realize how naïve or even immature they were to believe that Western nations are the fairy tale rescuer from the unjust Japanese male dominated society.

On top of the disappointment, the women "with too much ability" observe fellow Japanese compatriots' peculiar behaviors such as putting up with foreign men's poor behaviors that would not be tolerated in Japanese men. Takako Day reported about Japanese women who end up supporting their foreign husbands financially as convenient servants.<sup>29</sup> Some Caucasian men even confess that they

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<sup>27</sup> For example, see Oishi, Shunichi. *"Eigo" Ideorogi o Tou: Seio Seishin to no Kakuto* (Questioning the ideology of "English": Struggle with a Western mind). (Tokyo: Kaibunsha Shuppan, 1990)., Tsuda, Yukio. *Eigo Shihai no Kozo* (Structure of English domination) (Tokyo: Daisan Shokan, 1990)., Nakamura, Kei. *Eigo wa Donna Gengo ka* (What is the English language?). (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland*, 106.

<sup>29</sup> Day, Takako. "America de Jiritsu o Mezasu Nihon Joseitachi no Yume to Genjitsu: Hakuuin Dansei no "Yasashisa" ga "Fugainasa" ni Kawaru Toki (The dream and reality of



marry (or want to marry) Japanese women because they know they have no chance to find a Caucasian wife due to their undesirable attributes such as being divorced, reaching old age, dealing with bankruptcy, or even having a STD.<sup>30</sup> They think Japanese women are more tolerant than white women and are willing to take care of their husbands regardless of these undesirable situations. In a sense, these Anglo men are saying that they are not good enough to find a white partner, but they are still good enough to find an Asian wife who can also be an affectionate servant. It is hard not to notice some white male-Japanese female relationships are disrespectful for “Japanese women’s personhood.”<sup>31</sup>

Through these observations, the confidence of internationalist women declines especially when they realize they are no longer students with a temporary or work visa. When young single internationalists were in Japan, they could dream about working in a foreign country. When they were students in a host country, they still had high hopes to do something positively special in their lives. As soon as they become a permanent resident in an area where there is little Japanese business connections, the reality hits. They are, in fact, one of many immigrants with heavy accents in a host country. This bitter experience of declining status is common among many immigrants from various countries. Transformation from the positive self-image, (outgoing, assertive, smart Japanese-English bilingual internationalist) to a negative self-image (immigrants of heavy accents) is too harsh to internalize. It creates their heightened pride which skews their views of themselves and other immigrants in a host country. It is the counter reaction to their declined status. The pride which they use to hold as an internationalist emerges in their behaviors such as not taking regular jobs or differentiating themselves from the “other” immigrants.

For example, one of my female Japanese informants asked me how I was doing with my part time weekend job at a major bank, where 50% of the section was filled with first generation immigrants. I answered, “It’s fun to work at the bank by mingling with other immigrants.” The rest of the Japanese women with white husbands laughed hysterically. It was funny to them because I was referring

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Japanese women who seek independence in America: When white men’s “kindness” turns to “unreliability”” *Asahi Journal* (2 August, 1991): 20-23.

<sup>30</sup>Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 200, 242.

<sup>31</sup>Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 200.



to myself as one of the "immigrants." This episode indicates that it did not occur to these women that Japanese wives with American husbands are, in fact, "immigrants" in this country. Since the image of immigrants is perceived so negatively, these women could not associate the word "immigrant" with "a Japanese woman."

Tsuda reports Japanese descendent Brazilians in Japan "frequently refer to themselves collectively as '*os dekaseguis*'. "<sup>32</sup> Most *dekaseguis* (temporary immigrant workers) are also educated middleclass people in Brazil, but the obvious difference is that they know they are going to stay in a host country for a short time in contrast to Green Card Cinderellas who become permanent residents. Considering the fact that declined social status may stay with Green Card Cinderellas forever, accepting their declined social status must be harder for permanent residents than temporary ones. This might be the reason for the permanent residents holding a heightened pride to differentiate themselves from the "other" immigrants when, in fact, they are immigrants themselves.

### **3.2. Denying Stereotypical Images and Their Association with Compatriots**

Yen Le Espiritu and Diane Wolf describe Asian Americans' feelings of marginalization as:

excluded from the collective memory of who constitutes a "real" American, Asians in the United States, even as citizens, are expected to remain the "foreigner within" — the non-American.<sup>33</sup>

Alienated feelings of Japanese internationalists are no different from other Asian immigrants. They will never be totally assimilated to the main stream, Anglo society, due to their physical appearance. However they are certainly not typical traditional Japanese women either. Many immigrants recognize their true national identity from their native countries, while some immigrants develop transnational identities. Tsuda describes how some transnationalized people "see most of their experiences in nationalized terms" in his study of Japanese Brazilians in Japan.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland*, 179.

<sup>33</sup> Espiritu, Yen Le and Diane L. Wolf. 2001. "The Paradox of Assimilation: Children of Filipino Immigrants in San Diego" in Ruben. G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes (eds), *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America* (Berkeley: CA University of California Press, 2001),171.

<sup>34</sup> Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland*, 247-248.

Contrarily, internationalist Japanese women see their life and experiences in comparative terms. They compare and contrast themselves with the “other” Japanese wives — their imaginary reference group to define who they are. In other words, they see the imaginary reference group with negative connotation in their compatriots. By recognizing their limitation on total assimilation and by denying being a part of this imagined community, Japanese internationalist women become alienated.

Denying the association with people from their ethnic homeland is a common process among the second generation immigrants. For example, Nazli Kibria reported indifferent attitudes and disassociation of second generation Asian American women with the first generation immigrants because the second generation thought the women from their ethnic homeland reify the stereotypical quiet obedient images or “a reputation for staying in their own little group and not being very outgoing.”<sup>35</sup> Japanese wives of white husbands in a host country are the first generation immigrants, but they show very similar psychological distance. The only difference between Japanese wives and the second generation Asian American women Kibria reported is that Japanese wives have more ambivalent feelings and attitudes toward their compatriots. Japanese wives are not physically cutting off the connection with other compatriots, but psychologically separate themselves. Thus they have contradicting behaviors. Huping Ling introduces a Japanese housewife in Colorado. This Japanese woman confesses that making Japanese friends are not easier than making Caucasian or other Asian friends. She is “not around many Japanese people.”<sup>36</sup> She emphasizes her cosmopolitanism by saying that she makes “friends with all kinds of people.”<sup>37</sup> However, she still likes to talk to her Japanese friend, Mitsu, because they have a similar life. This woman says, “Mitsu knows other Japanese women, but I do not really know any others.”<sup>38</sup> This woman’s answer is a typical example of Japanese wives response, when they are asked about their association with their compatriots.

Japanese immigrant women critically observe their fellow compatriot’s Eurocentrism and Western worship. They feel they want to prove that they are not

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<sup>35</sup> Kibria, Nazli. *Becoming Asian American: Second Generation Chinese and Korean Ameircna Identities* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University press, 2002),89.

<sup>36</sup> Ling, Huping *Voices of the Heart: Asian American Woman on Immigration, Work and Family* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2007), 145.

<sup>37</sup> Ling, *Voices of the Heart*, 145.

<sup>38</sup> Ling, *Voices of the Heart*, 146.



the Green Card Cindelleras who are actually the servants for their white husbands. They also have to prove that they are, in fact, well educated and used to be career-motivated women. They have to prove that they are nothing like the rest of the white worshipping Japanese women in a foreign country. It is important to separate themselves from "other" Eurocentric, self devaluating, degraded Japanese wives. It is especially important when they cannot find any significant differences in their past and their life course compared to "other" Eurocentric Japanese wives. When I was searching for an apartment in a new state on the Internet bulletin board, I received a message from a Japanese woman. Her messages illuminate the view of Japanese immigrant women. I did not receive any information or comments about the apartment, however, this Japanese woman invited me to join the regular gatherings of local Japanese people. She wrote in Japanese:

Hello, I am living in [...Arizona] with my French husband and my hobby is reading in English. Are you a wife of an American or wife of *Chuzaiin* (Japanese elite business men in a foreign country)? A student? Or do you have a new job in Arizona? Are you in an international marriage? We have many Japanese wives in interracial relationships and wives of *Chuzaiin* here in ...Arizona. We gather regularly to have lunch and dinner. The members are from the youngest of 5 years old and the oldest of 55 years old. Please join us. (2007 August 13).

This e-mail was very indicative in many ways to describe intermarried Japanese wives in a foreign country. First of all, her priority was to manifest the existence of her French husband and her language skills. Then, she wanted to find out my marital status and the categories of my partner. I replied to this message with my name, marital status, and the reason for my relocation in a polite but brief manner. Her immediate lengthily reply was:

Oh, you must have a very interesting study subject because you quit your job and move from Colorado for your study.... I also work in Japan for 3 months every year, leaving my husband behind because I cannot stand to put myself in the life of Japanese wives all the time, especially among *Chuzaiin* wives. I will also start schooling next month and when I finish the course with a good grade, I am promised [by the school?] that I will get a job. ... I have my Blog .... The key word is international marriage, reading in English, and married couples with no kids. ... I hope you visit my [Blog] page and join next Wednesday's gathering.... (2007 August 16).

As a permanent resident internationalist, she cannot stand to associate with Japanese wives all the time, especially with *Chuzaiin's* wives. At the same

time, she is organizing gatherings and parties with Japanese people. The sender of the e-mail claims that she goes back to Japan to work for three months every year to escape from other Japanese wives. She also mentions her plan to get a job in Arizona after finishing her schooling. The connotation of this message is the competition with me (or with the image of generalized Japanese women) in terms of her independence, career, and her special position among the other Japanese wives. As the sender of the e-mail, most Japanese say that they do not like to be in a Japanese community or circle because of their tight nit gossip circles. Japanese informal communities predominately consist of female immigrants and/or *Chuzaiin's* wives. Therefore, negative images of a Japanese community are associated with negative generalized female characteristics.

### **3.3 *Chuzaiin's Wife, Intermarried Wife, and Different-ness***

Several publications are dedicated to disclose the fabulous yet notoriously closed, luxurious life of *Chuzainins* and their wives in a foreign country. Some of the publications are not necessarily academic publications; however, there must be some validity when most authors agree with the same points. For example, it is said that the social ranking of *Chuzaiins'* wives is determined by the prestige of their husbands' companies.<sup>39</sup> Since most of them do not stay in a foreign country long enough to master the language, their association is limited with other *Chuzaiins'* wives.<sup>40</sup> *Chuzaiins* receive high social status, salary, and various kinds of compensations from their companies and organizations to build business relationships in foreign countries.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the wives of *Chuzaiins* are believed to be arrogant as well. The intermarried Japanese wives can feel superior to *Chuzaiins'* wives because of their advanced language skills. *Chuzaiins'* wives can feel superior to intermarried Japanese wives because of their high status and life style that intermarried Japanese wives do not have. Thus, their bilateral mocking is created and perpetuated as an actual byproduct from these images.

Merry White illustrates a typical image of a *Chuzaiin* and his wife with the

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<sup>39</sup> For example, see Fukada, Yusuke. *Nihon Akusai ni Kanpai* (Cheers to Japanese Bad Wives). (Tokyo: Bungeishunjuu, 1981)., Satou, Katsuki. *Mainichi ga Amerika* (Everyday is American). (Tokyo: Bungeisha, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Fukada, Yusuke. *Nihon Akusai ni Kanpai*., Satou, Katsuki. *Mainichi ga Amerika*.

<sup>41</sup> Kusaka, Yoko. *Taniya no Shakaigaku, Settaik kara Baishuun made Bankou Chuzaiintachi no Seiiki* (Sociology of Taniya: Entertainment to Prostitution; The Sanctuary of Japanese Businessmen in Bangkok) (Tokyo: Mekon, 2000).



example of one particular couple who are not only well educated, but also from the families of pedigree.<sup>42</sup> White writes; “[the wife] may be best described by the American phrase ‘a real lady’.”<sup>43</sup> She made no strong attempts to make German friends when they were in Germany. She belongs to a group of Japanese women who attends cultural events together. After returning from Germany, she is able to readjust back into the Japanese lifestyle. She does not speak of Germany often because she knows how other women, especially after returning from the U.S., are excluded in Japan because they are seen “to be flaunting their different-ness.”<sup>44</sup> This woman’s attitude, upbringing, and remarks make a clear contrast with comments and attitudes of career-oriented middle class internationalist women who emphasize their “different-ness.”

For example, Toshiko Marks shows the significant attitudes of “different-ness” in her book, *Country of Weak Men and Ethereal Women; Japan*.<sup>45</sup> In this book, Marks states the real purpose of studying in England for Japanese women is to find an English boyfriend. Marks also chastises that Japanese women are ethereal because they have no sense of reality. For instance, Japanese women buy name brand goods with their “new money” without having the real social status, history, or personal quality to match the goods. Once Japanese women start using a particular name brand, the image of the brand goes down so badly that real upper class European people would refrain from the name brand. Marks published several other, but similar, books full of admiration for England and criticisms of Japan.<sup>46</sup>

Marks criticizes strong propensity of Japanese women for name brands and white men, but Toshiko Marks is a Japanese woman who was married to an English Baron, that is the ultimate “name brand” white man to obtain in a Western country. In her publications, she includes not only her academic background and

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<sup>42</sup> White, Merry. *The Japanese Overseas: Can They Go Home Again?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>43</sup> White, *The Japanese Overseas*, 30.

<sup>44</sup> White, *The Japanese Overseas*, 32.

<sup>45</sup> Marks, Toshiko. *Hiyowana Otoko to Fuwafua Shita Onna no Kuni Nihon* (Country of Weak Men and Ethereal Women; Japan) (Tokyo: Shisousha, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> For example, see Marks, Toshiko. *Otonanokuni Igrisu to Kodomono Kuni Nihon* (England, Country of Adults, and Japan, Country of Children) (Tokyo: Shisousha, 1992)., Marks, Toshiko. *Yutori no kuni Igrisu to Narikin no Kuni Nippon* (England, the Rich, and Japan, the Nouveau Rich) (Tokyo: Shisousha, 1993)., Marks, Toshiko. *Tondemonai Hahaoya to Nasakenai Otokono Kuni Nippon* (Japan, the Country of Ridiculous Mother and Pathetic Men) (Tokyo: Shisousha, 1999).

occupational titles, but also her English nationality and her formal name with the title of nobility. She even published a book about how she became a British aristocrat.<sup>47</sup> Her publications give an inevitable impression that well-educated Lady Toshiko wants to distinguish herself from the rest of “ethereal Japanese women,”<sup>48</sup> thus demonstrating her different-ness.

#### 4. Realization

Many intermarried Japanese wives, former internationalists, and/or Green Card Cinderellas try to differentiate themselves from “other” Japanese because they know that “white men are viewed as erotic commodities linked to social upward mobility.”<sup>49</sup> They know it because they participated in it. The idea of Western worship by Japanese people is real. It is not even necessary for the educated Japanese women to be indicated by the researchers; however, their pride will not admit their own participation in Western worship and self-devaluation. That is the reason for intermarried Japanese women to claim that they refrain from their own compatriots. The negative image of Japanese communities is too strong; it reminds them of their declined status too vividly.

When Kelsky tried to explain why it is valuable to study Japanese women’s preference for white men, a Japanese female activist was deeply offended. She had a white husband. She said, “Well, I am part of that group, and I don’t like that at all ...because each person...”<sup>50</sup> The Japanese female activist lost her words with anger, then, she makes a cynical comment, “So you’re going to make some general theory about it?”<sup>51</sup> Kelsky recalls that moment:

I was facing an invisible, unspoken code — a code that actively resisted critical scrutiny — about the “rightness” and necessity of the alliance between Japanese women and the West.<sup>52</sup>

The ambivalent self-image of Japanese women with white husbands oscillates between their personal experience in the past and the generalized

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<sup>47</sup> Marks, Toshiko. *Eikoku Kizoku ni Natta Watakushi* (I Became a British Aristocrat). (Tokyo: Shisousha, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> Marks, Hiyowana Otoko to Fuwafua Shita Onna no Kuni Nihon..

<sup>49</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 156.

<sup>50</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 237.

<sup>51</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 237.

<sup>52</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 238.



negative image they have seen today. Japanese female immigrants are not only geographically and culturally isolated from their mother country, but also psychologically alienate themselves from the rest of the compatriots in a host country. Whether they actually keep distance from the fellow Japanese immigrants or not is inconsequential. Their pressure and desire to separate themselves from the "rest of the Japanese wives" is more important than their actual association with them. They see their own Eurocentrism and their shattered Western dreams in other fellow Japanese wives. They have to prove they are not "one of them" by claiming that they don't associate with other Japanese wives.

Japanese women with white husbands use "It Just Happened To Be a [White Man] argument."<sup>53</sup> These Japanese women immediately deny the racial factor of their attraction for the white partners, while Japanese women with black males admit that they love their partners "because he is a *brother*."<sup>54</sup> Kelsky analyzes this "insistent refusal to countenance race as an element of attraction [for white men] is a form of the denial that inevitably accompanies desire."<sup>55</sup> Kelsky also analyzes the intermarriage fantasy as:

the same fantasy that has propelled Amy Tan and Jung Chang novels to best-seller status as feel-good parables for a multicultural age in which white men are under growing pressure to prove their non racism.<sup>56</sup>

Japanese female immigrants in Western countries are also under growing pressure to prove their cosmopolitanism, ability to succeed, as well as overcoming their Western worshipping and white supremacy. They are trying to prove all of the above by marrying white men and by denying the racial factor as the element of their attraction for their relationship at the same time. In other words, Japanese internationalists manifest their pressure to be a non-racist career woman in a form of psychological alienation, without admitting their internalized white supremacy.

## 5. Conclusion

The attempt of Japanese wives to differentiate themselves from "other" Japanese immigrants is a twisted form of denial that inevitably accompanies their

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<sup>53</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 146.

<sup>54</sup> Ieda, Shoko. *Ore no Hada ni Muragatta Onnatachi* (The Women Who Flocked to My Skin) (Tokyo: Shodensha, 1991), 41.

<sup>55</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 147.

<sup>56</sup> Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, 230.



own Eurocentrism and white supremacy. For Japanese wives with white husbands, denying their association with “other” Japanese wives is also their attempt to redevelop their new identity as a true cosmopolitan or internationalist. However, their new identity cannot be very positive and well-rooted since they define themselves based on what is “not” who they are.

It is unpleasant for anyone to admit his/her internalized white supremacy because it means admitting one’s own inferiority. However, admitting their white supremacy and own inferiority could be a good start to transform themselves from a rootless internationalist to a true cosmopolitan. “Instant” internationalists struggle with their rootless self identity when their pride relies on the superficial factors such as bilingual skills or the place they live. On the other hand, “true” internationalists/cosmopolitans would have a deeper source of self identity and understanding of their lives. It could be one’s self confidence and reliance to overcome her ethnic inferiority or superiority no matter what country she lives in or what language skills she possesses. Transforming oneself from an instant internationalist to a true internationalist/cosmopolitan could mean finding her entity and confidence in a host country.

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