

## MIGRATION DECISION-MAKING OF INDONESIAN WOMEN MARRIED TO JAPANESE MEN

*Trivinia Athina Sari,<sup>1</sup> Kurniawaty Iskandar<sup>2</sup>*

**Abstract:** The increasing intensity of interaction between Indonesian and Japanese nationals in the tourism and industrial sectors has led to an increase in international marriages between Indonesian women and Japanese men. This paper explores the migration decision-making factors of Indonesian women who married Japanese men. This qualitative study was done by conducting in-depth interviews in 2023 with Indonesian migrant women who met their spouses in Indonesia and are currently living in Japan. We examine the push factors from Indonesia and pull factors from Japan that form the migration decision-making. The main pull factor for migrating to Japan is the economic factor, where men who are the family's breadwinners can optimally provide for the family by working in their home country. Although Indonesian migrant women lose the support system of their extended family, it turns out they find new comfort in being away from their extended family in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** International Marriage, Marriage Migration, Indonesian Women, Japanese Men

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### INTRODUCTION

International marriages often result in the migration of one spouse to the country where the other spouse lives. Kofman divides "family-related migration" into three main categories: family reunification, marriage migration, and intact family migration.<sup>3</sup> Marriage migration is further subdivided into two types: migration for marriage among second-generation descendants of migrants and marriage between permanent residents or citizens and spouses they meet abroad for work, study, or vacation purposes. This suggests that the international unification of married couples in the country of one of the spouses can qualify as family migration.

The majority of migrants in international marriages are women, and most of these women move from poorer to richer countries, from developing to industrialized countries.<sup>4</sup> Based on the available information and their best estimates of the future, actors assign subjective probabilities to various future states of the world and make their decisions according to these subjective probabilities.<sup>5</sup> For women married to men of different nationalities,

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<sup>1</sup> First and Corresponding Author: Trivinia Athina Sari, Japanese Regional Studies, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia. Email [trivinia.athina@ui.ac.id](mailto:trivinia.athina@ui.ac.id)

<sup>2</sup> Second Author: Kurniawaty Iskandar, Japanese Regional Studies, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia Email [kurniawaty@ui.ac.id](mailto:kurniawaty@ui.ac.id)

<sup>3</sup> Eleonore Kofman, "Family-related Migration: A Critical Review of European Studies," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 2 (March 2004): 243–262, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183042000200687>.

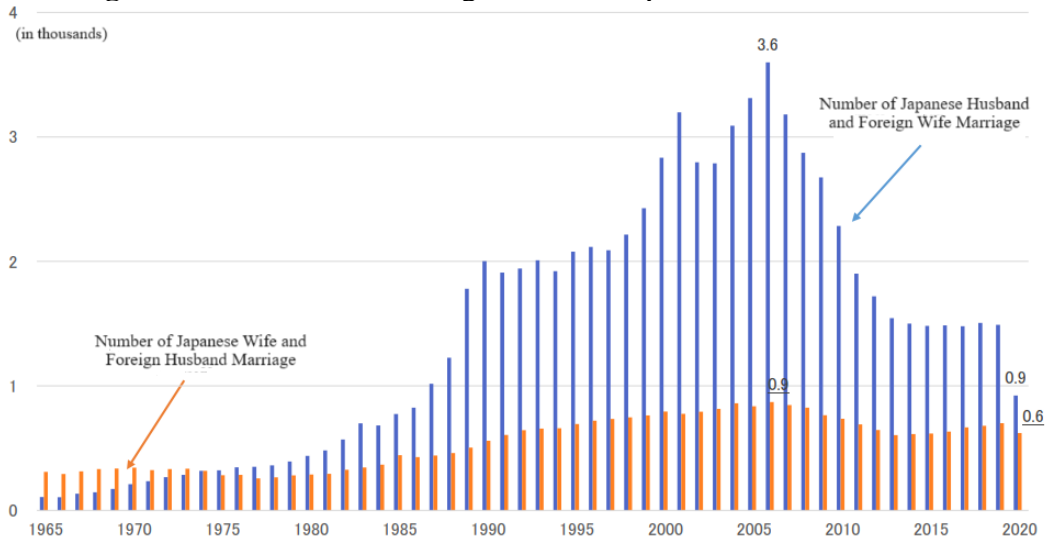
<sup>4</sup> Nicole Constable, "Introduction: Cross-Border Marriages, Gendered Mobility, and Global Hypergamy," in *Cross-Border Marriages* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812200645.1>.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Hechter and Satoshi Kanazawa, "Sociological Rational Choice Theory," *Source: Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 23, 1997, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2952549>.

migrating to their husband's country of origin is often considered a rational choice in terms of the husband's employment, which affects the overall economic situation of the family. In Japanese, a woman who moves to another country to marry a man in the destination country is called *kekkon iju josei* (結婚移住女性). Economic and paternalistic disparities often fuel this migration, particularly between developed and developing countries.<sup>6</sup> Japan, as an immigrant-receiving country, has become the country that receives the largest number of migrants in East Asia, leading for decades over East Asian neighbors such as Korea and Taiwan.<sup>7</sup>

As one of the most developed countries in Asia, Japan has experienced a rise in the number of international marriages. There were 4,156 international marriages or *kokusai kekkon* (国際結婚) in Japan when records began in 1964.<sup>8</sup> 5 years later, it rose to 5,546 in 1970, and then continued to trend upward, peaking in 2006 with a total of 44,701 international marriages happening in just one year.<sup>9</sup> Since 2007, the number of international marriages in Japan has been on a downward trend as the general marriage rate in Japan itself has been decreasing every year.

**Figure 1.** International marriage trends in Japan between 1965 to 2020



Source: Basic Data on Marriage and Family Report by Gender Equality Bureau<sup>10</sup>

Since 1990, the number of Japanese men married to foreign women has increased three to four times more than the number of Japanese women married to foreign men.<sup>11</sup> However, the number of Japanese men marrying foreign women has started to rise since 1970, presumably due to the rapid economic growth of Japan after World War II.<sup>12</sup> Japan experienced high economic growth, especially in the manufacturing sector from small to medium-sized

<sup>6</sup> Ayu Gardenia et al., “Fenomena Kekkon Iju Josei Dalam Masyarakat Jepang Phenomenon of Kekkon Iju Josei in Japan Society 26-38,” *Lensa Budaya*, vol. 13, 2018, <http://journal.unhas.ac.id/index.php/jlb>.

<sup>7</sup> Sari K. Ishii, “Remarriage Migration of Women in Asia: The Case of Japan,” *International Migration* 61, no. 4 (August 1, 2023): 186–200, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13090>.

<sup>8</sup> Labour, and Welfare Ministry of Health, “出生の年次推移,” 2013, [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hw/dl/2\\_Summary\\_of\\_results.pdf](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-hw/dl/2_Summary_of_results.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Gender Equality Beurau, “結婚と家族をめぐる基礎データ (令和3年11月2日),” 2020, <https://www.gender.go.jp/kaigi/kento/Marriage-Family/5th/pdf/1.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Gender Equality Beurau, “結婚と家族をめぐる基礎データ (令和3年11月2日).”

<sup>12</sup> Shigeto Tsuru, “Growth and Stability of the Postwar Japanese Economy,” *Source: The American Economic Review*, vol. 51, 1961.

companies which then expanded to various countries.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it can also be assumed that the number of international marriages has increased the number of international migrations in Japan.

In the World-Systems Theory framework developed by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein to understand the economic, political, and social relationships between countries in the world, Indonesia is classified as a semi-periphery country, while Japan is a center country due to differences in economy and trade.<sup>14</sup> From World Bank data by Worldometer in 2023, Indonesia's GDP per capita is ranked 16th, while Japan is ranked 3rd.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the marriage of an Indonesian woman to a Japanese man can be categorized as a hypergamous marriage. Regarding the social class of the partner, the terms 'hypergamy' (when a woman marries someone whose socio-economic status is higher than hers) and 'hypogamy' (the opposite) are used.<sup>16</sup>

Saint-Paul argues that most marriages tend to be hypergamous on the female side.<sup>17</sup> Based on this argument, Indonesian women migrating to Japan marrying Japanese men is a common situation. Hypergamy marriages where women marry men from higher economic or social backgrounds are the norm in international marriages based on different patterns of marriage and post-marriage residence for Japanese in international marriages.<sup>18</sup> The character of international marriages tends to be hypergamous where women marry into higher socioeconomic groups is evident if we compare the number of marriages between Japanese women and Indonesian men between Japanese men and Indonesian women in the same years (2015 and 2020) as below.

**Table 1.** Number of Marriages between Indonesian and Japanese by Gender

Year	Japanese Women and Indonesian Men	Japanese Men and Indonesian Women
2015	1.551	2.508
2020	1.865	2.949

Source: Japan Statistic Portal e-Stat (2015 and 2020)<sup>19</sup>

While international marriages in Japan have been decreasing since 2006<sup>20</sup>, international marriages between Indonesian women and Japanese men have increased in the past decade. According to the data presented on the table above, there were 2,508 marriages in 2015, then in 2020 it rose to 2,949 marriages. There was an increase of 441 marriages or about 17.6% in 5 years. Not only in the tourism sector, the interaction between Indonesia and Japan is

<sup>13</sup> Yoshikawa Hiroshi, "Social Science Japan in the 1960s," 1999, <http://www.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/>.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Chirot and Thomas D Hall, "World-System Theory," *Annual Review of Sociology* 8, no. 1 (August 1, 1982): 81–106, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.08.080182.000501>.

<sup>15</sup> Worldometer, "GDP by Country," 2023, <https://www.worldometers.info/gdp/gdp-by-country/>.

<sup>16</sup> Constable, "Introduction: Cross-Border Marriages, Gendered Mobility, and Global Hypergamy."

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Saint-Paul, "Genes, Legitimacy and Hypergamy: Another Look at the Economics of Marriage," *Journal of Demographic Economics* 81, no. 4 (2015): 331–77, <https://doi.org/10.1017/dem.2015.8>.

<sup>18</sup> Mika Toyota and Leng Leng Thang, "'Reverse Marriage Migration': A Case Study of Japanese Brides in Bali," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, vol. 21, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Japan Statistic Portal (e-Stat), "国勢調査 平成27年国勢調査 人口等基本集計 (男女・年齢・配偶関係, 世帯の構成, 住居の状態など)"; Japan Statistic Portal (e-Stat), "国勢調査 令和2年国勢調査 人口等基本集計 (主な内容: 男女・年齢・配偶関係, 世帯の構成, 住居の状態, 母子・父子世帯, 国籍など)."

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Health, "出生の年次推移."

increasing along with the increasing number of foreign contractors, especially Japanese contractors.<sup>21</sup> With the increasing intensity of interactions between Indonesian and Japanese citizens in recent years, it can be predicted that the number of marriages between Indonesian and Japanese citizens will increase in the future and then have an effect on increasing the migration of Indonesian women to Japan.

Studies on marriages between Indonesian and Japanese nationals have mostly examined code-mixed communication in bilingual households, e.g., the study conducted by Andriani & Ardiantari<sup>22</sup> and Zuraida et al<sup>23</sup>. Both studies took the marriage between Japanese nationals and Balinese as their research subjects. Toyota & Thang in 2012 discuss marriage between Japanese women (developed countries) and Balinese men in Indonesia (developing countries) where it is the Japanese women who migrate to Indonesia. This study analyzed how marriage is seen as a way for women to move to more attractive locations or escape structural constraints in their home countries.<sup>24</sup> This reverse marriage migration illustrates the dynamics of globalization that are different from the general pattern.<sup>25</sup>

This study focuses on Indonesian women migrants whose marriages to Japanese men are not in the process of divorce, so that the initial migration goal does not fail. We wanted to explore what pull factors from Japan and push factors from Indonesia were taken into consideration in their migration decision-making.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach and literature study method will be used in this research. According to Creswell, qualitative research is a research approach that focuses on in-depth understanding and interpretation of social phenomena by exploring the views, attitudes, and contexts perceived by research participants.<sup>26</sup> Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of context and complexity in understanding social phenomena.<sup>27</sup> Qualitative data analysis involves the process of searching for patterns, thematic, or categories that emerge from the data. We try to identify trends or themes that reflect the meanings that emerge from the data.

This study focuses on Indonesian women who married Japanese men, have migrated to Japan, and are currently living in Japan with their husbands. After living in Japan for several years, using the framework of push and pull theory, as well as rational choice theory, it will be evaluated what factors influence their decision to settle down and build a family in Japan. Secondary data in this research is obtained through literature studies in the form of books, articles, and journals. To obtain the data, the researcher conducted surveys or interviews with Indonesian women who have married Japanese men and are currently residing in Japan to gain further insight into their consideration factors before making the decision to migrate to Japan. The interview results will be the main source of data in this study. The following are the general criteria of the informants:

- Female Indonesian citizen

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<sup>21</sup> Ulani Yunus et al., "Keeping Harmony of Indonesian Japanese Intercultural Marriage Interactions," *Bus. Excellence*, vol. 1, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Anak Agung et al., "Current Issues and Opportunities in Linguistics, Literature, Culture and Arts Studies in The New Normal" *Code Mixing Phenomenon on Mothers to Children Interaction on Japanese And Balinese Mixed Marriage* n.d.

<sup>23</sup> Lukia Zuraida et al., "Language Choice of Balinese and Japanese Mixed Marriage Children," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 11, no. 4 (July 1, 2020): 604, <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1104.11>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Toyota and Thang, "'Reverse Marriage Migration': A Case Study of Japanese Brides in Bali\*."

<sup>26</sup> John W. Creswell et al., "Qualitative Research Designs," *The Counseling Psychologist* 35, no. 2 (March 30, 2007): 236–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

- Met her Japanese spouse in Indonesia
- Married to a Japanese
- Currently residing in Japan

The interviews were done in 2023 with 7 informants aged around 20 to 30 who have been married for at least 1 year. From these individuals, the researcher obtained leads and used the snowball method to recruit further interviewees.

**Tabel 2. Informants Data**

Initial	Age	Year of Marriage	Year of Migrated	Education	Number of Children	JLPT
HD	33	2018	2018	Bachelor	2	N3
ES	35	2020	2023	High school	1	-
RW	30	2019	2019	Bachelor	0	N2
RA	34	2019	2019	Bachelor	1	N2
DW	34	2014	2018	Bachelor	2	N3
ND	33	2016	2016	Bachelor	1	N2
SM	26	2022	2023	Bachelor	0	N2

We experienced difficulties in data collection, mainly due to limited access to relevant informant sources. Furthermore, since all interviews were conducted online and we are based in Indonesia, we faced additional challenges in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of interactions with respondents. In addition to geographical distance, researchers also had to be mindful of cultural and linguistic sensitivities during online interviews, ensuring that questions were designed to be well understood by respondents. Another difficulty was to obtain the number of marriages between Indonesian and Japanese nationals each year as there is no official data portal that releases such data.

## DECISION MAKING TO MIGRATE TO JAPAN

Migration decision-making is a process that consists of many small steps, both in the form of decisions and actions, which must be passed to achieve the final goal.<sup>28</sup> Tabor and Milfont have previously described the initial stages of the migration process from pre-departure to acculturation in the destination country. In the pre-departure stage, interpersonal characteristics such as personality and family connections influence migration decisions.<sup>29</sup> Then migrants enter the stage of actively considering departure, where macro (risk perception) and micro (job opportunities) factors become critical components.<sup>30</sup> However, unlike economic migrants, those involved in international marriage migration rarely have a choice of destination; they either stay in the husband's or wife's home country.

Achenbach concluded three influencing factors in migration: career, family, and lifestyle preferences.<sup>31</sup> Achenbach's opinion provides a very relevant perspective in the context

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

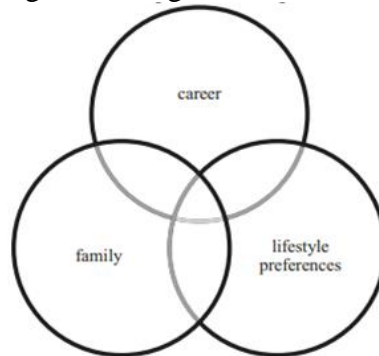
<sup>29</sup> Aidan S. Tabor and Taciano L. Milfont, "Migration Change Model: Exploring the Process of Migration on a Psychological Level," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 35, no. 6 (November 2011): 818–32, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.11.013>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ruth Achenbach, "Return Migration Decisions: A Study on Highly Skilled Chinese in Japan." (Berlin, 2016).

of migration, especially marriage migration where family considerations greatly influence the decision to migrate. In addition to family factors, we will examine how career factors and lifestyle preferences influence Indonesian women's migration decisions.

**Figure 2.** Venn diagram of migration decision-making influences



Source: Return Migration Decisions<sup>32</sup>

One common approach to explaining migration is the "neo-classical economic equilibrium perspective," or what is often and more simply referred to as the push-pull theory.<sup>33</sup> This theory explains why people migrate by the presence of push factors in the country of origin, and or pull factors in the country of destination.<sup>34</sup> One of the push factors for someone to migrate from their home country is often related to economic factors, for example due to the lack of jobs that match one's ability and income target. Meanwhile, one of the pull factors in the destination country is the availability of jobs that are considered promising. These pull and push factors are correlated where the things that drive a person to migrate from their country get a solution after they migrate to a new country. In the context of international marriage, the pull factor in the destination country is generally to establish a life together in the spouse's home country. However, there are not always push factors from the migrant's home country, so the decision for Indonesian women to migrate to Japan tends to be a decision that is not easy to make.

In the context of marriage-related migration, if the marriage precedes the migration and the foreign spouse joins their domestic partner through the family reunification route, this is called "spousal migration".<sup>35</sup> To migrate to another country that has a different culture, uses a different language, has a climate that is also different from the country of origin, is usually not a decision that is taken easily. It takes a push factor from the home country or a pull factor from the destination country that is large enough to make someone choose to migrate. 4 out of the 7 informants interviewed had never lived in Japan before marriage, so the purpose of their first migration to Japan was to live with their husbands in Japan. Most of the informants had registered their marriages in Indonesia, so when they migrated, legally their statuses were already wives.

One of the informants (HD, 33) worked for a Japanese company in Jakarta while her future husband was building a business in Jakarta. However, his business encountered many obstacles due to his status as a foreigner. Prior to January 2020, Law No. 5/1960 on the Basic

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Castles, Mark J. Miller, and Giuseppe Ammendola, "The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 27, no. 6 (December 9, 2005): 537–542, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10803920500434037>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Katharine Charsley and Michaela Benson, "Marriages of convenience or Inconvenient Marriages: Regulating Spousal Migration to Britain," vol. 26, 2012, <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/eb-terms/>.

Regulation of Agrarian Principles stipulated the prohibition of direct foreign ownership of property.<sup>36</sup> Then the tight competition in the local market and the cultural and language differences that became a clash made HD's future husband decide to return to Japan. Since they were already intending to get married, HD's future husband felt he would be a good breadwinner for his family if he was living in Japan. Other informants expressed the same opinion as HD where their husbands thought their jobs were more stable in Japan. Informant RA (34) explained that her husband once tried to find other job in Indonesia so that he can stay longer in Indonesia:

*When my husband's contract in Indonesia expired, he tried to find a new job there. But since this was his first job, he wondered if the choice to change jobs would be worth the benefits.*

New Zealand psychologist Aidan S. Tabor applied a concept called NDM (Naturalistic Decision Making), which specifically explains the limitations of rationality in explaining migration.<sup>37</sup> She defines migration decisions as the result of a long process shaped by unique individual differences and cultural norms, derived from a negotiation process between several actors in a social context (family) where the results will affect all members. Other informants gave similar answers, where their decision to migrate was based on which country their future husband or husbands could make a better living in. During the interview, all informants answered without hesitation, giving the researcher the impression that this decision was a natural one for them to make.

The purpose of migrating can also change during the decision-making process. Tabor found that in international migration, the decision to migrate is made before deciding where to migrate.<sup>38</sup> Tabor identified the following factors as determinants in a person's decision to leave their home country: lifestyle and environmental factors, work-life balance, career considerations and children's welfare.<sup>39</sup> Most informants see Japan as a safer country to live in especially for children, compared to Indonesia where the crime rate is higher. One of the informants (ND) even said that her skin feels healthier in Japan, probably due to better air quality. Other informant (ES) said that she likes the food in Japan better than Indonesian food because they are less oily.

## **FAMILY: EXTENDED FAMILY AS A PULL AND PUSH FACTOR FOR MIGRATION**

Achenbach tries to investigate who is part of the decision-making process in a family, household, extended kinship or social network.<sup>40</sup> Tabor highlights that not only parents and children in a nuclear family make decisions together, but also extended families and even friends and social networks from a community can influence decision-making.<sup>41</sup> Asian communities tend to have close ties with extended families, so family decisions are quite often made based on the influence of extended family members, especially elder extended family members. Men's position in the parental household (e.g., as the first son or the last son) affects their chances of choosing migration to improve their lives or to contribute to household

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<sup>36</sup> Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan Republik Indonesia, "Undang-Undang (UU) Nomor 5 Tahun 1960 Tentang Peraturan Dasar Pokok-Pokok Agraria," 1960, <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/51310/uu-no-5->.

<sup>37</sup> Aidan S Tabor, "The Peculiar Case of New Zealand," 2014, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/41338419.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Achenbach, "Return Migration Decisions: A Study on Highly Skilled Chinese in Japan."

<sup>41</sup> Tabor, "The Peculiar Case of New Zealand."

income.<sup>42</sup> In traditional East Asian paternalism, the first son inherits ancestral assets, usually land, and his wife is responsible for caring for her elderly parents.

Informant DW (34) lived in Indonesia with her husband and two children for four years before migrating to Japan. This decision was made because DW's husband no longer wanted to live in Indonesia and at that time there was an opportunity to return to work at the head office in Japan. In addition, her husband had also promised his parents that he would return to Japan no matter what, so DW and her children had to migrate to Japan. Here, the expectations of the husband's family had a big effect on the migration decision made by DW's family. DW's family currently lives with her husband's parents. In Japan, quite a few intergenerational families live together in the same house, but they do not really live together like most intergenerational families in Indonesia. The two families occupy different floors, usually have different facilities and household appliances so the two families do not really mix in daily life. DW sees her family's move to Japan as natural because "it was time (for her family) to return (to Japan)". For her, there is a change in the perspective of 'going back', because now for DW, going back means to Japan, not to Indonesia. Although DW's extended family in Indonesia sometimes persuade her to return home, this is just seen as a non-serious appeal and had no effect on DW's family's migration decision.

Informant RW also revealed that because her husband was the only child, her husband's family "could not let him go to Indonesia". In contrast, RW had more flexibility to choose to migrate away from her own parents in Indonesia. However, RW and her husband do not currently live together with her husband's parents' family. At the time of the interview, RW was in Indonesia because her mother was hospitalized. Regarding the care of the elderly, Indonesia still relies on extended family support and co-residency patterns with parents by considering the cost of living of caring for the elderly in the household sector.<sup>43</sup>

One informant (ND, 33), who was the only child, left her mother to live alone in Indonesia because her father had died. However, this situation did not make ND's mother force her to stay in Indonesia. In Japan, ND and her family do not live with the in-laws. ND's mother and father-in-law both have cancer, but they are still able to take care of themselves. ND's mother and father-in-law did not want to see their family often for fear of disturbing their grandchildren's health since their cancer was related to the respiratory system. Although ND left her mother in Indonesia, there are support from other family members who could help look after her mother. This decision may have been taken to provide support to the family in Indonesia while maintaining the well-being of the nuclear family in Japan. This situation reflects the complex dynamics of managing family responsibilities and marriage migration decisions. Migration studies have tended to interpret this scheme under the theoretical perspective of "global care chains".<sup>44</sup> Developed countries experiencing declining marriage rates experience a shortage of the next generation to take care of elderly parents, hence the creation of the so-called global care chain. Developing countries that have a demographic surplus of young people migrate to developed countries to take care of elderly parents.

Despite this, Japan has a relatively advanced and structured healthcare system. Japan's pension and health insurance programs support the health care of the elderly and access to long-term care services and nursing home facilities is relatively easy to access. Meanwhile, Indonesia's health care system for the elderly is not as good as Japan's. Limited access to health

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<sup>42</sup> Achenbach, "Return Migration Decisions: A Study on Highly Skilled Chinese in Japan."

<sup>43</sup> Shofy Yasmin and Kurniawaty Iskandar, "Rational Choice Theory and Taste of Japanese Popular Culture in Motivation of PMI to Enter Japan's Global Labor Market," *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 17, no. 2 (March 21, 2023): 571, <https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v17i2.2012>.

<sup>44</sup> Emily Haley, "Sending Love Home: The Effects of Global Care Chains on Economics, Family, and Agency," *Perspectives*, 2018, <https://scholars.unh.edu/perspectives/vol10/iss1/2>.



facilities and long-term care services can be a challenge. Economic challenges and social changes can affect the extent to which families can provide care for the elderly.

In Indonesia, the concept of extended family often includes not only parents and children, but also siblings, cousins, and sometimes even more distant relatives, whereas in Japan the concept of nuclear family is increasingly common. While the extended family is often considered an important source of emotional and physical support, changes in family structure and the demands of modern life can affect the extent to which family members can be directly involved in the care of the elderly. Factors such as employment, geographical distance between family members and changing social values can affect family care dynamics. SM (26) revealed that family ties and neighborhoods in Japan are not as strong as those in Indonesia. However, SM and most informants revealed that they felt more free living in Japan because of the extended family factor in Indonesia instead. The close relationship between extended families in Indonesia is considered something that makes them uncomfortable. As SM said in her answer:

*Although sometimes there is a sense of homesickness, here I feel more at ease because there's no lousy neighbors to listen to. Moreover, since we are currently postponing (on having children) so it's more comfortable because we don't get asked questions.*

Some informants described Indonesians' high curiosity about other people's affairs with the word "*kepo*". The word "*kepo*" itself is an informal word in Indonesian that refers to someone who is very curious or likes to interfere in other people's affairs. According to them, Japanese people are generally not as nosy as most Indonesians. For example, Indonesians can easily ask questions about whether they are pregnant or not, how much their husband earns, and so on. Here the presence of extended family in Indonesia is a push factor for Indonesian women to migrate to Japan and the freedom given by the husband's family in Japan is a pull factor to stay in Japan.

## **EMPLOYMENT: BETWEEN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND THE DOMESTIC SECTOR**

One important factor shaping the migrant experience is participation in the labor market and most migrants experience discrimination in the recruitment process, wages, and types of jobs available to them.<sup>45</sup> In particular, married female migrants are no longer considered "follower migrants" as they once were.<sup>46</sup> This study not only examines the position of sending and receiving countries globally, but also examines the economic and social benefits gained by migrants. For some women in the Philippines and Indonesia, motherhood and sisterhood pushed them to work abroad as domestic workers to support the education and living expenses of their children and younger siblings.<sup>47</sup> Indonesia, by constructing labor migration as a contribution to the economic development of the "national family," developed the gender ideology of familism to mobilize lower-class women to participate in labor migration.<sup>48</sup> But not all migrant women are victims of human trafficking, so scholars tend to avoid the "victim"

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<sup>45</sup> Achenbach, "Return Migration Decisions: A Study on Highly Skilled Chinese in Japan."

<sup>46</sup> Hyun Mee Kim, Shinhye Park, and Ariun Shukhertei, "Returning Home: Marriage Migrants' Legal Precarity and the Experience of Divorce," *Critical Asian Studies* 49, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 38–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2016.1266679>.

<sup>47</sup> Pei-Chia Lan, *Global Cinderellas* (Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822387787>.

<sup>48</sup> Rachel Silvey, "Mobilizing Piety: Gendered Morality and Indonesian–Saudi Transnational Migration," *Mobilities* 2, no. 2 (July 2007): 219–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450100701381565>.

and "perpetrator" approach, and prefer to consider individuals as agents who participate in decisions for their survival.

Most informants had stable jobs in their respective fields in Indonesia but gave up these jobs once they migrated to Japan for marriage. Although the informants could support themselves before marriage in Indonesia, by migrating to Japan their position in the public sector became weaker. But they still see migrating to Japan as a better option because by doing their current job, there's no way their salary will exceed their husband's salary. Stark & Levhari see this in terms of a new economic approach to labor migration that shifts the focus towards viewing migration as a household strategy aimed at diversifying income sources and thus minimizing risk.<sup>49</sup> Out of the 7 informants interviewed, only 1 informant had worked full-time in his field of expertise after migrating to Japan. RA worked for a company that accepted foreign workers in Japan called *touroku shien kikan* (登録支援機関). However, after becoming pregnant she decided to quit the job and is now a housewife. RA expressed her desire to work part-time once her child is in school, as returning to full-time work would be too time-consuming and tiring to do while taking care of the child.

It is not only economic factors that migrants consider when making the decision to migrate, but also where they can best fulfill several goals.<sup>50</sup> Some of the interviewees worked part-time before they had children, while others started working part-time after their children started school or daycare. Although part-time workers in Japan are paid well on average, it seems that part-time work for married migrants is not focused on their contribution to the family economy. Informant ND talked about the "meager" payment she received from her child's daycare center for being one of the caretakers and playing with the other children there.

*It just so happens that my daughter and I both 'work' at a daycare center where we work as a 'paid visitor'. So, we get paid to come on a certain day to the daycare center and make it look like it's crowded. It's not a bad job because I get to play with my daughter there. Sometimes if it's crowded, I read Japanese books and then translate them into easy Indonesian.*

For ND, this part-time job suits her situation as a stay-at-home mother who takes care of the children on her own without the help of extended family. Compared to the money earned, ND feels that working part-time at a daycare center while taking care of the children is more suitable. The husband's function as the main breadwinner is a strong foundation so that ND can freely choose to use her time without having to think about the money earned. Like ND, other informants who work part-time do not see the urgency of earning money; part-time work is done to fill the time while taking care of household chores. For married women, working is often seen as a means of self-actualization outside of work at home.

Most informants answered that they would like to work once their children are old enough to be left at work all day. Informant SM, who does not have children yet, thought about applying for a full-time job but felt that the Japanese hiring system might not support her plans to have children soon. SM thought that her plan to have children in the next 2-3 years would be detrimental to the company, so she chose to help the family business, which she thought is more sustainable. The existence of her husband's extended family can replace the role of the migrant extended family that she left behind in Indonesia.

## LIFE IN JAPAN: POST-MIGRATION

<sup>49</sup> Oded Stark and David Levhari, "On Migration and Risk in LDCs," vol. 31, 1982, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1153650?seq=1&cid=pdf->.

<sup>50</sup> Achenbach, "Return Migration Decisions: A Study on Highly Skilled Chinese in Japan."

For informants who have lived in Japan before marriage, the perception of risk can be said to be minimal because they already have experience living in Japan. Whereas for informants who have never lived in Japan before marriage and do not have an established social network in Japan, the perception of risk can be greater. The differences in living habits before marriage between Muslim-majority Indonesia and Japan nationals reflect differences in culture and social values. In Indonesia, religious norms and strong family traditions encourage most people not to live together before marriage. In contrast, in Japan the influence of globalization and modernization, especially among the young and urban, may make cohabitation a way to better understand a partner before taking a big step like marriage. By never living in the same house with their future spouse, Indonesian women who migrate are taking a risk to leave their roots and enter unfamiliar territory.

Japan is a country with a homogeneous community,<sup>51</sup> so migrants have the potential to encounter discrimination, including married migrants. Foreigners essentially give locals a choice, to welcome (xenophilia) or to reject (xenophobia).<sup>52</sup> None of the informants we interviewed experienced discrimination in Japan. This might be because most of the informants have passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Test with a considered rather high level. That way they can blend into the Japanese society better and they feel that the locals respect their effort to learn the language. RW even thinks she get a better treat because she is a foreigner:

*I don't feel any racism towards me, the people are kind. In fact, people treat me nicely at my part-time work because I'm the only foreigner, so it's a good kind of 'discrimination'. It wasn't difficult to take a long day-offs when I want to go back to Indonesia for a while, because they understand that I live far away from my parents and the airplane ticket price to Indonesia is not cheap."*

In dealing with foreigners, people in the receiving country are forced to choose between friendliness and hostility.<sup>53</sup> Foreigners in Japanese are called *gaikokujin* (外国人) or often abbreviated as *gaijin* (外人) which literally means 'outsiders'. Research conducted by Wibowo et al in 2023 concluded that some Japanese people are more careful not to use the word *gaijin* because they feel there are discriminatory nuances contained in it.<sup>54</sup> The word *gaikokujin* is considered more neutral, while the word *gaijin* contains negative, cynical, and discriminatory content.<sup>55</sup> This shows that although Japanese society is homogeneous, their eastern culture is sensitive to the terms and language used in communicating with foreigners.

Furthermore, the presence of their husbands alone could provide significant social and emotional support that gave them the courage to make the decision to migrate. All informants interviewed did not feel discriminated against after living in Japan. The presence of the husband's family can also help in adjusting to the new environment, culture, and daily life in Japan. When doing formal affairs in Japan, even though they themselves can speak Japanese, they would ask their husbands to accompany them and bridge the language gap.

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>51</sup> Donald. Denoon and Gavan. McCormack, *Multicultural Japan: Palaeolithic to Postmodern* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> Robi Wibowo, Heddy Shri Ahimsa Putra, and G.R. Lono Simatupang, "Sebutan Gaijin Untuk Orang Asing: Sebuah Gambaran Bagaimana Orang Jepang Memandang Budayanya Sendiri," *IZUMI* 12, no. 1 (June 14, 2023): 50–64, <https://doi.org/10.14710/izumi.12.1.50-64>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Migration is a tool to ensure a better life.<sup>56</sup> However, whether one's life is "good" or "bad" is highly subjective and can differ greatly from individual to individual, depending on personal values, family needs and aspirations. However, for married migrant women, the personal element of decision-making is overshadowed by family interests. Personal lifestyle preferences, such as Japanese people who do not like to interfere in other people's affairs compared to Indonesians, are considered an attractive factor for migration. Some of the informants also think that the Japanese environment is a better environment for their kids to grow up, despite the lack of religious education that they might get if they live in Indonesia.

The decision to migrate is also based on several key considerations including the welfare of the nuclear family, the husband's career as the main breadwinner, and the perceived better education of children in Japan compared to Indonesia. The decision to migrate is less about personal considerations and more about the impact on the family. The husband's job opportunities in Japan that match his skills and expertise are a major factor as they influence family welfare. Since they can fully depend on their husbands economically, they can choose jobs that do not contribute much to the family economy. Those who end up working in the public sector once their children are in school do so more for self-actualization. In a way, the 'career' that is said to be the reason for migration is the husband's career, not the wife's personal career.

Migration involves not only a physical change of residence, but also changes in daily ways of life, social norms, and language. However, the presence of husbands as a bridge between Indonesian migrant women and Japanese society is instrumental in facilitating integration and adjustment. Husbands, as family members who may be more familiar with the local environment, can provide migrant women with emotional support, assistance in communication, and cultural understanding. When migrating to a destination country, the main pull factor for migrant women is based on economic factors. But extended family social network factors and other non-economic factors such as comfort in socializing can be driving factors in migration decision-making.

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<sup>56</sup> Achenbach, "Return Migration Decisions: A Study on Highly Skilled Chinese in Japan."

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