

Educational Strategies of Highly Educated Chinese Women Married to Japanese Men: A Preliminary Study on Child Raising in Japan

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The past two decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in cross-border marriage in Southeast and East Asia largely as a result of increased population mobility as people move for work, study, lifestyle or even marital reasons. Japan is no exception with a substantial increase in the number of cross-border or 'international marriages' taking place since 1990. The pattern of international marriage is highly gendered, with Japanese men very much more likely than Japanese women to marry a foreign spouse. It also reflects post-colonial and on-going power relations in the region, with women from China, the Philippines and Korea, in that order of magnitude, making up the majority of foreign brides marrying Japanese men. These cross-border marriages are leading to an increasing number of mixed heritage families living and 'doing education' in Japan.

Taking a case study approach, this paper explores in depth the educational strategies of three highly educated Chinese women vis-à-vis their children; all married to Japanese men and living in Japan. It seeks to understand the expectations, desires, and lived experiences of these women in the sociocultural domain of childrearing and education. A key conceptual framework is that of agency in the face of sociocultural constraint. Two sets of interrelated questions will be addressed. What do these women hope for their children in terms of formal education and transmission of cultural heritage and how do they set about realizing their aims? In what way does the immediate familial sociocultural environment set limits upon this? By focusing on highly educated Chinese women, a group of women motivated by strong cultural and socioeconomic forces to maximise the possibilities of their children's education, we are able to see clearly this interaction of agency and constraint.

Keywords: cross-border parents; highly educated Chinese mothers; educational strategies; agency; sociocultural constraint

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Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed a rapid increase in cross-border marriage migration, particularly between Southeast and East Asia (Lu, M. and Yang, W., 2010, p.16). Japan is no exception with a substantial increase in the number of cross-border or ‘international marriages’ (*kokusai kekkon*) taking place since 1990. In 1965, there were only 4,156 cases of intermarriage between Japanese and foreign nationals, but by 2009 the number had grown to 34,393 cases—eight times that of 1965. This figure corresponds to 1/20 of newly married couples in Japan (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2014¹).

The pattern of international marriage is highly gendered, with the rapid increase of intermarriage accounted for largely by Japanese men marrying foreign women. Indeed, according to 2009 census data, 78% of international marriages in Japan involved a Japanese man and foreign woman. Given this situation, it comes as no surprise that there has been an increase in children being raised in Japan with a foreign mother (Shimizu et al., 2013).

The most common nationalities of foreign wives have also changed over the past two decades in accordance with the growth of intermarriages. Before 1995, women with Filipino and Korean nationalities exceeded all others, but the percentage of couples where the female partner is Chinese nearly doubled between 1995 and 2000. As a result, such couples currently comprise the biggest proportion of international marriages registered in Japan each year (Liaw, Ochiai and Ishikawa, 2010, pp. 53–62).

A number of international studies to date have focused on the path leading to marriage and/or the cross-border couples’ marital life (Breger and Hill, eds., 1998; Constable, ed., 2005; Lu, M. and Yang, W., eds., 2010). In Japan, there is research offering insights into how couples negotiate their relationship, such as Yabuki’s study of Japanese wives and American husbands (Yabuki, 2004). A number of studies explore the relationship between Japanese men and Asian women in the context of the marriage squeeze (the shortage of brides) in rural areas (cf. Kuwayama, 1995). While Japanese wives and American husbands are depicted as equally respected partners in this literature, non-Japanese Asian women are either portrayed stereotypically as having too much agency (sly and calculating) or without agency (rather hapless, vulnerable victims) (Nakamatsu, 2005). Both versions offer negative associations with Asian wives of Japanese.

Over the past decade there has been a steady increase in research focusing on children of cross-border couples (Suzuki, 2005; Takeshita, 2010; Saihanjuna, 2012; Shimizu et al., 2013). However, these two kinds of research—focusing on couples and on children—have not often been integrated, with Shimizu et al. (2013), being the exception. Nevertheless, this research has heretofore only been accessible in the Japanese language. The three women included in this study form part of a larger data set reported by Yamamoto, Shibuya, Shikita and Kim (2013).

In other words, there has been little investigation of how the immediate and wider socio-cultural and economic environments of cross-border couples influence the educational strategies they have for their children. Considering the fact that mothers tend to bear the main responsibility for conceptualizing and implementing educational strategies for their children in the Japanese context (Makino, 2007), it is especially meaningful to explore the impact of foreign mothers’ ideas and agency in this respect.

Reflecting the discussion above, this paper explores in depth the educational strategies of three highly educated Chinese women taking a case study approach. There were three main

reasons behind the decision to focus on data from just these three women for this paper. Firstly, in the context of cross-border marriage in Japan, Chinese women are now the most numerically represented foreign brides. Secondly, in seeking to understand the implications of agency in the face of social constraint of foreign women raising children in Japan, it was felt that highly educated women would have the greatest opportunity and motivation to implement their chosen educational strategies. Finally, the decision to focus on only three of the women from the entire data set was motivated by a desire to gain a thorough understanding of the deployment of agency and forces of constraint. Interviews were conducted two or three times with each woman to gain in-depth data.

The following section will explore previous studies on intermarriage in Japan focusing particularly on the question of agency. It will first look at studies that typically depict Asian wives as vulnerable individuals, followed by introducing those studies that specifically discuss the educational agency of female marriage migrants. This study builds on previous work to consider the question of agency surrounding educational strategies. In section three, the research methods and details of the data will be outlined. In section four, the author introduces data describing the educational strategies deployed by the women and the degree to which they are supported or undermined by wider familial and sociocultural factors. This is based on interview data collected from the three highly educated Chinese mothers. The penultimate section of this paper is comprised of the discussion section where the significance of the findings will be highlighted. The paper will conclude with a summary of the findings and some pointers for future research directions.

1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In Japan, during late 1980s and early 1990s, considerable attention was directed by the media on the issue of “Asian brides” who married Japanese men through matchmaking agents (Nakamatsu, 2005, p.405). At first, “Asian brides” were widely touted as “saviours” able to alleviate the marriage squeeze in rural farming communities. Initiatives of local government and private matchmaking services also played an important role in supporting these alliances (Liaw, Ochiai and Ishikawa, 2010, Lu and Yang, 2010).

Afterwards, however, the media started to criticize local governments, claiming that they were contributing to human trafficking (Satake, 2009). At the same time, negative family issues, including domestic violence and cultural maladjustment, were increasingly focused upon in the literature. Subsequent to this, media reports started to portray Asian brides as sly and calculating women from poor countries that married solely for economic gain. However, scholarly studies on international couples involving Asian women were more likely to depict them as vulnerable individuals, easily exploited by unequal power relations between Japanese husbands and their wives (Kuwayama, 1995).

As a point of contrast, Japanese women who marry foreign men and live overseas are presented positively in the literature as active childrearing agents, even though many appear to experience conflicts and challenges in their daily lives due to language difficulties and different cultural expectations. Compared with the vast literature on various aspects of cross-border couples in Japan, however, there are far fewer studies on Japanese female marriage migrants overseas (Okita, 2000; Maehara, 2010; Shibuya, 2013). One noteworthy study was conducted

by Shibuya (2013), who interviewed Japanese women in cross-border marriages raising children in Switzerland. She indicated that Japanese mothers viewed the transmission of Japanese language and culture as children's "assets", and did everything possible to transmit their native language and culture to their children. Moreover, it was evident that families and the wider community were generally supportive of these women's desire to pass on their linguistic and cultural heritage, most likely because bilingual or bicultural educational strategies are respected in Switzerland as a country with a long history of multiculturalism.

In sharp contrast to the positive reception that Japanese women raising their children to be bilingual and bicultural in Switzerland receive, Asian women who attempt to do the same thing in Japan may be criticised by their families or communities for not adapting to the local culture. Differences of opinion over transmission of cultural heritage can be a critical conflict point. Families may not be willing to allow anything other than Japanese language and cultural heritage to be passed on to the children (Kuwayama, 1995).

Among studies that focus on the enormous pressure faced by foreign women in Japan to assimilate, Saihanjuna (2011) offers a fresh viewpoint by looking at the proactiveness of Chinese female migrants from urban areas in China. However, there are some weaknesses in her study. There is a mismatch between her proclaimed focus for the study and the study sample. Saihanjuna explains that she chose three women from urban areas as interviewees to elucidate the educational strategies of "proactive" Chinese women since she assumed that women from urban areas in China would be from more educationally minded families and enjoy a higher social status (pp.148–150). However, the mothers in her research were not from especially high-status families and none graduated from university. Indeed, two of them reported low self-esteem due to a lack of higher education. Nevertheless, it is striking that, unlike the Japanese women living in Switzerland who were interviewed by Shibuya (2013), one of Saihanjuna's study participants was doing her best to provide her children with a "good education" in Japan and hoped that her children would fully integrate into Japanese society. The background to this assimilationist strategy was that, she feared that making her children different in any way from local Japanese would put the children "at risk" of being rejected.

While Saihanjuna's study throws a much-needed spotlight on individual women's strategies, she does not sufficiently consider the influence of other family members. As a result, we do not get a full sense of the very real constraints foreign women raising children in Japan may experience. Clearly the influence of other family members needs to be considered to gain a complete perspective of foreign women's educational strategies.

A recently published volume in Japanese by Shimizu et al. (2013) further advances the study of how choices in cross-border couples and educational strategies are made. Although this volume provides rich data about the decisions made by transnational families, particularly in the Japanese context, the primary focus of analysis is school choice and socioeconomic and cultural factors that may impact these. Part Two, authored by Yamamoto, Shibuya, Shikita, and Kim, focuses on cross-border couples and their mixed heritage children. It highlights the various possibilities that couples have for educating children, and stresses that the local public education system is the default mode for most parents. In terms of the questions being raised, the focus is firmly on school choice, the authors do not set out to analyse why foreign spouses from the same country and with similar educational backgrounds may make different choices for their children.

Although it is clear that female marriage migrants have the capacity to act as agents, their

options are shaped and limited by structural factors to a greater or lesser extent. Structural factors include not only the systems and policies of nations, but also sociocultural constraints governing communities and families (Lu, M. and Yang, W., 2010). As Constable (2005) notes:

A woman may actively pursue marriage to an outsider or a foreigner and she may actively choose one man over another, or she may decide to marry a local man and remain at home. But none of these choices guarantees that her marriage will be happy or successful. Nor do greater border crossings guarantee that the marriages will be “upward” in the ways that women may imagine. Moreover, (...) women’s agency and choice should not blind us to the varied influence and pressure that may be exerted in certain cases by parents, siblings, and even children (p.14).

Here Constable is pointing to the fact that there are limits on, and different degrees of agency that women in international partnerships may be able to exhibit in the presence of and pressure from parents, siblings, and children, who also influence the outcome.

Keeping to this theme, this paper focuses on the educational strategies of three foreign spouses with similar backgrounds (country of origin, language and academic background) to better understand how they are making choices about their children’s education even in the face of wider structural constraint. Compared to Shimizu et al. (2013), this research attempts to understand at a deeper level the factors that shape the choices that are made. Considering the findings of previous studies, this study further examines the influence of structural factors, especially sociocultural constraints governing communities and family members.

2. Methods

This paper explores in depth the educational strategies of three cross-border couples, focusing in particular on the foreign mothers. It draws on data that is part of a larger study on this theme. In total, the author collected data from 18 women from China, the Philippines and Brazil, six Japanese husbands, and 14 of their children in the study. In order to bring some focus to the discussion, the study explores the educational strategies of three Chinese women who graduated from university using a case study approach. Given the description of highly educated Chinese mothers often discussed in the literature, this study examines how these three university-educated Chinese mothers are influenced by strong cultural and socioeconomic forces to maximise the possibilities of their children’s education.

The data discussed here was collected on the basis of a number of in-depth semi-structured interviews (lasting 1.5-3 hours each) conducted from 2008–2012 with the three women, one of the husbands and three of the children. All participants were living in the Kansai area; a metropolitan sprawl that includes Kobe, Osaka and Kyoto, and is the second most highly populated region of Japan.

In order to make contact with possible participants, first, the author asked local international foundations² to introduce her to foreign mothers who were raising children in Japan. Once identified, the staff of these local international foundations explained the outline of the research to prospective interviewees, and asked them if they would be willing to cooperate. Afterwards, the staff provided the author with the contact information of women who were

Table 1 List of interviewees and background information

Pseudonym of Chinese mothers (age)	Ms. Sato (46)	Ms. Chin (43)	Ms. Inoue (35)
Birthplace	Sinkiang, Urumqi	Shanghai	Jilin, Changchun
Years of marriage	16	5	10
Family member (nationality/age)	Husband (Japan/57) First daughter (Japan/13) Second daughter (Japan/8)	Husband (Japan/51) First son (China/14) Second son (Japan/2)	Husband (Japan/36), First daughter (Japan/9) Second daughter (Japan/7)
Wives' occupation	Trading company (full-time)	Housewife	Translator and interpreter (part-time)
Husbands' occupation	All of them work full-time at private sector corporations.		

willing to be interviewed.

The interviews were conducted in Japanese (all mothers were fluent in Japanese), taped with an IC recorder, and then transcribed and translated into English by the author. Table 1 shows the list of interviewees. Interviews were conducted twice with Ms. Chin and three times each with Ms. Sato and Ms. Inoue. Ms. Sato was enrolled in the same Japanese language class as Ms. Chin. Ms. Inoue is working as a freelance translator and interpreter, so she often works with local international foundations. All interviews were conducted on the basis of usual ethical protocol, including informed consent. In addition to these formal interviews, the author had informal communication with three mothers via e-mail, SNS, and phone. The transcribed data was analysed thematically, with a particular focus on agency and constraint.

3. Results: Educational Strategies of the Chinese Mothers

This section explores each of the three mothers' educational strategies, focusing particularly on the influence of other family members.

3.1 Ms. Sato: "I want my children to build bridges between China and Japan"

Ms. Sato was born in Urumqi and stayed there until she graduated from high school. She chose to go to a university in Xian because her elder brother was already studying there and Xian was the closest city to Urumqi for university studies. After graduation, she went back to Urumqi for work, then a few years later she decided to work in Shenzhen, as it was rapidly growing as a special economic zone. She met her husband in China, got married and came to Japan. Ms. Sato described herself as an active woman who excels at clarifying her goals and at taking real action towards realizing those goals; her approach to her children's education is no exception. She expressed strong ideas about cultural tradition.

I want my daughters to become fluent in Chinese. Chinese schools teach children about the traditions, culture, and atmosphere in China. I want my children to understand them and also study the Chinese language. The Chinese language is becoming more important in this global age.

(Ms. Sato 2010.5, the same applies hereinafter)

Ms. Sato mentions with some regret that her eldest daughter (“Mami”, 13 years old) has attended Japanese schools from primary to middle years and, because of that, is not as fluent in Chinese as her mother expected her to be. Therefore, she has implemented a major strategy shift for “Sayaka” (8 years old), her younger daughter. She decided to enroll her in a Chinese school from the primary level, even though it would take more than an hour to commute to this school by train. Prior to her enrolment, Sayaka was left with her grandparents in China for six months to study at a local primary school.

[When I left her in China] I imagined how stressful it would be for her to stay alone in China. My parents told me Sayaka was actually crying every day, but then soon became accustomed to her new environment, and enjoyed school very much.

As a result of this extreme action, Sayaka returned to Japan with “fluent Chinese”, and her enrollment in Chinese primary school was reportedly smooth. As a previous study (Yamamoto et al., 2013) suggests, a local Japanese school is typically accepted as the “default” choice even when one parent is from a different country. Ms. Sato is the only one of the three mothers who selected a Chinese school for her child. Nevertheless, while she has prioritized her daughter’s Chinese language skills, she also wants Sayaka to achieve reasonable Japanese proficiency to be able to attend a Japanese high school. Consequently, she expects Sayaka to become (at least) bilingual and emphasizes the learning of both languages. At the same time, Ms. Sato continues to bring Mami up as bilingual, even though her Chinese language skills are weak, and hopes that she will study in China when she grows up.

I think it would be best for my children to build bridges between China and Japan, but I don’t know how. At any rate, I believe that to build bridges, it is essential to have a command of two languages.

Ms. Sato also believes it is important to transmit Chinese culture to her children as she views certain aspects to be superior to Japanese culture.

There are many TV dramas about family in Japan, and their messages are something like “it is important to respect your parents” or “the family is precious.” But in real life, family relationships do not seem to be very important for Japanese people. In China, we really have meaningful interactions with our parents. We go and visit our parents every week (...) to show our love and respect to our parents.

Ms. Sato mentioned that she has chosen a Chinese school for Sayaka because it can guarantee the transmission of Chinese language and culture, even in Japan.

It became apparent that, even though all mothers shared the same desire to pass on Chinese language and culture they have deployed different strategies. Ms. Sato’s case is atypical in that her husband and his parents have never strongly opposed her decision to send Sayaka to a Chinese school. Her husband is much older and conservative—he views male participation in housework and educational strategies as unmanly. Ms. Sato has taken advantage of this to play the major role in determining her children’s education. Moreover, Ms. Sato and her children do not have frequent interaction with their mother-in-law, and her father-in-law has

already passed away.

As an aside, only three families out of 18 (17%) interviewed by the author chose an ethnic school or sent their children to study abroad, even though a majority of mothers (88%, or 16 out of 18) mentioned the benefits of bringing up their children as bilingual and bicultural. It was clear that sending children to one of several, small ethnic schools operating in Japan is not easy even if viewed as a desirable option. In addition to financial considerations, it is necessary to persuade Japanese family members, not to mention the children themselves of the desirability of this strategy. Opposition may be practical as well as ideological (cultural) as choosing an ethnic school may be a handicap if the child wants to enter or return to mainstream education in Japan in the future (Yamamoto et al., 2013).

3.2 Ms. Chin: Longing for home

Ms. Chin had been in Japan the shortest time of the three interviewees, only five years. She is the only one who has not become a naturalized citizen of Japan. Similar to Ms. Sato's case, her father-in-law had already passed away when she married her husband, and her mother-in-law lives far from the family. Ms. Chin seldom talks to her mother-in-law.

Ms. Chin had to give up a long and satisfying career as a nurse to live with her husband in Japan, and it was a hard decision for her. This is her second marriage, and three years ago she brought a son "Ryou" from her first marriage over to Japan. He had just finished primary school in China at the time. Ryou's father is Chinese and has remained in China.

Ms. Chin joked with a hint of bitterness that her husband had showed respect for her native language and culture before she came to Japan, but not anymore.

I loved my job, and I didn't want to quit even after we got married. My husband always told me "Please come to Japan as soon as possible!" (...) He used to study Chinese before we got married, he studied it for me, but not anymore (...) He broke his word completely (laughs).

(Ms. Chin 2010.6, the same applies hereinafter)

She now regrets that her husband seldom speaks Chinese. In fact, his rejection of Chinese goes further. Although Ms. Chin tries to speak Chinese as often as possible to her children, her husband attempts to set limits on this activity. Ms. Chin and Ryou usually communicate in Chinese, as this is the most natural way for them, but her husband does not allow Ryou to speak Chinese in front of him.

If my son and I are talking in Chinese, my husband doesn't understand. He also imagines too much and suspects we're saying nasty things about him. So he always forcefully tells us, "In Japanese, please!"

Ms. Chin says that she and her husband generally have a good relationship, but her husband does not fully accept her language and culture, and he thinks she should become accustomed to life in Japan. However, Ms. Chin misses the life she had or imagines that she had in Shanghai. She says that she is seriously considering taking both children to Shanghai in the future, reasoning that school education in Shanghai is much better than in Japan.

Shanghai is a big international city and Ryou's [former primary] school gets renovated every summer. So it looks brand-new. (...) In Shanghai, each classroom has a big screen, audio equipment, computers, and everything. Teachers use a projector for teaching. So, I think schools there are better equipped than ones in Japan.(...) My son and I were disappointed when we saw his [middle] school here, but my son said "I like school, because teachers are friendly".

According to Ms. Chin, Ryou enjoys schooling in Japan telling his mother that "teachers are friendly" because he does not get punished even when he cannot finish his homework. Ms. Chin feels teachers in Japan are not as devoted as in China. Consequently, Ms. Chin is not satisfied with education in Japan and this is the reason she is planning to take her children to China for a better education.

Ryou can go to a university in China. His father practices acupuncture, so he can go and learn with his father. If he doesn't want to, I may go back to Shanghai with my second son. I want my second son to go to school in Shanghai.

Nevertheless, Ryou likes Japan and says that he wants to stay there. This is despite experiencing many difficulties initially in fitting into a Japanese school. He has managed to make some close friends and has passed the entrance exam for a high school. As a result, he is not keen to return to Shanghai.

Ms. Chin stated that she would like to go back home not only for the children's education, but also for her own career. Giving up her nursing career has been particularly hard for her. Moreover, it is clear that Ms. Chin still has a strong emotional attachment to Shanghai. She knows she can stay with her parents, and they will help her take care of her children. Even though she recognizes that it is not possible for her husband to leave Japan, she is still exploring the appropriate timing for going back to Shanghai.

Examining the data as a whole, only three mothers out of 18 are communicating with their children in the mother's native language. These families have either settled down in Japan recently (within 1-5 years) or the children are young (not entered school yet). After the formal interviews were carried out, Ms. Chin has since started working in Japan and this required that she send her son to a day care centre. Now, both Ms. Chin and her son are more exposed to the local Japanese environment, which will likely affect her strategy and that of her family in some way in the future.

3.3 Ms. Inoue: Resistance to the pressure of the Japanese family

In contrast to the Ms. Sato and Ms. Chin, Ms. Inoue came to Japan alone to study for a university degree. With the exception of her mother, who supported her decision, all of her family members and relatives were against this decision, but she disregarded their objections and came to Japan anyway. She majored in economics, and earned a bachelor's degree, although she noted that it was challenging to study in a second language. After graduation, Ms Inoue started working at a private company, and there she met her husband, who was her line supervisor.

As Ms. Inoue was already proficient in Japanese when they met, so there was no compelling reason for her husband to learn Chinese. More surprisingly, her mother-in-law forbade

her to speak to her daughter in Chinese from the moment she was born. Ms. Inoue was also persuaded by her mother-in-law to become a naturalized citizen of Japan.

When my older child was born, my mother-in-law asked me to talk to my daughter only in Japanese.(...) I didn't want to lose my Chinese nationality and name, but my mother-in-law kept asking me to become a naturalized citizen of Japan. She always says, if I keep my Chinese nationality and my children learn to speak Chinese, I may return to China with them someday, and never come back. (...) My parents in China objected [to naturalization]. I felt so sorry for my parents.

(Ms. Inoue 2011.10, the same applies hereinafter)

Ms. Inoue wanted to communicate with her baby in her first language, but followed the instructions of her mother-in-law even when she was not being monitored. She reflects that because she had married a Japanese man, she decided to follow Japanese tradition and do her best at that time.

My husband got angry with me many times. He told me I lacked common sense. Also, his elder brother once told me I was rude because I didn't know the Japanese tradition of sending a gift in return for congratulatory gifts of money when we got married. I was still 25. (...) He still has a negative image of me even after ten years.

This kind of Japan-centred environment influences her children's identity. Her daughters always tell her "Mom is Chinese, but we [daughters and their father] are Japanese" or "Yours is the Chinese way. The Japanese way is different." Ms. Inoue reports that it is because of this situation that she is always filled with a sense of loneliness in Japan.

While initially Ms. Inoue was obedient to the wishes of her mother-in-law, recently she has started to teach her children Chinese against the older woman's wishes. Ms. Inoue's mother-in-law is not living in their house, so she cannot monitor everything. Ms. Inoue makes strategic use of this situation. There are two main reasons why she started teaching Chinese to her daughters. The first is she wants her daughters to be able to communicate with her parents and their relatives in China, with whom she maintains a close relationship. The second is that she is not satisfied with school education in Japan. She feels it is her role to pass on her language and culture as "assets" to her daughters to compensate for what she perceives to be an unsatisfactory education in Japan.

Ms. Inoue perceives the quality of education at the local primary school to be too low as evidence by the "low" quantity of homework. She also criticizes the fact that teachers do not appear to be respected in Japan. Like Ms. Chin, she evaluates Chinese schools highly while expressing disappointment in Japanese schools. Now she is trying to teach her daughters Chinese by using methods such as cartoons in Chinese, which she can access via the Internet and DVDs. She is introducing these gradually, since her daughters do not yet feel the need to study Chinese at this stage.

In the larger study, most families (83%, or 15 out of 18 families) send (or plan to send) their children to a Japanese local school. As mentioned above, this is the default strategy. One third of mothers (6 out of 18) mentioned that it is hard to transmit their native language and culture because of strong opposition from Japanese family members, just as Ms. Inoue experi-

enced. Nevertheless, other mothers also use strategies to provide their children with bilingual and bicultural education. However, as we can see in Ms. Inoue's case, who only began to teach her children Chinese recently, each family's strategy could change over the time.

4. Discussion

This article has highlighted the main educational strategies of three highly educated Chinese mothers in Japan by focusing both on their agency and sociocultural constraints. In the previous section, we can sense the women's agency in both the ideals that they hold for their children's education and also in the actual actions they take to transmit their native language and culture to their children. This is despite pressure from their Japanese families. This pressure functions as a sociocultural constraint.

We can find two common features here. The first is that, as children grow up and go to a local Japanese school, they tend to become more monolingual (at best passive bilingual) and integrated into Japanese culture³, yet there was not unquestioning acceptance of full assimilation by the mothers. All the mothers strove to pass on to their children the Chinese language as an important asset. Previous research has found that Chinese interviewees, for various reasons, did not consider Japanese society academically and morally altogether suitable for their own children (Gracia, 2011, p.798). Chinese mothers in this current research also voiced the same concerns about possible negative influences of Japanese school and society on their children. The second common feature is that the three Chinese mothers are by no means powerless or vulnerable. They confront assimilation pressures and try to create the best choices for their children, just as the Japanese women overseas mentioned in Section 2 have done. In addition, they know that they can get adequate support from their own families in China.

Regardless, some aspects of the three families' educational strategies differ. Table 2 shows the home languages and school choices of these families. Language use in the family depends less on the mother's degree of enthusiasm for passing on Chinese and more on extent to which other family members reject her cultural and linguistic heritage. It is not easy for a mother to transmit this heritage to her children if her husband and/or his family prioritize Japanese over Chinese in the home and insist that the children attend a local school.

As mentioned previously, Ms. Sato was able to move ahead in pursuit of her ideal educational aspirations for her second daughter, despite the overall lack of support from her husband. In fact, she was able to take his lack of engagement in childrearing as a form of implicit approval of her strategy. Ms. Sato is taking strategic advantage of this unspoken approval and is eager to bring about her ideas of bilingual and bicultural education as much as possible. In contrast, Ms. Chin noted that there was no option for her to send her son to a Chinese school, because neither her husband nor her son would agree to that idea. Despite this, Ms. Chin has not given up on her desire to return to her hometown, Shanghai, which is an attractive city for her. Furthermore, she asserts that if she returns to Shanghai with her children, she would be able to provide them with a better education and also start working again. She is likely to get help from her parents in this case, which makes this return scenario even more attractive. Neither Ms. Sato nor Ms. Chin has frequent interaction with their mothers-in-law, and that makes their relationship with their husbands more equal than that of Ms. Inoue. Of the three mothers, Ms. Inoue feels the strongest pressure from family members to assimilate to Japanese

Table 2 Languages and school choices of three families

Pseudonym of Chinese mothers	Ms. Sato		Ms. Chin		Ms. Inoue	
Language at home (mainly between mother and children)	Japanese > Chinese		Japanese = Chinese		Japanese	
School choice	First daughter	Public primary in Japan → Private junior high in Japan	First son	Public primary in China → Public junior high in Japan	First daughter	Public primary in Japan
	Second daughter	Public primary in China → Private Chinese school in Japan	Second son	/	Second daughter	Public primary in Japan

culture. Her mother-in-law has been interfering in the family's affairs at various levels, especially since the first daughter was born. In addition, Ms. Inoue's husband and daughters view neither her language nor her culture as something valuable or equal to Japanese language and culture. Thus, we can observe the clear influence of sociocultural constraints, especially how pressure from the foreign women's Japanese family can influence the degree of success of each woman's aspirations regarding childrearing and education.

5. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the educational strategies of three Chinese women, looking at both the women's agency and the sociocultural constraints that they face. It is clear from the data that these two factors influence each other reciprocally. Nevertheless, previous studies have depicted Chinese women who raise their children as rather isolated individuals, and did not focus on the connection with family members in Japan or in China. It should be noted that the educational strategies of a given family are intricate and dynamic, subject to the influences not only of the extended families in both countries, but also of other elements, including school teachers and systems (Shikita, 2013). Children, as they grow up and develop, can also become key stakeholders in producing their own educational strategies, as we have observed with Ryou.

Previous research has suggested that mothering is gendered, racialized and differentiated by class (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997). Consequently, the childrearing and educational strategies of a group of women who share certain characteristics, such as being highly educated women or Asian, for example, could differ substantially even within this group. In other words, the results of this study are not generalizable. Yet, despite these limitations, this study offers some important insight into the experiences of highly educated Chinese women who have migrated to Japan and who are trying to bring up their children as bicultural and bilingual. It reveals that even among a group of women who on the surface appear very similar (Chinese, highly educated, raising children in Japan), education strategies are framed and deployed differently, depending not only on their own priorities but on the wishes and practices of their

families in Japan. Not surprisingly, we can also see that the children also have a voice, and that their ideas toward their schooling may not match those of their (foreign) mother. Finally, as previously mentioned, the strategies of each family are not fixed but are somewhat fluid and flexible. The next phases of this research will further shed more light on this fluidity by focusing on the changes in families' strategies in accordance with life stages.

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Notes

1. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/jinkou/suii09/marr2.html> (Accessed on 2014/03/15).
2. These grass-roots international foundations are run by a local government and offer Japanese classes and cultural events for foreign and Japanese residents in the community. Most of students taking Japanese classes are foreign women who classify themselves as "housewives". Those people who actively attend these classes and events (both Japanese and non-Japanese) tend to be from middle class families. My chosen research field is in the metropolitan area of Kansai, which has a more multicultural local culture than many parts of Japan and, as a result, the international organizations serving this population are relatively easy to access.
3. Unlike children born in Japan, Ryou came to Japan after he had learned Chinese and was already communicating with his mother in Chinese. Yet, there are limited opportunities for him to use Chinese outside home. His younger brother is growing up in Japan with limited exposure to Chinese, so it is likely that the main language of conversation between siblings and the family will be Japanese in the future.

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