

**(Re)Constructing Identity: International Marriage Migrants as Potential Agents of Social Change in a Globalising Japan<sup>1</sup>**

**ABSTRACT**

There is a critical debate taking place in Japan concerning the issue of migration. In particular, Japan, as the epitome of the global ageing/childless society, is having to address the issue of permanent migration. However, the link between settlement and new types of societies emerging within the context of global transformation has received little attention in the migration literature. Moreover, international migration research, with its traditional focus on economic types of studies, has typically neglected issues of settlement and (cultural/societal) transformation. One reason for this may be the lack of an appropriate mechanism for conceptualising potential change. Agency, a central notion in any discussion of change from below, is often framed in a Foucauldian influenced metaphor of resistance/domination that is more useful in explaining reproduction than the transformative potential of human agents. In this paper, I put the notion of resistance under erasure. Using James Scott's alternative idea of 'everyday' resistance as a point of departure and drawing on recent work in migration research, I show how notions of strategic activity, social capital, and social ties/networks can provide a better understanding of the dialectic between the individual and the social, between the human agency of individuals and the social practices of communities. The result is a much more convincing mechanism of change, one that is better able to conceive of the international migrant as a complex social being exercising agency to gain access to, transform, and create social networks, social resources, and identities. I support my argument with data from a small sample of international marriage migrants gathered during a six-month period of fieldwork in Northeast Japan. The data identifies some of the ways – particularly long-term, active status-seeking strategies of participation, contribution, and education – these migrants act as agents. At a time when the conditions of possibility offer particularly fertile ground for migrants to be potential agents of social change, a reformulated conception of agency provides a tool for understanding the changes currently occurring in contemporary Japan and how migrants have responded to – and act as catalysts for – such change. A deeper understanding of the link between (societal) conditions and (individual) agency may in turn shed light on how ideologies of Japan as mono-cultural, homogeneous, and 'unique' are undergoing processes of dissolution and transformation.

**INTRODUCTION**

Migration is, according to Berger (1984), the 'quintessential experience' of the global age. This is the 'age of migration' (Castles and Miller 1998), a world of ever-intensifying networks of human interaction and interdependencies (Piper 2000). There is a speeding up in the pace of life and an

overcoming of spatial barriers that is commonly referred to as globalisation. Globalisation is characterised by movement or flows across borders (Appadurai 1996), flows of ideas/values, information, capital, technology, and, perhaps most significantly, people. One consequence of such flows is an increased questioning of notions of 'difference' and of the relevance and validity of the lines that are drawn around various human groups and individuals. On the other hand, the same mediums and flows that enable contact with people outside our immediate physical and temporal setting are also increasingly being utilised to (re)produce and maintain us as subjects. The overt tensions between globalising and localising forces that are characteristic of our age are perhaps most transparent in the case of migrants who have come to live in a new country.

As Bartram (2000) points out, in the migration literature Japan is viewed as a 'negative' case, one of the few industrialised countries not to have experienced the tremendous increase in international migration characteristic of the global age. But even assuming the global movement and flows of people have yet to affect Japan very much, this is certainly not true of other flows which characterise globalisation. Eades, Gill, and Befu's (2000) volume shows how contemporary Japanese society has undergone deep changes in response to the challenges of globalisation. Goodman's (2002) edited work offer more evidence that major transformations did occur during the 1990s as a result of Japan's changing economy, demography and civil society. Indeed, many (e.g. Giddens 1990; Gills 2002b; Rosenau 1997) have even conceptualised globalisation *as* a process of profound social change. Harvey's (1990) description of globalisation as a new intense period of 'time-space compression' characterised by a 'crisis in representation' is useful in framing such changes. Because spatial and temporal dimensions are central for all systems of representation, "the shaping and re-shaping of time-space relationships within the different systems of representation have profound effects on how identities are located and represented" (Hall 1992: 301). Thus, in a Japan often portrayed as the archetypal postmodern/global society, change has manifested itself in economic, social, educational, moral, political, demographic, diplomatic, and even linguistic 'crisis'.

Since migration is one of the most important aspects of globalisation, the recent (belated) increase in international migration in Japan suggests that even more dramatic crises and transformations are yet to come. If globalisation is a powerful transformative force, then migration too – which Befu (2000) argues is *the* most important aspect of globalisation – may be seen as coterminous with social change. Indeed, migration, being both a result of global change and powerful force for further change, as Castles (1998: 179) points out, plays a key part in most contemporary social transformations. However, as Held et al (1999: 8/9) note, the transformationalist argument is usually framed in terms of the reconstitution of the power and authority of the state as well as its affect at the economic level. In comparison, Befu's meso-level perspective on migration, does, in the words of one reviewer (Monceri 2002: 138), make it possible "to consider globalisation from the perspective of individuals operating in a global environment, rather than limiting it to the economic and institutional macro-level." This makes sense since, as Mato (1996: 69) observes, local agents, as part of the contemporary globalised world, increasingly develop their practices and representations in transnationally and internationally related contexts. Still, as Monceri just noted, conventional frameworks of globalisation analyses and migration research have

tended to focus on the economic and institutional macro level at the expense of the micro-level. Looking at what Gills (2002a: 1) calls the ‘invisible’ part of globalisation – globalisation-from-below – *together* with the cultural and social aspects of migration at the macro-level can only result in a more complete understanding of the mechanisms of potential social change.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, the argument that Japan has reached or is about to reach some kind of turning point or ‘critical mass’ is examined. Then, the migration literature in general, and of migration in Japan in particular, is reviewed. Next, the popular notion of resistance (particularly in its Foucauldian form) as a viable mechanism of change is problematised. The following section reclaims the concept of agency by enriching it with notions of strategic activity, social capital, and social ties. Thus reconceptualised, agency better captures the transformative potential of human agents, the concept becoming a more useful tool in trying to understand how migrants, in their daily lived-experience, can be potential agents of social change. In the remainder of the paper, the theoretical discussion is integrated with interview material gathered during a six-month period of fieldwork in Northeast Japan. The paper finishes by touching briefly on the implications of these findings for the future of Japan and Japanese identity.

## **THE CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY: JAPAN AND THE ‘TURNING POINT’ OR CRITICAL MASS ARGUMENT**

Although the populations of all developed countries are ageing and having less children, Japan is experiencing both of these demographic trends particularly acutely and will, as Figure 1 shows, have the highest ratio of over 65s and the lowest birth rate of all developed countries in the next twenty years or so:

**Figure 1: International Comparison of Age Structure and Birth Rate<sup>2</sup> 2000 and Future Projections (in brackets)**

Country	Over 65's as % of total population 2000 (2020/30)	Total Special Birth Rate 2000 (2025)
Japan	17.34 (27.85/29.6)	1.36
America	12.30 (16.29/20.2)	2.13
Germany	16.40 (22.51/27.7)	1.36
France	15.97 (20.45/23.8)	1.77
Italy	18.07 (23.85/28.6)	1.19
Australia	12.3 (??/20.1)	

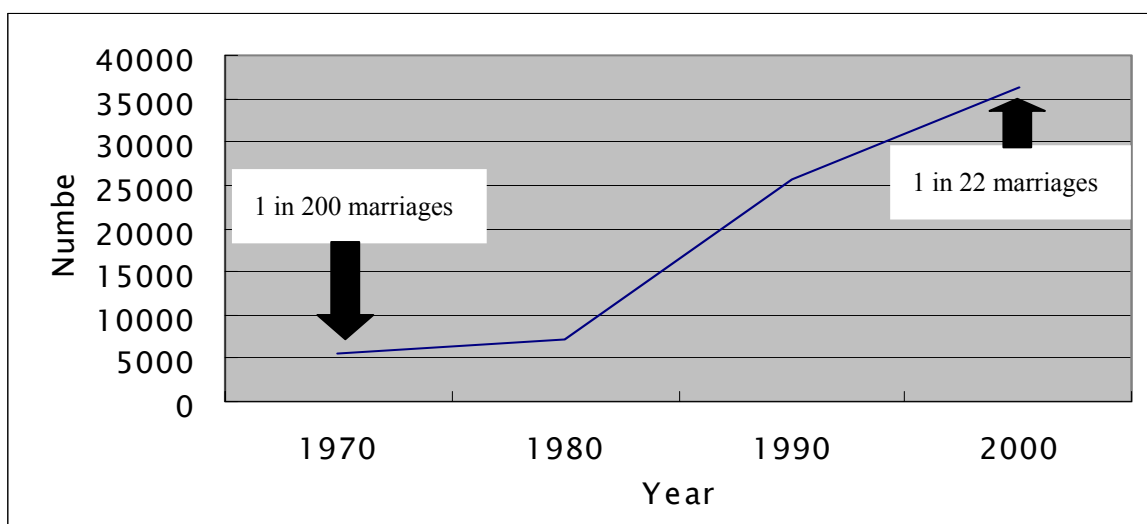
Societies which are getting older and having less children experience labour shortages leading to a higher age dependency ratio (the number of workers supporting one pensioner), a shortfall in taxes, and a strain on the welfare system. In fact, the UN has estimated that Japan is facing a serious labour shortage that will require the acceptance of 600,000 foreign workers a year for the next fifty years in order to sustain its economy at the 1995 level (Shipper 2002: 60; UN 2000). The need to import labour to sustain its economy is widely recognised by government bodies, such as the Prime

Minister's Commission and the EPA, and other organisations, such as the Japan Research Institute and Keidanren. However, the need to accept foreigners as 'necessary human resources' is usually balanced against the need to maintain 'safety and social order' (a euphemism for crime by 'foreigners') and to consider 'Japanese people's perception of society, culture and their sensitivity' ([www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/IB/IB2000/ib.htm/](http://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/IB/IB2000/ib.htm/)). One of the first attempts to maintain this delicate balance was illustrated by the June 1990 revisions to the Immigration Control Law which allowed South Americans of *Japanese* descent (up to third generation) and their spouses and families to reside in Japan for three (now four) years without job restrictions (Sellek 1997: 185).

The 1990 revisions were only a temporarily solution and there is evidence that the immigration debate has now reached a critical stage in Japan. Indeed, there is only recently talk (e.g. Yamawaki, Kondo, and Kashiwazaki 2000) of the 'conditions' necessary for Japan to become an immigrant nation, giving the impression that Japan is currently migrant-less. Issues of migration, settlement, and social transformations are beginning to attract widespread media attention in Japan. For example, although established in 1995, the work of the Ethnic and Migration Studies in Japan Network (EMSJ) – an independent body of around 200 scholars, graduate students, NGO personnel, and staff from newspaper agencies – has only recently entered the public arena following its 1999 campaign against the deportation of a group of overstayers ([www.unesco.org/most/apmrnjap2.htm](http://www.unesco.org/most/apmrnjap2.htm)). Then, in September 1999, the Asian Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN), of which EMSJ is an affiliate, held its 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference at Waseda University, Tokyo. The APMRN, established in 1995 to look at long-term social and political consequences of international migration in the region (See the Special Issue of the Asian and Pacific Migration Journal 2000 (9:3)) is located within the UNESCO-MOST (Management of Social Transformations) Programme, established in 1994 (See the Special Issue of the International Social Science Journal June 1998 (50:2)).

Although much of the recent debate in Japan concerns labour migration, settlement (defined in terms of permanency) is also becoming an issue. One of the clearest cases of permanent migration is international marriage migration. <sup>3</sup> 'International' marriages have increased dramatically in recent years (Figure 2), in 2000 comprising 36,263 couples or 1 in 22 (4.5%) of all marriages, a 400% increase over twenty years (Asahi-Shimbun 2001: 63) (Asahi-Shimbun 28.2.02).

**Figure 2: Number of International Marriages Annually by Japanese**



Such numbers, compiled by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, may actually underestimate the true figures since those who possess dual nationality,<sup>4</sup> who got married abroad, or who never registered/co-habit don't show up. Nitta (1988: 211/12) suggests combining these figures with Ministry of Justice figures for foreign nationals entering Japan for the first time with spouse visas to obtain a more accurate picture. For example, in the year 2000 there were 33,167 new entrants with a spouse/child of Japanese national visa (Nyuukan-Kyoukai 2001: 26). Since 1975, foreign brides in Japan have been more numerous than foreign grooms and now outnumber them by more than 3:1 (Asahi-Shimbun 2001: 63).

International marriage, as is argued later, can be seen as the epitome of permanent international migration. If we are interested in the potential for change of migrant actors in Japan, then those international migrants who have infiltrated the very fabric of society and who are making/have made a long-term *investment* to the country would seem to be of most interest. In other words, the skyrocketing international marriage figures provide one form of evidence to support the assertion that Japan is at a turning point, something like Europe in the 1960s (Hirano, Castles, and Brownlee 2000: 246) or Australia in the 1970s (McCormack 1996: 281-3) where the futility of exclusionary and/or assimilationary policies has had to be accepted in the face of major social and cultural changes stemming from the increasingly permanent presence of international migrants. Although the relationship between international marriages in particular and international migration in general is not clear, it would appear that the number of international marriage migrants increases at a faster rate than the number of international migrants. So, while numbers of foreigners entering Japan have increased by 50% between 1990 and 2000 (Nyuukan-Kyoukai 2001: 10), numbers of international marriages have increased by 81% over the same period (Asahi-Shimbun 2001: 63) (Asahi-Shimbun 28.2.02). For the year 2000, foreign entrants to Japan numbered 5,272,095, an increase of almost 25% over four years and the first time the 5 million barrier had been broken (Nyuukan-Kyoukai 2001: 10).

The numbers suggest that Japan may, if not reached, at least be approaching a point where international migrants are beginning to have a visible influence on Japanese society. This may be termed the 'critical mass' (Mouer 2002) argument. Visibility is no doubt the key when defining a slippery concept like 'critical mass' for which it is impossible to specify any particular 'magic' number. As Mackie (1998: 45/58) points out, in Japan encounters with the 'Other' and discussions and questions of difference can no longer be avoided since it is impossible to maintain the pretence that these are somehow 'external' to Japan when one's neighbour, co-worker, or family member either is, or is married to, a 'foreigner'. Moreover, visibility is no longer limited to cities like Tokyo, Osaka or prefectures such as Aichi or Kanagawa but, as we shall see, to other areas of Japan that do not traditionally have high concentrations of international migrants. The kind of food available in supermarkets, the programmes on local television, the increasing numbers of languages that are heard on the street, the ads found in the media, and the individuals themselves who make the news all point to the increased visibility of international migrants in society at the local and national level. Nationally, foreign executives such as Carlos Ghosn, president of Nissan, are well known, the public

face behind a huge surge in foreign direct investment, mergers, and take-overs in Japan (Nikkei Weekly 15.1.01). Ethnic Koreans in particular are becoming household names, both in the economic spheres— such as Masayoshi Son, the founder of Softbank and Yahoo Japan – and cultural spheres – such as the acclaimed writer Yu Miri or the writer/director Sai Yōchi. Even at the political level, there were indications that some sort of watershed had been reached with the election of the first ‘westerner’ – Marutei Tsurunen, a naturalised Japanese citizen born in Finland – to the national Diet (The Japan Times 9/2/02). A government sponsored bill to grant suffrage to foreigners with permanent residence in local elections only failed to pass due to lack of time (Japan Times 30.5.01). In the meantime, more and more local governments are extending suffrage to this group in local plebiscites (Japan Times 25.6.02/1.4.02/9.1.02 ). Such moves at the local level may set a precedent redefining Japanese notions of citizenship and participation in society. Moreover, more and more local governments now allow foreign nationals to take jobs in their offices, following the 1997 Tokyo High Court ruling that there was no constitutional reason to deny non-Japanese nationals access to public positions aside from those involved in the direct exercise of public power (Yomiuri Shimbun 11.27.97) (see also Kagawa 2001: 101). Other recent rulings, such as the three men who were awarded damages by the Sapporo District Court after being refused entry to a bathhouse because they were not Japanese (Japan Times 12.11.02) or Ana Bortz, a Brazilian who was awarded ¥1.5 million after being thrown out of a shop because she was a ‘foreigner’ (Yomiuri Shimbun 13.10.99), have set (widely publicised) legal precedents. The latter judgement was deemed ‘epoch making’, marking the first time that the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ratified by Japan in 1995) had been applied in interpreting an illegality.

That international migrants are now more visible in society to the extent that numbers of people in mainstream society who have a consciousness of migration issues have increased is suggested in recent surveys of Japanese attitudes towards foreigners. For example, in a survey conducted by the Cabinet Office in November 2000, the overall number of people answering that they had opportunities to socialise and/or speak with foreigners (9.7%) increased compared with a similar survey back in 1990 – though the gap between urban and rural areas had also grown (<http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h12/gaikoku/>). In the same survey, almost 55% felt that recently the numbers of foreigners around them had increased. A heightened awareness of the presence of migrants locally reflects the world-wide development of what Mato (1998: 603) calls ‘a consciousness of globalization’. “An important consequence of the development of this consciousness”, he (1998: 603) writes, “is that it informs the social practices and representations of numerous social actors everywhere.” “Globalization has ensured”. write Lock and Kaufert (1998a: 5), “that the majority of the world’s people are aware, as never before, that other ways of being exist beyond the boundaries of their respective communities.” The effects of globalisation are no longer limited to the relations of economic agents internationally but now include relations between agents *within* nations. “Japan is in the process of ‘internal internationalisation’”, writes Stevens et al (2000: 64), “a process whereby Japanese society itself must recognize its status as a multicultural, multiracial society.” They conclude by noting that many were not expecting that ‘the fabric of Japanese society itself would change’ as it currently appears to be doing.

Change is central to the idea that Japan is at some sort of turning point. The argument that a 'critical mass' has or is about to be reached – that the conditions of possibility are such that the non-native population have the potential to become agents for fundamental social change – is found in Komai's (2001) most recent work, an argument that was not apparent in his earlier (1995a) volume. As Komai himself notes, there have been major changes in the migration of foreigners into Japan since he wrote his first book. "I see them [foreigners coming into Japan] not simply", argues Komai (2001: xiii), "as strange neighbours who need protection, but rather as reformers with the potential to open up new horizons in our society." For Kang (2001: 144) too, the increasing inflow and settlement of migrants into Japan may be the beginning of a change in Japan's national space. Unfortunately, the international migration literature does not offer a particularly useful framework for conceptualising the everyday lived experience of these potential agents of social change.

### INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW

"An international migrant", according to Hammar and Tamas' (1997: 16) definition, "is...a person who has moved from one country to another with the intention of taking up residence there for a relevant period of time." The notion of crossing a state frontier is clearly central to the definition (Castles 2000b: 269). Time period is also crucial, since 'international migration' clearly excludes tourists and other temporary visitors, such as international business people. However, as Hammar and Tamas recognise, the notion of 'residential intention' is clearly problematic and may be reduced to a declared (or presumably tacit) intention to stay for a minimum period of time. In Japan, for example, that period might be considered to be more than the ninety days designated as the maximum time allowed for 'short-term stays' or 'temporary visits' – the same period within which new arrivals must register. Whether there is an intention to eventually return 'home' or not is usually not deemed relevant for any definition; as Aguilar-Jr. (2000: 187) points out, any rigid demarcation between 'temporary' and 'permanent' migrants is difficult, resting as it does again on the slippery notion of 'intention'. This relates to the question of whether there is a 'maximum' period of time, i.e. a point after which individual is no longer classified as a migrant. In Britain, for example, an immigrant (read international migrant) is defined as a person who has settled in a country to which they are not native of *less than ten years* (Collins English Dictionary). What is clear – and will become clearer when the case of Japan is looked at in more detail – is that any definition of 'international migrant' is complex and situated, varying across different contexts and power structures. As Castles (2000b: 270) points out, definitions of international migration are not 'objective' but are the result of state policies introduced in response to political and economic goals and public attitudes. Unfortunately, these arbitrary definitions influence self-perceptions. "Any society which contains power, status, prestige, and social group differentials (and they all do)", notes Tajfel (quoted in Ferdman 1990: 192), "places each of us in a number of social categories which become an important part of our self-definition." The category of (international) migrant is one such category and, as Smolicz (1988: 195) points out, is generally reserved for subordinate or less-powerful peoples and is tied up with notions of inclusion and exclusion. In this way, highly

skilled, professional ‘migrants’ are often not referred to as migrants at all but as ‘expatriates’ (Hirano et al. 2000: 245; Piper and Roces forthcoming: 11/12). These problems in defining ‘international migrant’ need to be considered when reviewing the ‘migration’ studies literature.

As Hammar and Tamas (1997) point out, the study of international migration is broad and rapidly expanding, covering a range of disciplinary perspectives and borrowing theories and methods from many different disciplines. It is also, according to Castles (2000a: 15-22), highly fragmented, divided into a number of fields of study, compartmentalised, shaped by national ideological models, and characterised by paradigmatic closure. “Social scientists do not approach the study of immigration from a shared paradigm”, write Massey et al (1994: 700) in noting the lack of a commonly accepted theoretical framework, “but from a variety of competing theoretical viewpoints fragmented across disciplines, regions, and ideologies.” Such points need to be borne in mind during the brief overview of the leading theories of international migration below.

Before looking at individual theories, it is possible to pick out a number of general assumptions that underlie migration research. In the first place, there is a tendency to see migration as a linear movement from country X to country Y (and often back to country X), that is migration as having a definite outcome or end. Moreover, as Piper and Roces (forthcoming: 2) point out, there is a marked economic focus that equates migration with labour migration. Thus, even when work ostensibly focuses on ‘transnational migrants’ (as with the special issue of *Critical Asian Studies* (2002, 34:1)) this almost always means transnational *labour* migrants, temporary workers who, after a brief sojourn, usually “return to their places of birth, citizenship, or long-term residence” (Nonini 2002: 3. ). In concentrating on economic incentives, migration is reduced to “a response to a wage differential or inequality between the source and destination countries caused by a difference in the level of socioeconomic development” (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 317). Halfacree and Boyle (1993: 334) call this a ‘positivistic behaviourist conceptualization of migration’ where migration is simply a push-and-pull response to external (economic) stimuli operated through and mediated by the individual. The focus is almost always on simple economic reasons or causes behind the decision to migrate or not, rather than the complex and diverse set of cultural and social factors. At root the interest is in explaining and understanding *why* some individuals engage in migration (read labour migration) and others do not. Almost all theories attempt ‘to explain the origins and persistence of international migration’ by positing causal mechanisms (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino, and Taylor. 1993: 454). This despite the fact that the reasons why people migrate (or, as will be seen later, why they marry) are incredibly diverse and complex,<sup>5</sup> involving ulterior motives, lack of reasoning, and/or outcomes unrelated to intentions (stated or otherwise). One consequence of the focus on ‘why’ questions is a paucity of work on the dynamics of settlement, community formation (Hirano et al. 2000), and marriage (Kofman 1999: 271). When migration *is* recognised as permanent, the focus is on assimilation, what Castles (2000a: 21) calls a ‘paradigmatic notion’ in the field. As Faist (2000: 244/52 ) points out, the interest in assimilation which characterises present-day migration research has its roots in the pre-1924 mass migration into the USA and associated theories which assumed a unified and non-ethnic ‘core’ culture. The ‘traditional’

model of migration which starts with (male) labour migration and is followed by family reunion (either in the home or host country) also has implications for how female migrants tend to be portrayed (Campani 1995: 546; Harzig 2001: 15; Piper 2000: 207). “The persistence of this model”, writes Kofman (1999: 273), “serves to reinforce the notion of women as passive followers and dependants, whose employment, where it occurs, is of secondary consideration.” Immigration laws act to reproduce these notions of female dependency (Phizacklea 1998: 29), obscuring the ways in which female migrants can be independent active agents.

Turning to particular theories, as White (1980) noted some twenty years ago, a philosophical division in migration research between macro and micro approaches can be made out. Subsequent reviews of the international migration literature (e.g. Castles 2000b; Faist 2000: chapter 2; Goss and Lindquist 1995; Massey et al. 1993; Phizacklea 1998) have tended to follow White’s lead. Micro-functionalist approaches (what Phizacklea calls ‘the orthodox model’), such as neo-classical ‘push-pull’ economic theory, tend to emphasise the rational choice of individual actors – the role of human agents – who consciously try to maximise their quality of life by moving to economies which (appear to) offer better employment opportunities, conditions, and wages. On the other hand, macro-structuralist approaches, such as neo-Marxist political economy models or world system approaches, emphasise structural conditions, the importance of institutional factors, and the unequal distribution of resources within the world economy as the principal determinants of migration flows. Migration Systems theory (Hoerder 1999; Kritiz, Lim, and Zlotnik 1992:2), which views international migration as a dynamic and deeply historical/temporal process linking places (most often countries) of origin and destination using notions of interdependent (counter)flows, chains, exchanges, and ‘beaten paths, is a good example (in its earlier version at least) of such a macro approach. “With hindsight we now identify these accounts as overly economically determined analyses”, notes Phizacklea (1998: 26), “...if the orthodox accounts are guilty of voluntarism, structural accounts can be criticised for their mechanistic, capital-logic approaches to global migratory processes.”

In concluding his paper, White (1980) recognised that the macro/micro division in migration research worked against unifying the field and needed to be overcome. It is no surprise, therefore, that recent perspectives on the study of migration have tried to reconcile micro (functionalist) and macro (structuralist) approaches. In moving beyond conventional push-pull models, a ‘second generation’ of international migration research may be identified (Faist 2000: 11). These new perspectives attempt to overcome the dichotomy of agency vs. structure by focusing on levels of analysis – sometimes referred to as the meso-level (Faist 1997) – that lie between and integrate the individual (micro) and the structural (macro). As Goss and Lindquist (1995: 319) put it, such integrative approaches typically aim to introduce analytical categories that can function ‘as points of articulation between macro and micro levels of determination, or between structure and agency.’ Thus, micro-level approaches have evolved beyond the individual to consider the way migration decisions are often taken in larger social units such as the (extended) family, household,<sup>6</sup> or community: the ‘new economics’ approach (Stark 1991). Conversely, macro-level systems approaches have come to incorporate lower-level categories like migrant networks, “sets of interpersonal ties

that connect migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin” (see also Gurak and Caces 1992; Massey et al. 1993: 448). Formal organisations/associations and transnational communities<sup>7</sup> are further examples of the kinds of networks in and between which decisions may be taken and information exchanged.

As proposed points of articulation between the micro and macro levels, both households and migrant networks have been criticised. Faist (1997: 190) accuses the latter approach of ignoring or simplifying the power relations between family or household members. He (1997: 194) argues that the real significance of social units between the micro and macro level remains blurred, offering no understanding of the mechanisms linking macro factors with individual decision making. The main problem for Goss and Lindquist (1995: 327) is the simple substitution of the rational household for the rational actor. On a conceptual level, the notion of a ‘household’ itself has been problematised in feminist circles (e.g. Bjerren 1997: 233/35) as ‘hopelessly ethnocentric’, lacking cross-cultural validity. Conceptual vagueness is also a common criticism of migrant networks, particularly with regard to how they operate as social entities (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 331). “Ultimately, the problem that the integrative approaches attempt to resolve, that is, the contradiction between functionalist and structuralist perspectives”, conclude Goss and Lindquist (1995: 331), “results not merely from different levels of analysis, nor even from ideological predilection, but from an inability of the theories to coherently articulate structure and agency.”

Recently, a number of attempts have been made to enrich systems and networks approaches by adding a more socio-cultural perspective that recognises how structures both enable and constrain human agency. Faist (1997: 190/216) introduces a more explicit social-relational perspective via the more elaborate meso-level categories of social ties and social capital. Both are defined in distinctly economic Bourdieuan terms. Social ties are “a continuing series of interpersonal transactions to which participants attach shared interests, obligations, understandings, memories, and forecasts” (Faist 1997: 199). Social capital “are those resources [information, knowledge, status etc] inherent in patterned social tie that allows individuals to [access and] co-operate in networks and collectivities, and/or that allow individuals to pursue their goals” (Faist 1997: 199). Faist builds on Massey’s (1994: 728) observation that network connections comprise a valuable form of social capital that people draw upon to gain access to social resources. Importantly, social capital (like money) is created and accumulated in social relations, through exchange relationships, reciprocity, trust, and solidarity (Faist 1997: 199-203). “Social capital...is created when the relations between persons change in ways that facilitate action” (Coleman 1990: 304). As with money, the transfer of social capital from one country to another is difficult and costly, and its value is often reduced or even lost in the transfer (Faist 1997: 203).

Goff and Lindquist (1995) put forward the concept of the ‘migrant institution’ as an alternative means to conceive of international migration as a unified process. “The migrant institution is a complex articulation of individuals, associations, and organizations”, they (1995: 319) write, “which extends the social action of and interaction between these agents and agencies across space and time.” Their conception is informed by Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory which

attempts to collapse rather than integrate the distinction between agency and structure. Phizacklea (1998: 28) sees structuration theory as an important analytical tool in the building of a transformatory model that explores the means by which the seemingly powerless carve out 'spaces of control' for themselves. Less-powerful actors are able to mobilise resources and carve out such social spaces since structures are seen as both constraining and enabling, being produced, reproduced, and transformed through actors drawing on rules and resources (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 331; Phizacklea 1998: 26/7). The duality is possible because social life is not viewed as a phenomenon *external* to agency, but is contingently produced and reproduced *within* and through social activity, that is, enacted in dynamic social practice (Giddens 1986: 536/41). In addressing the applicability of structuration theory, Giddens suggests 'an analysis of the strategic conduct of situated individuals' involving ethnographic fieldwork (Goss and Lindquist 1995: 334). The emphasis on *strategic* conduct or action is important since it takes analysis beyond synchronic decision-making mechanisms at one moment in the migratory process to long-term, complex, and multi-layered ongoing decision-making strategies enacted on a daily basis by knowledgeable actors attempting to secure or further their interests. Such an approach is supported by Castles' (2000a: 23) observation that studies of Asian migration have shown that action tends not to be based on short-term gain by individuals but rather towards maximising long-term well-being.

"One of the crucial factors", Faist (1997: 194) concludes, referring to conventional macro/micro migration theories, "is the lack of an appropriate conceptual framework." The enriched meso-level approaches emerging in international migration research offer new frameworks and point towards a reconceptualisation of the field itself. As Halfacree (1993: 333) puts it, simple micro/macro integration is not enough: "we must also re-examine the very conceptualization of migration itself...migration research is in danger of being left behind by recent development in social theory." The idea the migration research needs to 'catch up' is echoed by Castles (2000a: 22/25) who asks whether the social sciences can develop new approaches (such as citizenship studies) "more appropriate to a situation marked by globalization and the emergence of transnational communities." The difficulty is that the range of knowledge and theory necessary to fully grasp 'the ways in which the migratory process leads to new types of societies within the context of global change' is extremely broad (Castles 2000a: 24). Feminist researchers have played a key role in advancing a broader contextual understanding of migration processes, particularly in their ability to coherently articulate structure and agency in a global context. "Within these...processes", writes Harzig (2001), "women are often decisive agents pursuing their own agenda at the local and global levels, negotiating...strategies and options." Kofman (1999: 288) points out that any new perspective "has to seriously contest the traditional modes of agency ascribed to female migrants." When one of the tendencies predicted to play a major role globally in the next twenty years is the feminisation of migration (Castles and Miller 1998:8), this becomes even more urgent. By reconceptualising human agency, feminists have opened up a space to identify the roles played not just by the state but by individuals in the processes of social transformation. This recognition of the possibilities of social change from below by local/global agents contrasts with previous studies of change, which have limited themselves to a notion of 'development' (Hammar and Tamas 1997: 18) usually interpreted in

terms of GDP per capita. As Castles (2000b: 275) puts it, the most important question for nation-states (and by association researchers in nation-states) has been whether migration assists or hinders economic development. Usually it is the latter, as immigrants have commonly been perceived as agents who disrupt and destabilise the existing social order in receiving countries.<sup>8</sup> “[M]igration tends to be regarded as problematic: something to be controlled and even curbed”, writes Castles (2000b: 270), “because it may bring about unpredictable change.” Although migration inevitably leads to cultural and social change, because this is often perceived as ‘threatening’ such transformations are often suppressed, something which, as Castles (2000b: 278/80) warns, can lead to racism and conflict. A structuration approach, informed by notions of social capital, social resources, and social ties, and supported by feminist notions of complex individual decision-making strategic action appears to be the best the international migration literature has offered to date in terms of addressing the question of potential cultural/societal transformation.

### INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION RESEARCH: THE CASE OF JAPAN

The previous section discussed the difficulties in coming to a universal definition of ‘international migrant’ and gave an overview of migration research theories. The case of Japan provides for more detailed analysis. In the first place, the Japanese term *imin*, unlike its English counterpart ‘migrant’, refers exclusively to international rather than intra-national movements of people,<sup>9</sup> and is rarely heard outside of academic Discourse. Instead, in both the media and everyday conversation, the term foreigner (*gai(koku)jin*) is more common, whether referring to visiting tourists or international migrants like Jane in my own study (see p. 37), a Filipina who came to Japan some twenty years ago and has since naturalised. Thus, the question of who is and who is not a ‘foreigner’ is closely connected to the question of who is and is not ‘Japanese’, a category whose criteria go beyond citizenship to inextricably intertwined notions of cultural literacy and, especially, ‘blood’ and/or physical appearance (Fukuoka 1993: chapter 1; Yoshino 1992: 115-20). The connection with race is supported by the way *gaijin* is typically used as a synonym for ‘White foreigner’, White people being conceptualised as ‘pure’ or ‘true’ *gaijin* (Befu 1983: 242; Clemmons 1999:3; Creighton 1997: 212). Because of the racial hierarchy that is in operation, White people tend not to be viewed as international migrants, even less so as potential settlers, but as sojourners who will return to their own ‘superior’ societies.

The sharpness of the *nihonjin/gaikokujin* distinction in Japan, and the exclusiveness of the category ‘Japanese’ is reflected in terms like *taizai* and *otozure* (a temporary stay, sojourn, or visit) commonly used in the media to describe even those who have been in Japan for many years, as in the strings *nihon ni taizai shiteiru gaikokujin* or *gaikoku kara otozureta hanayome*. The implication is, of course, that such people are short-term guests who will at some point go back ‘home’. And, as Piper (2001: 192) points out, as long as migrants are viewed as temporary residents they can never be truly incorporated into the host society. Since late 1998, however, there have been indications that the Japanese government have taken a slightly more relaxed attitude towards accepting applications for permanent residence (see Figure 3). Moreover, increased use of terms in the media

like *gaikokusekisha* (foreign national) (Takagi 1997) and in particular *gaikoku-shusshinsha* (foreign-born person) (e.g. Yamagata Shimbun 18.2.02) suggest a growing sensitivity of the problems with the term ‘foreigner’, although in the latter reference the term is still contrasted with *chiiki no hitotachi* (local people) and *chiiki jyūmin* (local resident).

Although *gaikokujin* is an all encompassing category that can refer to anyone who is not culturally, genetically, and/or legally ‘Japanese’, there are important distinctions within this category that relate specifically to international migrants. One of these is the popular distinction between ‘oldcomers’ and ‘newcomers’.<sup>10</sup> The former consist of Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean workers (and their descendants) who came to Japan, either voluntarily or under duress, following the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) and the annexation of Korea (1910). Those who decided not to return ‘home’ after the war lost their Japanese citizenship in 1952. The fact that the descendants of the original workers are 100% ‘Japanese’ culturally and linguistically but not ‘genetically’ or (if they have not naturalised) legally relates to the question raised earlier of when one stops being a migrant as well as issues of power. As Moldenhawer (1995: 74) notes, concepts such as ‘second generation immigrant’ are problematic since they indicate that such individuals will remain trapped in the ‘immigrant’ category forever. The introduction of a ‘special permanent resident’ (*tokubetsu eijyūsha*) visa category allowing indefinite stay was important, but this group still remain in a kind of limbo between migrancy and citizenship. As of December 2000, there were 512,269 *zainichi* (‘being in Japan’) *gaikokujin*, as they are called, with people of Korean ancestry accounting for 95% of these (Ministry of Justice *Zairyū Gaikokujin Tōkei*; see also Nikkei Weekly, 2.10.01). Since 1952, it has been estimated (Shipper 2002: 55) that some 300,000 Koreans have become naturalised Japanese citizens and therefore no longer show up on statistics.

The special permanent residents (‘oldcomers’) are often contrasted with the so-called ‘new’ minorities or newcomers. The term *nyūkama* is generally taken to mean those groups who have immigrated to Japan to settle recently, a category which perhaps begins with the Indochinese refugees in the mid to late 1970s, and includes returnees from China, foreign spouses of Japanese, and (perhaps) South Americans of Japanese descent (*Nikkeijin*<sup>11</sup>). That the term *nyūkama* carries connotations of permanence is reflected in the visa categories many of them hold: *ippan eijyūken* or general permanent residence (usually obtainable after five years residence, three in the instance of spouses) and *teijyūken* or long-term residence (in the case of the *Nikkeijin* and their families). The argument that the term *nyūkama* carries associations of permanence is supported by Stevens’ (2000: 51) observation that Westerners tend not to be described as newcomers “because they are seen as visitors who will return home to their (superior or at least equal) countries of residence.” Apart from the oldcomers and newcomers, the remaining legal migrant groups are either students or skilled workers (mainly entertainers<sup>12</sup>). The only exceptions to the prohibition on unskilled or semi-skilled workers are the *Nikkeijin* and those on trainee/internship programmes<sup>13</sup> (Hirano et al. 2000: 248).

Interestingly, the key division used by the Ministry of Justice is not between ‘oldcomer’ and ‘newcomer’ but between *eijyūsha* or permanent residents (including both special and general) – that is those visa categories which do not require extension – and *hieijyūsha* or non-permanent residents (mainly spouses of Japanese, long-term residents, students, and dependants), that is visa categories

that are valid for designated time periods. Recent data on numbers of legal migrants, together with figures for illegal migrants – so-called overstayers – are presented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Population Figures and Changes from Previous Year of Total and non-Japanese Populations in Japan (Ministry of Justice<sup>14</sup> as of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2001 unless otherwise specified)**

Category	Number	Ratio to previous year	As a % of total foreign residents
Total Population – estimate (including legal foreign residents) <sup>15</sup>	126,930,000	+0.008%	N/A
Naturalisations <sup>16</sup>	16,100	+9%	N/A
<b>LEGAL FOREIGN RESIDENTS</b>	<b>1,778,462 (1.4% of total pop.)</b>	<b>+5.5%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Permanent Residents</b>	<b>684,853</b>	<b>+4.1%</b>	<b>38.5%</b>
● Special Permanent Resident	500,782	-2.2%	28.2%
● General Permanent Resident	184,071	+26.7%	10.3%
<b>Non-permanent Residents</b>	<b>1,093,609</b>	<b>+6.3%</b>	<b>61.5%</b>
Of which 5 largest groups are...			
● Spouse/Child of Japanese National	280,436	+0.3%	15.8%
● Long-term Resident	244,460	+2.9%	13.7%
● Student / trainee	176,241	+17%	10%
● Dependent	78,847	+8.2%	4.4%
● Entertainer	55,461	+3.1%	3.0%
Foreign Labour Force (estimate) <sup>17</sup>	670,000	+/-0%	N/A
Visa overstayers (estimate) <sup>18</sup>	251,700	-7%	N/A
Foreign nationals deported <sup>19</sup> (Of whom were illegal workers)	51,459 (44,190)	-6.7% (-4.5)	N/A

A brief discussion of the data is required. The figures for total and non-Japanese populations are a snapshot of a wider trend that sees total population pretty much static and the number of foreign residents increasing, making up a larger and larger percentage of the total population each year. Looking more closely at permanent vs. non-permanent residents, the trend in recent years is for the former to be increasing at a slower rate than the latter. In 1990, for example, permanent residents made up 60% of the total number of foreign residents (www.moj.go.jp) compared with 38.5% in 2001. This is despite an extremely large (26.7%) increase in the number of general permanent residents, no doubt reflecting a trend towards settlement as many long-term residents and spouses/children of Japanese nationals apply for – and apparently more easily secure – PR. The largest increase in non-permanent residents is the student/trainee group, reflecting the ongoing expansion of the (technical) trainee system (see footnote 13). Finally, although the estimated number of illegal workers – around five times the numbers detected and deported – appears large, this in fact represents a significant drop from the 1993 ‘peak’ of 298,646 (Shipper 2002: 64) reflecting an increasingly tough stance towards overstayers by immigration and police officials. Interestingly, over half of those deported had been working for more than three years which, according to the 2001 OECD annual report on trends in international migration(2001: 213), reflects the increasing tendency for illegal as well as legal workers to settle in Japan.<sup>20</sup> “Migrant worker NGOs and support

groups are increasingly being confronted with problems that have shifted over time”, writes Piper (2001: 201) drawing on Roberts(2000: 286), “from being about 'help to return' to 'livelihood support' in Japan... instead of short term intervention for people who are considered to be sojourners, there is now a stronger emphasis on settlement and citizenship provision.”

In looking at the numbers above, it is important to remember that the visa categories described are designated and managed by the state in the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (*shutsunyūkoku kanri oyobi nanmin nintei hō*). The abbreviated title for this – the Immigration Control Act – reveals its true purpose, that is to *control* migrants (Stevens et al. 2000: 63). As such, it channels individuals into a very narrow range of occupational and other categories (Piper 2000: 210) that may poorly reflect their abilities, education, and qualifications – their social capital. Indeed, visa categories can become social categories which trap individuals into roles such as ‘bride’ or ‘worker’ thereby disguising and limiting the range of activities and roles actually or potentially performed. This may be particularly acute in the case of women since the traditional patriarchal model of migration where women followed men and were accorded the dependent status of a ‘migrant’s partner’ (i.e. wife) is still reflected in immigration laws today (Campani 1995: 546).

Such social categories become an important part not only of migrants’ construction of self but also of other’s construction of migrants. In Foucauldian terms, by specifying conditions and limits, the state and associated social institutions produce and consolidate disciplining Discourses at the regional, national, and transnational level. In other words, as Veronica Taylor (1995: 112) argues, immigration laws are pivotal to the ways in which states – and those living within states – are constructed. For example, the 2001 OECD report (2001: 211/216) on international migration in Japan identifies a long-term governmental strategy to gain societal acceptance for increased (particularly skilled) immigration through stricter controls over the inflow of foreign nationals and harsher penalties for violations, epitomised by the 1997 and 2000 amendments to the Immigration Law. This is stated quite clearly in the Ministry of Justice’s First and Second Basic Plan for Immigration Control (1992 and 2000) which see the role of immigration control as contributing to the ‘sound development of Japanese society’ via the dual goals of ‘smooth acceptance of foreigners’ and ‘rejection of unfavourable foreigners’ ([www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/IB/IB2000/ib.htm/](http://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/IB/IB2000/ib.htm/)).

Tomoko Nakamatsu’s (2002a) excellent study of foreign women married to Japanese looks in detail at how the state’s immigration policies and the available options for residential status (generally a ‘choice’ between remaining in one’s original visa status or applying for permanent residence or citizenship) influence migrants’ social identities. Those with spouse visas, for example, are reliant on husbands co-operation when renewing (Kuwayama 1995). Furthermore, divorce, particularly for those with no children, could even lead to deportation. Consequently, the *Kokusai Kekkō wo Kangaeru Kai* (2000: 258) strongly recommends foreign spouses apply for permanent residence (*eijyūken*) as soon as possible. This example shows how visa regulations, immigration laws, and citizenship policies can silence migrants and restrict their activities. Conversely, securing permanent residence or acquiring formal (legal) citizenship and (especially) substantive citizenship<sup>21</sup> (Castles 1997: 11; Piper 1998) can increase and broaden migrants’ legal protection and agency. The continuum of limited and difficult choices presented – in Japan the advantages of

naturalisation must be balanced against the disadvantages of losing one's original nationality – illustrate how migration is a complex, multiple, and continuing process of negotiation often with no definite 'end' (Piper and Roces forthcoming: 20).

While it is important to be mindful of the structural restrictions on migrants – the macro perspective – it is also important to consider migrants not just as patients, instruments, or victims but also as active agents 'pushing back'. For example, Nakamatsu rightly concludes that structural determinants do not affect all individuals evenly nor do all individuals act consistently under similar social circumstances. However, as with the wider debate on international migration, continuing to frame migrant experiences in simple binaries of 'society and the individual', 'assimilation and integration', or 'accommodation and resistance' has created an unproductive polarisation that portrays individuals as locked in a never-ending push and pull of constructed and constructing identities. The danger is that by dichotomising complex migrant behaviour into a simple resistance/non-resistance binary and dichotomising migrant experience into a simple resistance/accommodation or resistance/domination binary, the question of genuine transformation is left unaddressed. "Without denying the sometimes devastating consequences of immigration constraints on the individual", concludes Koser and Lutz (1998: 14), "emphasis therefore needs to be placed on the opportunities resulting from migration movements...migration was and is a dynamic element of contemporary societal changes." I argue below that the key to achieving this and overcoming unproductive polarisations is to deconstruct the notion of 'resistance' and to re-examine and re-conceptualise the notion of 'agency', something that may be most effectively achieved in the context not of international migration as a whole but the specific case of migrants who have settled down to marry a local in the 'host' country.

## **'INTERNATIONAL' MARRIAGE MIGRATION AS AN EXAMPLE OF SETTLEMENT IN JAPAN**

"The number of foreigners who entered into or have status of residence in Japan with deep connection with the Japanese society have increased", notes the 2000 Basic Plan for Immigration Control (<http://www.moj.go.jp/ENGLISH/IB/IB2000/ib03.html#III-1-4>), "[m]any foreigners stay for a long period of time as members of Japanese community under the status of 'permanent resident', 'spouse or child of Japanese national', or 'long-term resident'." In Japan, this trend for international migrants to settle is true, as was noted in the previous discussion, not only for legal but also for illegal migrants. As Komai (2001: xi) puts it, one of the major changes in the migration of foreigners into Japan in the past few years is that a significant number are now choosing to settle. Hirano et al (2000: 248) discuss a number of trends – such as the increasing porosity of borders and democratisation – that, put together, strongly suggest that "migrant settlement and community formation will become increasingly important in Asian immigration countries." As one local government report (Yamagata-City 1996: 11) concludes, "newcomers are clearly becoming firm members of Japanese society. It is probably fair to say that in terms of future policy Japan is at a crucial crossroads that will strongly influence the state of Japanese society" (author's translation).

As was seen earlier, settlement is defined in terms of permanency. If we are interested in

the long-term social and cultural effects and consequences of international migration in Japan, those international migrants who intend to stay permanently and have made a long-term investment to the country would seem to offer particularly valuable insights. The concept of investment in particular has recently received much attention in relation to the development of social identity (McKay and Wong 1996; Norton-Peirce 1995). In its Bourdieuan form, investment is used to capture the complex relationship of the subject and the changing social world and relates to the acquisition of symbolic and material resources in the new society (Norton-Peirce 1995: 17). Permanent migrants are undoubtedly much more motivated to devote time and energy to the negotiation of such resources, that is to invest in their own social identity. Although settlers are not the only potential agents of change, it is this group, perhaps more than any other group of migrants, who are “compelled by their situation to have multi-layered sociocultural identities, which are constantly in a state of transition and negotiation” (Castles and Miller 1998: 297). Permanent migrants provide a window – much more so than those whose environment is relatively static and fixed – which starkly reveals how individuals located within a web of societal norms navigate such norms in everyday life (Halfacree and Boyle 1993: 341).

Considering the traditional neglect of the dynamics of settlement and community formation in the migration literature, it is refreshing to witness the emergence of a small but growing body of work. Unfortunately, much of the emerging ‘settlement’ literature (e.g. Castles 2000a; Douglass and Roberts 2000; Komai 1995b; Miyajima and Kajita 1996; Weiner and Hanami 1998) continues to be framed in terms of *labour* migrants settling down, illustrating that the migration=labour migration equation remains strong. Even the seminal volume by Piper and Roces (forthcoming: 2), written specifically to counter ‘the lingering legacy of economic types of studies which have dominated migration theory for a long time’, focuses not on marriage and settlement *per se* but on the *connection* between work-related migration and marriage. But as Figure 3 indicates, the labour force estimate is only around half of the total (legal and illegal) foreign population (excluding permanent residents). Some of those who settle down and marry a Japanese have indeed been engaged in paid work in Japan (and may still be engaged in such ‘productive’ work); many others, however, have not, and may have entered Japan as students or trainees, come specifically to marry, be(en) engaged in cultural, civic, or voluntary activities or (unpaid) ‘reproductive’ work. The definition of ‘work’, as Piper (1999: 74) points out, is socially constructed and often a reflection of a patriarchal system which values income generating work over other kinds of work. International marriage migration (hereafter IMM) offers a way of approaching the important topic of settlement that is not restricted to conventional models of ‘work’ and economically motivated migration.

IMM can in many ways be said to epitomise settlement. When an international migrant marries a Japanese and settles in Japan, they create a potentially deep and long-lasting connection with a Japanese, a family, a local community, and a national society. The presence of children can further deepen these connections. In comparison with international migrants who marry a non-Japanese, those who marry a Japanese are less likely to form ethnic or national enclaves within Japan. Although, as was seen earlier, such ‘transnational communities’ are emerging as a significant new trend in migration research, because migrants in such communities may be less rooted (in the

postmodern sense) and less committed to or inclined to invest identities in Japanese society they are less relevant for the purpose of this particular study. Certainly, those who have married someone from their own country and settled in Japan might be less actively engaged in what one of my respondents (Shiho) refers to as ‘micro-internationalisation’, that is ‘internationalisation within the home’. This sentiment is echoed in a Yamagata University report (Anon 1997: i) which, discussing the influence on local society of those foreign spouses married to Japanese, notes that “internationalisation is occurring at the very basic unit of society – the family” (author’s translation). If family is indeed the basic unit – or at least one of the core units – of ‘culture’, then the fact that migrants have infiltrated the very fabric of society suggests a high degree of permanence and transformative potential. Unfortunately, the focus on (unskilled) labour migration over other forms of migration has tended to disguise the influence of migrants at this most core unit of ‘culture’, the family level. This has not been eased by the recent shift in migration research from the individual to the ‘household’ as a unit of analysis (see above), since ‘household’ is most often invoked when discussing which members of the *kinship* group take the decision to migrate (Bjeren 1997: 236). Focusing on IMM also has the advantage of escaping from the particular visa categories international migrants are (often arbitrarily) placed into, since spouses who have come from abroad are not limited only to those holding spouse visas but also include those holding long-term residency, permanent residency, working visas, overstayers, and even (after naturalising) Japanese citizenship. As a final argument for focussing on international marriage as the epitome of permanent international migration, it can be pointed out that marriage to a Japanese offers perhaps the simplest way for international migrants – particularly Asian migrants – to secure stable visa status and settle permanently in Japan. As Nakamatsu (2002a) points out, naturalisation, a notoriously complex process, is possible after three (rather than the usual five) years for this group. Moreover, since July 1996 long-term resident (*teijyūsha*) status has become automatic for all foreign nationals with custody of their (Japanese national) children in the event, for example, of a spouse’s death – with the proviso that parenthood is recognised by the father (The Japan Times 19.11.96). Considering all of this, it is hardly surprising, as Piper (2001:1) notes, that foreign spouses – particularly Asian women – form perhaps the largest settling immigrant group in Japan today.

In the light of the arguments above, it is no surprise that many researchers have focused on the issue of ‘international’ marriage in Japan. Much of this work, unsurprisingly mirrors international migration research perspectives. One of the pioneers of such writing was Anne Imamura who examined the lives of foreign wives in Nigeria and Japan (Imamura 1986a; 1986b; 1988; 1990). Imamura focuses on issues such as differences in role expectations between husband and wife, why people choose to marry ‘out’, the negotiation of womanhood as an ‘achieved’ (i.e. socially constructed) status, and marginality. Despite occasional denials, there is a markedly negative aspect to her research that leaves the impression of unhappy wives and problem marriages, epitomised by her insistence on the sojourner or stranger status of foreign wives and the coping (reactive) patterns or strategies they adopt. Her focus on the husband-wife relationship, and associated roles such as spouse or mother, is generally at the expense of non-domestic roles, though

she does (Imamura 1990: 183) touch upon the importance of work and social networks as ‘marginality reducing mechanism’:

Participation in the labor force led to more local contacts, generated a broader view and multiple interpretations of local society, and facilitated developing an identity as an individual. The importance of occupation for foreign wives without other social linkages is underlined by Nakano Glenn’s discussion of war brides (1986, p. 233) (Imamura 1988: 300)

However, she (1990: 183/5) rather spoils this by going on to say that participation in the broader society (through paid work or networks) can be a further source of marginality, confirming or reinforcing ‘foreignness’. There is no discussion on the consequences of participation in the broader society nor mention of other kinds of work, including civic, community, and voluntary. Overall, agency, and the ways such individuals can contribute to and transform the new society is completely ignored, so that women are passive objects who ‘follow’ their husbands and are ‘permitted’ (1990: 185) (or not) by local society to integrate.

Many of the positions Imamura takes are perhaps a consequence of (tacitly) adopting an assimilation/integration framework characteristic of international migration research in general. Charlie Morgan’s (2001) work on international marriages in Joetsu, Niigata, explicitly adopts assimilation theory, supported by social exchange and macro-structural theory, to look at differences between international ‘arranged’ and international ‘love’ marriages. As with Imamura (1986b) he is mainly interested in ‘why’ they decided to marry, reflecting the obsession with causal mechanisms in international migration research. The importance of locating a reason for marriage, as with migration, is reflected in the author’s desire to distinguish ‘love’ from ‘arranged’ marriages. In similar fashion, Ishii (1996: 148) emphasises the economic push and pull factors motivating marriage between Asian newcomer women and Japanese men, dividing such marriages into (1) entertainers’ (2) arranged and (3) marriages through ethnic ties. Unfortunately, as with the category (*nōson*) *hanayome-san* (Shukuya 1988), a label which is often specifically used to describe those brides ‘brought in’ to marry farmers, it may not be particularly helpful (and indeed rather presumptuous) to attempt to box migrants into categories based on their perceived motivation for and method of marriage or particular social/ethnic roles (‘Asian bride’). Subjects themselves may also fail to appreciate such an approach. In my own fieldwork, Jiru (interview #9) expressed great relief after the interview that I hadn’t asked any of the typical ‘why’ questions that she had been constantly bombarded with. Similarly, June (interview #11) complains that the most common question she is asked is ‘why’ she married. This corresponds with Piper and Roces’ (forthcoming: 8) observation that in the context of international marriage, researchers have tended to limit their research interests to reasons ‘why’ such marriages occur or the ‘success’ of the marriages. “The problem with this perspective”, they (forthcoming: 8) argue, “is that it remains one-dimensional: for instance, ‘mail-order brides’ are forever labelled or categorized as brides and almost never become ‘women’, still less do they become workers, or political actors and cultural mediators.” Certainly,

rather than ‘explaining’ the motives and dispositions of migrants or asking ‘why’ they got married, it might be rather more useful to attempt to identify the conditions of possibility and the way these are engaged with and transformed.

The tendency to stick with simple labels and binaries – such as assimilation/integration – rather than view migrants as active complex social beings shifting between local, national, and global levels is fairly common. Migrants are still portrayed as individuals with assimilation/integration ‘problems’, particularly language problems, that need to be ‘solved’. For example, as Morgan (2001: 17) points out, many of the (local government) surveys published to date on resident foreigners (particularly ‘foreign brides’) in Japan (Bunkacho 1995; Monbusho 1997; Nakazawa 1996; Yamagata-City 1996; Yamagata-Prefecture 1995) focus mainly on the wife’s situation with regard to the Japanese language. Moreover, the women are often framed as ‘bride’, who have come to get married (*totsugu*), something which perpetuates the traditional migratory model of women as dependents. Some interesting subsidiary findings does emerge from the questionnaire data. For example, although one-off participation in local events was relatively high, continuous systematic participation in local society – such as involvement with neighborhood associations or local bodies – was very low (Yamagata-Prefecture 1995: 13/28-29) apparently reflecting the fact that such organisations ‘are not geared towards guests (*okyakusama*)’ (Yamagata-City 1996: 81). Interestingly, in the prefectural survey, after language problems the biggest problem turned out to be the lack of driving license, suggesting the importance of mobility. One of the key ‘problems’ was identified as the lack of positive knowledge/interest in the newcomers’ home countries by receiving families and communities, something which made cultural maintenance difficult and forced assimilation almost inevitable. Cahill’s comparative study of intermarriage between Filipinas and male partners across different countries also found that in Japan the expectation to become ‘good Japanese’ and to give up their original ethnic identity was strong (1990: chapter 4). The result is that the scope and range of the activities newcomers can engage in (i.e. which are accepted) is very narrow and severely limited (Yamagata-City 1996: 102). This suggests that an emphasis in such reports on language – on speaking like a Japanese – at the expense of making it easier for newcomers to get involved in and contribute to local society is misplaced. In terms of involvement in society, Nakazawa’s (1995) survey showed that whereas most had worked back in the ‘home’ country, less than half worked in Japan. Many of the comments from the women compared the busy and fulfilling life back ‘home’ with the boring one in Japan. They felt excluded (*haiseki*) from community and even family-decision making processes. In terms of wishes, many demanded the creation of work opportunities and job introduction services (*assen*). For those interested in the ‘why’ of marriage, Nakazawa found that more than half cited the attractiveness of the husband as their top reason for getting married.

The assimilation/integration focus characteristic of local government (sponsored) surveys is also found in Scully’s (1999) study of seven Filipino brides in a small village in Shikoku. She focuses on the link between ‘acculturation’ and second language acquisition by measuring language proficiency and correlating this with social and cultural ‘successes’. This was based on Schumman’s (1986) influential Acculturation Model, which, though ostensibly based on the need to include social

factors as well as individual linguistic factors, ultimately fails (as he admits) by trying to relate the complex and dynamic process of the 'acculturation process' with measures of so-called 'language proficiency'.

Another writer who has written extensively on the issue of international marriage in Japan is Nicola Piper (1997; Piper 1999; 2000; 2001; 2002). Piper attempts a gender-specific analysis of marriages of Southeast Asian women with Japanese men in the broader context of global labour migration, using a wide, socio-economic and historical (i.e. macro) framework that looks especially at formal legal constraints and the involvement of the state and state policies. One of her primary goals is to address the research gap in the existing literature regarding the gendered nature of migration (Piper 2000). As the title of her co-edited book (Piper and Roces forthcoming) indicates, she is very much interested in the dynamics between labour migration and international marriage, the 'systematic links between macro and micro level'. As well as representatives of NGOs and other support groups in urban Japan, she interviewed fourteen (mainly Filipina) female migrant workers in her earlier study (Piper 1997) and a total of forty-one (unskilled) migrant workers, of which twenty-four were women (fifteen Filipina), in her later work (Piper 2001). Her refusal to neatly categorise migrants as 'just' wives or just 'workers' by treating them as individuals with multiple identities and fluid roles is important. Also praiseworthy is her desire to balance the tendency to depict her subjects as 'victims' with a focus on agency, specifically civic groups, NGOs, and other forums for social movement activism (Piper 2001: 3).

Although Piper flags the importance of the dialectal dimension of migration – migrants' role as both agent and subject (Piper 2002: 189) – and the tendency in the literature to adopt a problem stance towards international marriage (Piper 2001: 1), she does in fact slip into a portrayal of migrants as 'vulnerable' victims. Her concern with the 'vulnerable' results in repeated claims (Piper 1997: 322; 2000: 207; 2001: 3; 2002: 190/96) that most migrant women and/or (Asian) women in international marriages work(ed) in the entertainment industry. However, Cahill's data (1990: 135) together with that presented in Figure 3 suggests that this is most certainly not the case, especially considering that those of Philippine nationality (who make up the largest percentage of entertainers) comprise only 8.8% of the total number of legal foreign residents – a figure that includes men as well as women (31.12.01/www.moj.go.jp). Even the assumption that many overstayers work as 'entertainers' is questionable given the fact that only 11% (4496) of deported illegal workers in 2000 were Filipinas.<sup>22</sup> Her tendency to see all migrant (especially Asian) women as entertainers leads to inaccurate claims that the *only* legal way of entering and working in Japan for Asian women is through the entertainers' visa (Piper 2000: 219; 2001: 15). Overstating the number of migrant women who work in the entertainment industry also underlies the speculative claim made by Ishii (1996: 152) linking the inflow of entertainers with the rise in numbers of Asian women marrying Japanese men. This links to another problem with Piper, as with much of the literature, namely the desire to explain motivations for and causes of migration/marriage (Piper 1997: 328), so that her subjects, for example, marry (apparently) 'because of bad work experiences', 'to get around rigid immigration policies', and/or 'to gain economic security' (Piper 2000: 218; 2002: 202). The idea that narratives do not necessarily correspond with 'truth' or 'what happened' and that

respondents may be (re)constructing and putting spin on these cultural stories in hindsight is not considered (see methodology).

In order to draw attention to the vulnerability of some groups of Asian migrant women in Japan by showing the wider socio-economic, political, and legal restrictions placed upon them, Piper clearly reduces cases of international marriage to those between female entertainers and their patrons. Indeed, all but one of the brides in Piper's (1997) study had worked in the entertainment industry, the majority meeting their future husband in a club or snack bar. In comparison, in my survey only one participant had worked – or at least admitted to working – in the entertainment industry. While Piper's feminist gender-specific analysis is important, the tendency to generalise findings to all foreign migrants in Japan, to seek and ascribe reasons as to why individuals chose to marry, and to focus (perhaps unintentionally) more on the constraints operating upon women's agency rather than agency itself is more problematic. Many of the problems in the migration literature of a whole – such as the economistic focus on labour and the promotion of causal explanations based on ethnicity or gender without an awareness of the dangers of culturalism – are reproduced. Given Piper's important observation that female (labour) migrants are hardly ever portrayed as the 'ordinary wives' of Japanese (Piper 1997:322), it is ironic that her own gender/race focus may tend to (inadvertently) reproduce those disciplining public Discourses that trap Filipinas and others into a negative 'sex-industry' stereotype.

Nobue Suzuki's (2000; Suzuki 2001; 2002) work bears many immediate similarities with Piper's. In the first place, she focuses exclusively on Filipino women living in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area. In the second, more than half of her respondents (50 out of 84) met their husbands in entertainment establishments. However, Suzuki discusses 'transnational' marriages between Japanese and Filipinas not only in the context of labor migration but also in the context of the historical shifts that have emerged in conjunction with the Philippines' struggles in its positionalities in the global political economy during the postwar period. Her interest in the issues of globalization, boundaries, and identities, sees her research not limited to Japan but also incorporating shifting translocal and transnational spaces that stretch across state frontiers. As the title of her thesis (Suzuki 2001) suggests, the transnational arena forms the context for the 'intimate political arena', the 'global desires', experiences, and practices of both the Filipino wives *and* the Japanese husbands (Suzuki 2002).

Although Suzuki writes extensively on the negative Discursive construction of Filipinas in Japan, she appears well aware of the dangers of reproducing such stereotyping in her writing. "[T]he writings of even well meaning feminist researchers", she (2000: 434) notes, "have tended to funnel representations of Filipina diasporas into those of women with uniform, truncated, and troubled lives." She thus appears sensitive to the dangers associated with culturalism and the reduction of people's behaviour to the outcome of certain social identities. "By naming a group," she (2000: 495) continues, "we risk recreating a bounded, unchanging representation similar to the very construct we want to dismantle." By focusing on the 'meanings and possibilities' of the practices of Filipina wives – in public charity and cultural events for example – she shows how images the women themselves deploy constitute a way to create 'affirmative spaces' (reminiscent of Giddens' 'spaces of

control') in the new society.

The way her subjects are framed in a simplistic 'battle' between stereotypical images of the 'immoral' Filipina predominant in Japanese society and the 'ordinary' (house)wife/mother image they wish to project does, as she acknowledges, tend to perpetuate Orientalist and sexist disciplines. There is little discussion of the broader ways these women are actually contributing to and transforming Japanese society; indeed, the spaces they are creating are 'on the margins' of the two nation-states (Suzuki 2000: 431). This 'marginal' label is not a little worrying considering how the centre/margin model underpins colonialist Discourse (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998: 96). Similarly, describing someone as 'transmigrant' implies a lack of fixity or rootedness, portraying them as circular migrants who endlessly shuttle back and forth but who never settle. Nevertheless, she does indicate that as their presence becomes more stable and central (with PR for example) they may become active agents challenging and revising the ideological mapping of race and gender in Japan. In this context, her discussion of resistance is important, particularly 'everyday' resistance as articulated in familiar and habitual practices. "Seldom is attention paid", she (2000: 432) writes, "to the mundane processes in which the women themselves try to resist and rework such ideological yoking for their own identity construction." Although resistance is, following Foucault, restricted to quiet, intermittent 'counter-attack' (i.e. refuting 'bad-girl' images), the possibility of transformation is also acknowledged, a resistance that "allows us to see beyond what is otherwise deemed imaginable" (Suzuki 2000: 435). The notion of slow, long-term change coming from within is captured in two quotes (2000: 436/40) from 'Anna', who established the Japan Society of Filipina Wives (JSFW): "Unless we initiate actions by ourselves, we are only going to lose our space in this society...Nothing may happen right away, but I believe the situation will improve in the future as we continue our endeavors. And we have to make it better ourselves." According to Suzuki, introducing Filipino culture and food and helping others were just some of the ways they do this. Anna's comments about internal initiative, long-term goals for self-improvement, and helping and educating others are startlingly similar to comments from the women in my own study which are looked at later.

Tomoko Nakamatsu's work on international marriage migrants in Japan has already been discussed in terms of the relationship between structural determinants (such as immigration policies) and human agency (such as residential status options). Elsewhere, echoing Suzuki, she (2002b) points to the importance of ethnic women's self-help groups in establishing social spaces in society. Such groups become ways of expressing agency, of taking control of how they are represented and resisting the stereotypical representations imposed at 'international' cultural events. But in asserting their autonomy and rejecting passive images of them as powerless receivers of help by 'well-meaning' local organisations, there is also a danger of isolation, of not being acknowledged as town-folk. This leads to the observation that overly strong displays of agency can lead to ostracism. The focus on agency is continued in her latest work (Nakamatsu forthcoming) which looks how women are pro-active in negotiation of roles both inside and outside the home. For example, in the domestic sphere, she notes how the women are able to negotiate gender roles and eventually control the household finances. In my own survey, Jane tells of her shock of having to give her salary to her

mother-in-law, comments also found in Nakazawa's survey discussed earlier. Jane's strategy was not one of confrontation but discussion and negotiation over a long period which eventually led to financial autonomy. Such examples make it easier to view migration as a restructuring of gender roles in which women, as active and decisive social agents, pursue their own agendas at local and global levels, negotiating gendered strategies and options in familial and market domains (Campani 1995; Harzig 2001; Tienda and Booth 1991). Gaining access to social resources and status both at home and in the wider society (by finding worthwhile careers or engaging in civic/community work) are frequently the goals of such negotiation.

## RESISTANCE

In a Japan which may be approaching some kind of turning point, international marriage migrants would seem to form a promising case study for exploring the link between (social) conditions and (individual) agency. However, as the review of the international migration literature showed, very little attention had been paid to the link between permanent settlement and new types of societies emerging within the context of global transformation. It was suggested that one reason for this 'gap' may be the lack of an appropriate mechanism of change: a new way of talking about, theorising about, and/or describing the strategies people adopt. Although often presented as such a mechanism, the popular notion of resistance – particularly in its Foucauldian guise – tends to be more useful in explaining reproduction than the transformative potential of human agents. Thus, when resistance does occur in the migration literature (which, surprisingly given its general academic popularity, is not that often<sup>23</sup>), it is usually in terms of a mechanical *re*-action to dominant power structures. For example, there are occasional discussions of 'coping strategies of resistance', i.e. *reactions* to adverse external circumstances such as restrictive state immigration policies, lack of welfare/medical/human rights, or exploitation. Resistance is portrayed as a reaction to some kind of structural (usually state) domination, usually framed in terms of collective resistance, of individuals working through social organisations or associations (Moren-Alegret 2002a). What little talk of 'transformation' that does occur is usually framed in these terms:

"a new brand of transformative politics has emerged out of the new migration. Migrants have adopted new migration strategies which have often undermined the restrictive immigration policies...new restrictions can trigger new forms of resistance...migrants are not simply victims and passive recipients of these policies; they also have the capacity to mobilize resources and create and broaden their own spaces of control...responses 'from below'" (Koser and Lutz 1998: 4)

Thus, on the rare occasions when resistance does appear in the migration literature it remains framed in the conventional domination metaphor rather than in the idea of any genuine potential for change.

A growing interest in globalisation, transnationalism, and the transformations associated with such phenomenon, coupled with the growing influence of feminism in the migration literature, is likely to see resistance<sup>24</sup> receive more attention in the future. Feminism in particular has been receptive to the notion of resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990: 54; Brown 1996: 729), often concerning itself, as Stephens (1989: 112/115) points out, only with those aspects of a women's experience that demonstrate 'suffering' and 'struggle'. However, such a notion of resistance may be more useful in explaining conflict and reproduction than the means by which individuals can act as agents of social change. Kondo's (1990: 225/311) observation that resistance is rooted in the 'violence' of poststructuralist (and particularly Foucauldian) language shows how resistance, in its popular Foucauldian guise, is rooted in a circular resistance/domination binary. In attempting to understand how individuals define new categories of experience for themselves that circumvent 'the dualism of domination and resistance' (Hoffman 1999: 478), Foucauldian concepts of 'resistance' need to be deconstructed and alternatives found.

For Foucault, resistance and power are inextricably interlinked, two sides of the same coin. Power is never absolute but generates resistance. "Where there is power", he noted (1978: 95) famously, "there is resistance." The remainder of the sentence points out that as a consequence 'resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.' Resistance is thus the 'compatriot' of power:

"there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies" (Foucault 1980: 142)

By theorising power as omnipresent, capillary, and ubiquitous (Foucault 1980: 98), exercised not only from the top downwards but also from the bottom up, Foucault ostensibly allows for the possibility of change. Moreover, by framing practice not as sets of individual actions but as modes of social relations, Foucault's notion of Discourse is useful in understanding the dialectic between the individual and the social. Indeed, some (Gee 1989a: 6; 1989b: 19) have extended Foucault's schema and incorporated notions of social capital, arguing that mastery of dominant Discourses can lead to empowerment through the acquisition of social goods such as money, power, and status. However, Foucault's limiting of resistance and change to within the framework of the prevailing social order means that genuine transformation remains impossible to theorise. The problem is that if resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power – if one is never 'outside' power – then 'resistance' is merely limited to what Foucault (1978: 101) calls a 'reverse' Discourse. A reverse-Discourse, as Saroca (1997: 96) notes, while appearing to challenge the dominant Discourse, actually, by using the same vocabulary and categories merely reinforces and compounds it. Threadgold (1997: 124/182)

shows in practice how Discourse, because it is embodied, is unwittingly reproduced, using the example of an Australian High Court decision that perpetuates and affirms the very same (social) structures it purports to counter. The question is whether the production of *genuine* change against the “capacity of established discourses to ignore or absorb would-be subversion” (Terdiman 1985: 13) is possible.<sup>25</sup> Although he takes pains to deny it (e.g. Foucault 1972: 209; 1980: 142), it is difficult to escape from the impression that Foucault’s work is over totalising, presenting an inescapable form of domination. The image of our fates being mapped out from the start – the human subject being produced through rules and codes in what Foucault himself (1970: 342/383-7) dubbed the ‘death of man [sic]’ – appears fatalistic. The problem is perhaps that his analysis stops short of the emancipatory intent of other critiques of power:

Foucault's imagination of power is largely within rather than against it...His interest in domination was critical but not finally as contestatory, or as oppositional as on the surface it seems to be. This translates into the paradox that Foucault's imagination of power was by his analysis of power to reveal its injustice and cruelty, but by his theorization to let it go more or less unchecked...

(Said 1986: 152)

By suspending reference to the speaking subject, Foucault also deprives his subject of ‘natural’ creativity, desire, interests, affections, and impulses, all qualities which Foucault sees as Discursively produced within a social order. Such a ‘half-way, crab-wise aestheticising move’, as Eagleton (1991: 395) calls it, somehow leaves the subject incomplete and unfinished, suggesting that Foucault “still cannot quite bring himself to address the subject as such.” His (Foucault 1972: 208/9) claim that Discursive practices are less limitations imposed on the initiative of subjects than conditions of possibility doesn’t ring true, as he (1972: 210/11) recognises a few pages later. In focusing on how the self is Discursively produced through both external and internal regulations he is effectively establishing the limits of subjectivity.

Feminist responses to Foucault’s shackling of subjectivity get to the core of the problem of resistance in its Foucauldian form. The idea that power is the ‘bottom line’, that it is not possible to slip an internal voice or hidden subject underneath or outside power relations leads to feminism’s central criticism: that Foucault underplays the *transformative* potential of human agency by centralising and establishing the limits of subjectivity itself (Dirks, Eley, and Ortner, in Battaglia 1999: 145). In this way, Foucault’s view of the subject, as constructed by and within external forces of sociality, fails to address the notion of what Battaglia (1999: 143) calls the ‘transformative subject’. In short, as Ramazanoglu (1993: 18) points out, Foucault does not discriminate sufficiently between resistance to power and the ability to transform power relations.

A neglect of subjectivity, that mode of self-conscious awareness central to transforming power relations, is not just a characteristic of Foucault but, to some extent, of poststructuralism in general. Ortner (1995: 184) bemoans the particular poststructuralist move which destroys the subject ‘who should be enriched, rather than impoverished by the act of introducing complexity’:

The question here, however, is how to get around this ideological construct and yet retain some sense of human agency, the capacity of social beings to interpret and morally evaluate their situation and to formulate projects and try to enact them...the ability of social beings to weave alternative, and sometimes brilliantly creative, forms of coherence across the damages is one of the heartening aspects of human subjectivity (Ortner 1995: 185/6)

As Benita Parry (1987) has argued, analysts like Spivak and Bhabha have effectively erased the voice of the native, obliterated his or her subject positions, written out historical evidence of agency, and limited possibilities for (meaningful) resistance. “[B]ecause their theses admit of no point outside of discourse from which opposition can be engendered”, Parry (1987: 43) points out, “their project is concerned to place incendiary devices within the dominant structures of representation and not to confront these with another knowledge.”

Rediscovering the *transformative* potential of human agency by recovering subjectivity is central to the feminist agenda – and to the enrichment of any theory of resistance. Chris Weedon, as a feminist poststructuralist, has sought to integrate individual experience and social power in a theory of subjectivity. She (1987: 32) defines subjectivity as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world.” Weedon, as many others,<sup>26</sup> views the subject as multiple and non-unitary, and subjectivity as a site of ‘struggle’, both actively and passively (re)produced in a variety of social sites all of which are structured by relations of power in which the individual is constantly taking up (and being hailed to) different subject positions or social roles. She does not, therefore, reject those like Giddens and Foucault who see structures as both enabling and constraining but instead demands the individual be accorded greater human agency:

Although the subject...is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling and social subject and agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices (Weedon 1987: 125)

The notion of ‘everyday’ resistance provides a starting point for moving beyond Foucauldian notions of resistance that ignore the transformative potential of human agents. Scott (1985) describes ‘everyday’ resistance as the small, daily, innumerable, anonymous acts of transgression in which ‘ordinary’ people engage. Individuals enact a ‘slow, grinding, quiet struggle’ (1985: 37), a calculated conformity that stops well short of outright collective open defiance or insubordination that dominates other studies: “These Brechtian forms of class struggle have certain features in common”, he (1985: 29) writes, “[t]hey require little or no coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or elite norms.” In terms of change, he argues strongly that the success of such de

facto resistance 'is often directly proportional to the symbolic conformity with which it is masked.' What he is saying is that such forms of resistance are much more effective in making the political presence of the less-powerful felt – in narrowing and transforming the policy options available to the state – than direct confrontation which threatens the symbolic order. "Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines", he concludes (Scott 1985: xvii), "[b]ut just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do the multiple acts of...subordination and evasion create political and economic barrier reefs of their own...And whenever, to pursue the simile, the ship of state runs aground on such reefs, attention is usually directed to the shipwreck itself and not to the vast aggregation of petty acts that made it possible."

However, Scott's formulation of resistance as disruptive, class-based, and short-term is relatively narrow and of limited applicability to other contexts. The subordinate groups he focuses on live an entirely separate and fairly isolated existence. As he (Scott 1990: 22) acknowledges, this makes any analysis in which subjects are immersed in multiple social relations problematic. More worrying is Scott's tendency (particularly in his later work (Scott 1990)) towards simple, essentialising dichotomies (the hidden vs. the public transcript; the powerless vs. the powerful) which ignore how identities (in the plural) and power relations frequently shift and change. Another problem is his tendency to see *everything* (such as flight) as resistance, a classic trait of 'resistance studies' in general in which any impulse, whim, or caprice that a person happens to have at a particular time provides the basis of an 'agency objective' (Sen 1992: 56). But perhaps the central problem with Scott's conceptualisation of resistance – and the reason it remains nothing more than a starting point – is his reliance on 'intention' in definition.

Scott (1985: 290) defines 'everyday' resistance as any act that is *intended* either to mitigate or deny claims made by the more powerful or, alternatively, to advance claims vis-à-vis the more powerful. Others, (e.g. Fegan 1986; Kielmann 1998: 136) argue similarly that only acts in which a conscious intention to resist are present can be classified as resistance.<sup>27</sup> Mahoney and Yngvesson (in Kielmann 1998: 136) claim that this introduction of motivation – the exploration of why certain individuals and not others respond to domination and make change – improves on conventional accounts of resistance, particularly in the way it introduces the 'previously neglected and essential dimension' of reflexivity. Intention or motives (as opposed to consequences) are deemed central. Unfortunately, intentions are often mixed, ambiguous, and (as Marx pointed out) constantly evolving, making it practically impossible to show what any one person intended for one particular action. Moreover, Scott's formulation of *every* conscious purposeful action (e.g. flight) as resistance is counter-intuitive. Instead, it may be better to reconceptualise resistance as strategic activity, to switch focus from intentions to 'objectively oriented lines of action which social agents continually construct in and through practice' (Bourdieu 1992: 129). In the first place, strategies imply a relatively consistent course of action across (and perhaps even at the intersection of) Discourses that gets over the impasse inherent in Foucault's circular notion of a reverse-Discourse. Secondly, an analysis in terms of long term strategies addresses the problems inherent in Foucault's (1983: 211) conception of resistance only as 'immediate' struggle in which people 'do not expect to find a solution to their problems at a future date'. Thirdly, the notion of individuals adopting complex strategies

addresses feminist concerns (e.g. Harstock 1990) that Foucault's schema marginalises subjects and denies the possibility of transformation. Feminists also tend to put a great deal of emphasis on consciousness raising, something which links to the final point, that strategy is useful because it contains the key concept of reflection. This is important since (self)reflection is often presented (Giddens 1990: 175-6; Heelas 1996; Kellner 1992: 141-2) as a trait of the contemporary 'fragmented' global world, crucial to how individuals see, construct, and modify coherent selves in that world. "In the settings of what I call 'high' or 'late' modernity – our present-day world –", writes Giddens (1991:3), "the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made." The notion that self-identity in a global world is (partly) 'a reflexively organised endeavour' (Giddens 1991: 5) is captured by the term 'strategy' yet missed by Foucauldian notions of Discourse which see subjects constituted outside the immediacy of consciousness (Poster 1996: 277).<sup>28</sup>

Reconceptualising resistance as strategic activity overcomes many of the limitations of inherent in Foucault and Scott's theorising. As Lock and Kaufert (1998a: 2/11) argue, pragmatism (not ideology) often motivates what individuals do (even if it is an indifference of doing nothing) and agents will often balance apparent benefits against potential costs, making the best of what is available to them and trying always to maximise control. "Most important of all", they (1998: 208) conclude, "individuals often juggle strategically to their own advantage among networks of power. Alternatively...they may retain a cynical distance." The notion of agents working *within* (not exterior to) the system, pursuing strategies that maximise their present situation (Kielmann 1998: 137) while *simultaneously* aiming long-term to transform that situation for increased benefit (social/symbolic capital) may not be as attractive as conventional notions of resistance driven by ideological or revolutionary beliefs or even notions of resistance as struggle and transgression, but it is far more realistic. If resistance is to be maintained at all as a useful term, it is important to acknowledge (as Scott (1985: 296) tacitly does) that while rare and isolated acts are *not* resistance, when they become a consistent pattern (i.e. a strategy) they may be viewed as resistance. As Scott (1985: 329) notes, it is the fact that even individual acts of resistance are dependant upon a social context (i.e. they are mediated) that allows individual action to be classified as resistance. Lock and Kaufert (1998b: 13) suggest that it may well be appropriate to confine use of the word resistance to self-consciously (both individual and group) calculated responses (including long-term and potentially contradictory strategies) to situations of domination. We may go even further, though, and question the usefulness of the concept of resistance at all.

Although notions of 'everyday' and 'strategic' resistance deal with some of the problems with 'resistance' in its Foucauldian guise, perhaps the notion of resistance itself, as a framework for conceptualising potential change, has been given too much attention. Resistance is, as Abu-Lughod (1990) observes, 'romanticised'. Its popularity is reinforced by a moral angle which sees the adoption of a framework of resistance as somehow validating the moral integrity of both observer and observed (Brown 1996: 729/30): "in the concept of resistance", notes Sangren (1995: 16), "there thus remains a comforting trace of ineffable creativity." As Marcus (1992: 313/14) points out, the question of identity-formation in particular tends to be framed in 'slogan-like' analytic formula of

'resistance and accommodation'. The importance of the resistance/domination binary in studies on identity construction is undoubtedly a factor in the tendency to see identity as a duality,<sup>29</sup> where one identity is primary and the other secondary, as reflected in terminology like 'bicultural identity', 'half', or 'two worlds'. Fortunately, there are a growing number of scholars who recognise the pitfalls involved in unthinkingly embracing notions of resistance.

While it is easy to understand the attraction of 'resistance studies', there are clear dangers, as Sahlins (1996: 16-18) has humorously pointed out, in categorising *everything* in terms of hegemony and counter-hegemony. "Resistance' is rapidly becoming a word that covers anything", notes Lewin (1998: 164), "defines itself, and may be said to exist because we insist that it do so." "The point is", concludes Hoffman (1999: 477), "that interpreting everything as a form of resistance does no more for theory or understanding than the 'old' functionalism that saw everything as harmonious and socially adaptive." Indeed, the infatuation with locating sites or implications for resistance, as Chen (1996: 41) observes, often limits or distorts rather than enriches analysis. Abu-Lughod (1990: 41/2), while acknowledging the contribution studies of resistance have made in understanding the complexities of power and domination, also attempts to get beyond the notion:

I want to show how in the rich and sometimes contradictory details of resistance the complex workings of social power can be traced. I also want to show that these same contradictory details enable us to trace how power relations are historically transformed...Most important, studying the various forms of resistance will allow us to get at the ways in which intersecting and often conflicting structures of power work together these days in communities that are gradually becoming more tied to multiple and nonlocal systems. (Abu-Lughod 1990: 42)

In arguing that the desire to find 'resistors' and to romanticise 'the resilience and creativity of the human spirit' results in a lost opportunity to learn more about forms and flows of power and how people are caught up in them, strategically transform them, and are transformed by them, Abu-Lughod indicates, as other feminists earlier, the need to highlight the transformative potential of human agency in any discussion of change.

## AGENCY AND ACTIVITY

Many of the problems associated with resistance – and indeed, as Halfacree (1993: 334) points out, the concept of migration itself – stem from an unsatisfactory formulation of human agency. Resistance – which in its original Gramscian conception was opposed to agency – has now subsumed it, becoming, as Sangren (1995: 16) notes, "the privileged domain of agency and change in history." This is partly due to resistance coming to be defined through intentionality, something which requires the existence of human agency. Agency describes the *capacity* to act within social/structural constraints. It is about individuals who have the *power* to interpret, determine, and evaluate their situation, choose from options, make decisions, formulate projects, and put them into practice

(Messer-Davidow 1995: 25; Ortner 1995: 185). “[I]t is in the formulation and enactment of those projects”, argues Ortner (1995: 187), “that they both become and transform who they are, and that they sustain or transform their social and cultural universe.” The concept of social capital enriches the formulation of agency since the mobilisation of social resources increases the autonomy of individuals, enlarging their freedom of choice and helping them pursue and achieve their goals (Faist 2000: 102/17).

In the literature, ‘agent’ is often used alongside ‘victim’ (or ‘patient’). Thus, one may be resisting domination and simultaneously a victim of domination just as social capital increases the autonomy of individuals at the same time as maintaining social structures. “The study of humans”, Hobart (1990: 93) notes, echoing the problems outlined above with a focus on resistance and suffering, “usually treats [people] more as objects...than agents.” This is true of female migrants who are often framed in narrow terms of bride/worker and victim (Roces 1998:1). But people are never simply agents or victims but what Hobart calls a ‘complex’ agents:

"If classes of action overlap, agency and patiency need not be exclusive: a person may be more or less willingly part agent, part instrument, part patient in relationships, and at different times...Agency and patiency are situational, overlapping, ironic, and under-determined...As agents never operate in a vacuum, in a sense they are always more or less complex. By a complex agent I mean that decisions and responsibility for action involve more than one party in deliberation or action" (Hobart 1990: 96)

Roces (2000) develops the notion of the complex agent by exploring the extent to which the labels ‘victim’ and ‘agent’ are often problematic in assessing the impact of the wider processes of modernisation and globalisation. As with Roces’ (1998) data on 18 Filipina international marriage migrants in Australia, my own data also shows how the distinction between victim and agency is often blurred, the women often perceiving themselves as agents despite experiences – such as having to give up their salary to their mother-in-law – that clearly indicate constraints on freedom. For Roces (1998: 4/5), the most palpable evidence of the women’s increase in agency is their intense desire, as new members of the society, to contribute to the community, through participation in events, clubs, circles, shows, ethnic groups, churches, volunteer work, and civic activities. Concentrating on symbolic rather than social capital, Roces (1998: 5/6) focuses on the notion of status as a concept to make sense of the ways in which a group can successfully negotiate the transition to another country through migration. In her study (1998: 12), fulfillment of particular social roles (wife and mother) provided the ‘decisive piece of symbolic capital’ that formed the foundation of their self-perception as agent.

In developing a concept of agency that, while mindful of social constraints, captures the transformative potential of active individuals, activity would seem a central concept. Social capital, being both inherent in the transactions between people (networks, groups, communities) and facilitating such transactions, places great emphasis on activity, the idea that people constitute actions (and themselves) relationally (Faist 2000: 177). Since social capital is not always transferable from country to country but usually a local asset, newcomers often actively pursue strategies to

secure and enhance their status through participation in (and the creation of new) social networks. Thus, the women in my study were initially limited to quite a narrow range of low-status roles tied to the domestic sphere (bride, wife). In response they pursued strategies to claim more powerful roles (identities), which would garner respect and acceptance, and acquire and use a variety of resources, which would be valued (Norton and Toohey 2001: 318). “It is through these roles and functions”, writes Harzig (2001: 20), “that migrant women interact with the receiving societies and it is in these interactive processes that new identities are formed.” Of interest, then, is *how* individuals exercise human agency to gain access to social networks, social resources, and new identities (Norton and Toohey 2001). Acquiring a wider range of symbolic (as well as material) resources is connected with identity because such resources “enhance their conception of themselves and their desires [possibilities] for the future” (Norton and Toohey 2001: 312). “Thus, the question ‘Who am I?’”, she (Norton 1997: 410) concludes elsewhere, “cannot be understood apart from the question ‘What can I do?’. Put simply, status – whether what Imada (1999) calls achieved (material) or relational (social) status– is created and accumulated by *doing*. Thus, human *activity*<sup>30</sup> may be distinguished from animal *action* (sometimes referred to as behaviour) by the way it is social, conscious, goal-driven, purposeful,<sup>31</sup> and (importantly) transformative. “True activity”, writes Davydov (1999: 46), “is always connected to the transformation of reality.” Thus, activity (as opposed to everyday behaviour, most of which may be seen as decidedly reproductive) transforms identity and may eventually transform society. “Structures are distributional orders”, explains Parker (2000: 48), “[a]gents, as beneficiaries of these orders, use their power to defend or increase their holding, causing realignments within the distributional structure.” People are able to escape being purely reproductive because (following structuration theory) structures are both constraining and enabling, exerting power over people but also the products of people. Activity, as a key component of agency, takes us beyond Foucault, beyond the immediate conditions of possibility:

The transforming and purposeful character of activity allows the subject to step beyond the frames of a given situation and to see it in a wider historical and societal context. It makes it possible for the subject to find means that go beyond the given possibilities

(Davydov 1999: 41)

Activity, as a specific form of human societal existence, offers the potential for both individual and societal change and development: indeed, the two are often indistinguishable (Davydov 1999: 41). “[I]ndividual and group action cannot be adequately understood independently of one another”, notes Faist (2000: 116/17), “[w]ith the concept of social capital we can emphasize the dualism of individual actors and groups.”

Halfacree (1993: 334/41) argues for an alternative conceptualisation of migration which emphasises its situatedness in everyday life, the need for an approach that integrates the process of migration into the everyday experience of the individual within society. Feminist analyses of international migration (Campani 1995; Edwards and Roces 2000; Harzig 2001; Kofman 1999; Phizacklea 1998; Tienda and Booth 1991) have been instrumental in satisfying this demand. Faist’s

social capital framework has also been crucial in enriching the formulation of human agency. The key has been recovering subjectivity from a conception of resistance that carried connotations, as Ortner (1995: 177/180) points out, of opposition to domination or mechanical *re*-action rather than the more important notions of (the transformation of) inequality and asymmetry. In recognising the possibility of strategic action on the part of individual and collective actors (Phizacklea 1998: 28) and the potential for the human agent to go beyond the given possibilities, a conception of agency that admits the transformative potential of the human subject is made possible. “In short, one can only appreciate the ways in which resistance can be more than opposition, can be truly creative and transformative”, Ortner (1995: 191) concludes, “if one appreciates the multiplicity of projects in which social beings are always engaged.” An ethnographic ‘thick’ perspective characterised by fieldwork is one way of exploring such projects and understanding the relationship between human agency and the social practices of communities.

## THE RESEARCH SITE

Yamagata, located in the Northeast (Tōhoku) region along the Japan Sea, is, in terms of area, the 9<sup>th</sup> largest prefecture in Japan but ranks only 33<sup>rd</sup> out of 47 prefectures in terms of population. Although regarded as a rural farming area – the region has a history of seasonal labour migration during dormant periods of the agricultural cycle – it also has a thriving industrial sector producing hi-fi speakers, slippers, and sweaters. Yamagata is unique in a number of respects.<sup>32</sup> Compared with the national average it has a particularly low percentage of people in the 15-64 age bracket (62.5%: 1999) and a particularly high percentage of those over 65 (22.3%: 1999). The ageing population is reflected in Yamagata’s position nationally as having the highest percentage of households with parents over 65 (47.01%), the largest percentage of three generation households (28.6%), and the lowest percentage of nuclear households (44.97%). Finally, Yamagata Prefecture also has the highest rate of households where both husband and wife are working (47.09%), perhaps a consequence of the wife living together with mother-in-law.

Although the foreign-born population of Yamagata Prefecture is not particularly large on a national scale – Yamagata ranks only 37<sup>th</sup> out of 47 prefectures (Yamagata-Prefecture 1998: 186) – there are reasons for choosing Yamagata as a research site. Firstly, numbers of registered foreigners in Yamagata have increased almost five-fold (500%) between 1989 (1,381) and December 2000 (6,347), far more quickly than nationally (984,455 to 1,686,444 – a 170% rise). What this means is that societal change is occurring not slowly but at a relatively rapid pace, making it much more transparent. Secondly, Yamagata has a particularly high ratio of foreign-born migrants who have come to settle *permanently* and invest their future in the society. This is in part a reflection of the fact that Yamagata was the first place in Japan to ‘invite’ foreign-born brides through official channels back in 1985. For example, as of December 2000, 38% of foreign nationals in Yamagata (Souma 2002: 114) had spouse visas (*nihonjin no haigūsha*) compared with 16.5% nationally. Latest figures (Asahi-Shimbun 28.2.02) show that an astonishing 1 in 14 marriages are so-called ‘international marriages’ compared with 1 in 22 nationally. The high ratio of foreign born migrants

who have come to settle permanently also reflects the fact that the prefecture has the second highest number of returnees from China (*Chūgoku Zanryū Shōni Konin*), Japanese ‘war orphans’ who as adults came back to Japan to locate parents and relatives and settle with their families (Nishigami 1999:225). The combination of rapidly increasing numbers of foreign nationals coupled with the high ratio of permanent settlers makes Yamagata a particularly appropriate location for studying the potential of migrants to be agents of change in contemporary Japan. As a Yamagata University report (Anon 1997: i) puts it, in Yamagata “internationalisation is occurring at the very basic unit of society – the family – and their [the migrants] influence on local society can be said to be more than any other locality in Japan” (author’s translation). If family is indeed the basic unit – or at least one of the core units – of ‘culture’, then the fact that migrants have infiltrated the very fabric of society suggests that they are indeed agents for fundamental change. “In other words”, concludes another local government survey (Yamagata-City 1996: 11), “newcomers are clearly becoming firm members of Japanese society. It is probably fair to say that in terms of future policy Japan is at a crucial crossroads that will strongly influence the state of Japanese society” (author’s translation).

## METHODOLOGY

Previous studies of international marriage migrants in Japan (e.g. Nakamatsu, Piper, Suzuki, Morgan, Scully) have all engaged in fieldwork<sup>33</sup> comprising a relatively small number of interviews with (and observation of) individuals underpinned by further information from discussion with (and participation in) various related organisations such as NGOs, Japanese classes, community groups, and self-help associations. This combination of participant-observation and interviewing – a combination which Lofland and Lofland (1995: 18) note are frequently mutual rather than distinct investigative activities – is also adopted in this study. By witnessing the interactions and hearing the voices of my subjects firsthand I hoped to better understand their lived experiences. To paraphrase Norton and Toohey (2001: 308), by focusing on the *situated* experiences of migrants, new insights emerge into the dialectic between the social and the individual, between the social practices of their communities and the human agency of the individuals.

In practice, this meant working as a volunteer with a local NGO (IVY) and the local government run Association for International Relations in Yamagata (AIRY) at the same time as interviewing individuals (mostly married women) using a narrativist approach. As in most qualitative research, random sampling was not employed. Instead, following Morse and Richards (2002: 173), I sought valid representation through purposeful, convenience, theoretical, and snowball sampling. Thus, I selected participants because of their characteristics (permanent international migrants, especially marriage migrants), because they were available and willing to be interviewed, because of an interest in social activity, and because they were recommended by participants already in the study. Interviewees were mostly recruited either directly or indirectly via the two local organisations.

In total seventeen people were interviewed in twelve discrete interviews over a period of six months. Most interviews were one to one, with two pair interviews and one (four-person) group

interview. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two hours. For privacy reasons, names are pseudonyms and localities are not specified, though all took place in Yamagata Prefecture. Interviewees came from Korea (8), China (5), the Phillipines (3), and Brazil (1). All interviewees were female and fifteen were married to a Japanese. The exceptions – a Chinese married to another Chinese and a single Chinese – were selected because they had lived many years in Japan. The sample reflects the fact that the overwhelming number of non-Japanese married to Japanese are women; moreover, the three main nationalities – Chinese, Korean, and Filipino <sup>34</sup>– reflect (in that order) the most common nationalities of spouses in Yamagata.

Of the seventeen interviewees, I got to know five through IVY (three through language classes and two volunteers) and six through AIRY (three directly through AIRY language classes, one who worked part-time at AIRY, one at an international party held at AIRY, and one at a different Japanese language class recommended to me by AIRY). The remainder I contacted directly after an article appeared in the local newspaper about them or (in one case) was introduced to me by a local village office after I had written a letter. I provided potential participants with a written explanatory statement in Japanese and one of Korean, Chinese, or Tagalog which they could study in their own time at home and come to a voluntary decision whether to participate or not. Interview times and dates (in the case of deciding to participate) were arranged either face-to-face or via E-mail or mobile phone. Although I had worried about beforehand about ethical issues in acting as both volunteer and researcher, these failed to materialise. This was no doubt because my dominant role – the one I introduced myself as and which was written on my business card and the explanatory statement – was as researcher. The ‘volunteer’ role was casual and occasional. At AIRY I was just another foreigner – albeit one with unusually good Japanese – who dropped into the ‘international’ lounge, visited local schools to speak when asked, and helped out at ‘international’ events. At IVY, I attended fortnightly meetings, helped out at the weekly Japanese classes, and translated the homepage and a prefectural-wide questionnaire into English. When I met someone who fitted my criteria, I would give them an explanatory statement: some were interested in being interviewed and others were not.

A ‘narrativist’ approach is generally taken to mean that individual interview responses are viewed not as giving direct access to ‘experience’ or ‘the truth’ but as actively constructed ‘cultural’ stories that themselves (re)produce ‘truth’. In other words, narratives are a way of making sense of, coming to terms with, and (re)ordering and (re)organising where one has come from, who one is, and, particularly, where one is going: Hall (1996: 4) calls this the ‘narrativization of the self’. “The reflexive project of the self...”, writes Giddens (1991: 5), “consists in maintaining the coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives.” Exploring the richness of everyday lived experience through biographies, narratives, or life-stories is gaining currency in migration research (Brinkler-Gabler and Smith 1997; Halfacree and Boyle 1993). Moreover, the notion that the telling of biographical narratives is therapeutic (Becker 1997) supports the suggestion (Steedman, in Peel 2002: 186) that it is less-powerful beings – including not only the poor, but also perhaps language learners and migrants – who most often and most carefully (need to) tell their stories. When Silverman (2000: 90) suggests that we live in an ‘interview society’, one that is dominated (especially in the media) by

the 'cult' of interviewing, this may well be a consequence of uncertainty and fragmentation of identity – Harvey's crisis in representation – that is a feature of globalisation in this period of high, late, or post modernity. If identities are constituted within representation, and the question of representation is acknowledged as being intimately tied to power, then individual narratives may reveal a great deal about potential societal transformation. Thus, the ongoing (re)structuring of the self (Block 1995: 44) characteristic of these spaces of narration may represent not only an individual (re)structuring of self but also a wider (re)structuring of local, national, and even global identities.

The interviews themselves were regarded as conversations, but more specifically what Holstein and Gubrium (1997: 122) call *guided* conversations, my role being to incite or activate the production of narratives that address issues relating to my research concerns. "[T]he consciously active interviewer intentionally provokes responses", they (1997: 123/6) argue, "by indicating – even suggesting narrative positions, resources, orientations, and precedents...that might emerge too rarely to be effectively captured 'in their natural habitat'." The notion of a guided conversation, therefore, requires the preparation of a few (but not too many) questions in advance so as to ensure that the informant has sufficient flexibility to reflect on and raise unanticipated issues (Silverman 1993: 95). In my case, I adopted an initial trigger question ('So when did your relationship with Japan begin?'). Supplementary questions asked about subjects' different roles/identities, daily activities, free time/ways of relieving stress, whether they had created a space/place for themselves in Japanese society, the importance of language, and, finally, future dreams and goals. The intention was to achieve a balance between letting the interviewee structure their talk in their own words, way, and time while still allowing me to prompt and probe their answers in ways that related to the research questions. The interview finished with the collecting of personal data including full name, date of arrival in Japan, visa type, date of marriage, and number of children. This was deliberately kept at the end in order to avoid a typical question-answer pattern becoming established at the start of the interview. Transcripts of interviews were later forwarded to the subjects and feedback invited.<sup>35</sup> Interviews themselves were held exclusively in Japanese. Interviews were transcribed by the author and then checked by a native. Transcripts were coded and analysed using the qualitative QSR software N-Vivo.<sup>36</sup>

Before moving onto a discussion of the results, some of the limitations of this small study need to be noted. Clifford (1986: 6) convincingly argues that ethnographic representations are always partial truths or accounts. Even as a partial-insider – someone married to a Japanese, with permanent residence, who has lived there for many years – I make no attempt to claim that I wholly understand or have fully represented my subjects on the basis of only brief encounters. Given more time, I would have liked to have undertaken longitudinal rather than just synchronic interviews. Another limitation relates to recruitment of participants. Since subjects were initially recruited mainly through the two local organisations, there is the danger that those more isolated individuals with no contact with such bodies would be excluded, though the snowball effect helps to mitigate this problem. The possibility of self-selection by dynamic individuals must also be acknowledged. Language is another issue, since basic speakers were obviously precluded from interviews. Language ability implies a certain number of years in Japan, meaning that those who agreed to be

interviewed were undoubtedly the more settled migrants. Those recently arrived, unhappy, or with problems (or indeed those who had already divorced, fled, or returned home<sup>37</sup>) would not want a white male researcher asking them questions, something exacerbated by the huge attention the issue of 'international marriage' has received in the mass media in Japan. Such limitations need to be borne in mind during the discussion of the data.

## DATA

Due to the weight of data and space constraints, I shall focus on one interview only, a group interview held at the beginning of the fieldwork period (30.10.01). The interview consisted of four women who had come together to form a language and education training service in October 2000 based at the local international salon.<sup>38</sup> Hikaru (H) was a Chinese who, some sixteen years ago, had left China half-way through her Japanese major to come to Japan to marry her Japanese husband. Mari (M) was another Chinese – actually an ethnic Korean Chinese – whose linguistic abilities saw her work initially as a tour conductor and later as a court translator. Shiho (S) was a more recent arrival, a Korean whose level of Japanese allowed her to find work as a local radio presenter. Finally, Jane (J), the leader of the group, was a Filipina who had arrived in Japan back in 1982 at a time when she was practically the only foreigner in the locality. Between them, these four had fifty years experience living in Japan, were fluent in the language, and were heavily involved in a number of local activities.

Although aware of the danger of 'best quotes', in order to give the women a voice I introduce sections of the narrative that stood out as representative and frame them in a series of stages ordered in roughly chronological fashion. Rather than focus on longer monologues, I present numerous short snippets from each of the women in order to cover as much of the transcript as possible and show how many of the points are reinforced on multiple occasions by different speakers at different times. At some points in the interview it becomes unclear who is speaking: this is represented by (?). Although I would have preferred to keep the data in the original language, the nature of the readership has forced me to translate into English.

As noted earlier, social capital was argued to be a mostly local asset since its value is often reduced or even lost altogether in the transfer from one country to another (Faist 1997: 203). As a consequence, it was suggested that newcomers often actively pursue strategies to secure and enhance their power (social capital) and status (symbolic capital) through participation in, contribution to, and the creation of new social networks and roles/identities. These arguments are strongly supported by the interview data. One thing the data clearly shows is the limited number of roles available to the women initially, both absolutely and in comparison with what they had enjoyed back home:

- It was a case of 'let's start from scratch' – I felt like a baby throwing everything away (S)
- I thought if I could cast off the 'bride' role I could somehow contribute to the local community (J)

Moreover, the narrow range of roles available to them – bride, daughter-in-law, mother, wife, woman, foreigner – were all characterised by low status:

- Whether wife or mother, the way people look down on the performance of such roles is really hard (M)
- Asian brides are really looked down upon by the Japanese (J)
- In the house the bride's status is the lowest of all (M) At home I'm right at the bottom (J)
- The status of Japanese women is really low (M)
- There is discrimination, you know (S)
- Brides are outsiders...nothing but outsiders (J/M)
- In the Philippines and Korea (we) were well respected but (here)...(J)

The notion of low status was aptly illustrated by two lengthy anecdotes (both by Jane but heartily supported by the others) about receiving the smallest portion of food at mealtimes despite doing the cooking and another regarding how any salary from part-time work had to be brought home and given to their mother-in-law. As the last quote indicates, this lack of status was exacerbated by the fact that many of these women had secured a great deal of social and symbolic capital (a good education and career) back 'home'. Because the women had a standard of comparison and clear ideals – perhaps brought into starker relief through marriage to a 'country' man in a rural conservative area – the low status character of the 'new' roles was acutely felt. The women reacted to this loss of social capital not by rejecting or refusing these low-status roles – though they were vocal in their criticism and stereotyping of 'the Japanese' – but by recognising the necessity of adopting long term strategies:

- I guess it's only to be expected that it's impossible to change all at once the way Japanese people have been thinking up to now...it's not something that can be finished in one or two years but something that I'd like to do step by step (M)
- (Japanese people's) way of thinking has become hardened so (changing it) in one fell swoop is impossible isn't it...it will take time (S)
- Getting angry is just stupid isn't it I thought? Conversely, the initiative (should come) from me...even just bit by bit I came to feel like teaching (the Japanese). Bit by bit, through activity (H)
- It's all over (if you start thinking) 'I hate it – I really hate this society – I hate the way things are done here' (J)

This is what Scott (1985) refers to as a 'calculated conformity' – an acceptance of the need to (appear to) accept certain customs and values – hiding a quiet determination. Here the concept of agency – the *capacity* to formulate and enact projects within societal constraints – can be seen. On the one hand, the women recognise that resistance, in the conventional sense of open defiance, insubordination, or confrontation towards dominant power structures that restrain them, may not

be the best way to further their interests. On the other hand, they recognise (as Anna previously) that if they want to sustain and transform their social and cultural universe they can't wait for someone to do something for them. Rather, the initiative needs to come from themselves, from within, a mobilisation of internal social resources. Such positive activity largely consisted of getting involved with, contributing, helping, and educating those around them:

- Thinking positively what I should do – this should come from me...pride or whatever – throw it all away! (S) Everything coming from me, mixing positively with those around me (S) Even if I'm not invited – the initiative should come from me (J)
- If you don't make friends they won't come (J)
- I think I want to teach Japanese people (J)
- Correcting the misconceptions about my own country – it's a really important (kind of) diplomacy – I'm a private diplomat (M)
- I have to do something – I can't just go on living life this (H) Obviously I have to do something (H)
- I want to make a contribution using whatever strength I have...it's a feeling of 'let's live together in a mutually co-operative and fulfilling way' (H)
- I can contribute something (J)
- It's a feeling of wanting to help the local community (H)
- I can do something, can't I? (J)
- The bride at home, you know, silent, watching TV – I can't do it (J) I can't do it – I can't recognise it (?)
- Back in my home country I worked, so (if I don't work) my reason for living is gone (J) I can't live (without work) (M)

We see a rejection of passivity in favour of activity, an activity located away from the domestic site where the low status roles were mostly rooted. The need for mobility, to get out of the house is crucial. Once outside of the home, status-bringing roles, particularly those which most Japanese couldn't do (i.e. were largely excluded from) – such as teacher, cultural ambassador, or interpreter/translator – were favoured:

- It's for the sake of Japan as a country too, so looking at it that way, if there's anything us Chinese can do, we want to do it I think...a bridge between Japan and China (M) I want to become a bridge between China and Japan... for Chinese and for Japanese (M)
- My role is to contribute to society. We can do things that regular (Japanese) people cannot do (H)
- (something) anyone can do – (something) Japanese can do. Not that – I want to do something that Japanese can't do, you know (M)

As well as the education and translation (paid) work available via the group itself, the four individuals acquired status through various other means. For example, Jane taught English part

time at the local college and also (voluntarily) at local schools. She also stressed the importance of communication and teaching about Filipino culture at 'international' events as a way of bridging the gap between stereotype and reality. Foreigners, she said, have a responsibility to act. Shiho worked for a time as a presenter on local radio. Mari worked as a tour conductor and was currently a (trilingual) court translator. Hikaru worked in local government and also as international student co-ordinator at the local college. The possibilities for involvement in such activities appear to have increased dramatically in recent years. Jane, who was the first to arrive back in 1982, worked in an electronic parts factory for fifteen years. It was only in 2000 that conditions were sufficiently fertile for her dream of opening of translation/teaching group to be realised. The (quite explicit) desire for acceptance or approval (i.e. status) in society, as seen from the following quotes, probably always existed but conditions have only recently allowed such goals to be actively pursued and achieved:

- My way of relieving stress is to get out (of the house) I guess. Work is the thing I most enjoy. Once I get out, I'm treated as someone really important – as *sensei* – by people, at the police station, at the court, I'm called *sensei* – but at home I'm the lowest you know, the position of the bride (M)
- I'm so pleased when people rely on me (J)
- If I wasn't around nobody would teach (these kids) (J)
- I want people to have the feeling of accepting others as they are...that's what I wish for more than anything (S)

In mobilising social resources and formulating and enacting projects in society, the potential for both individual and social transformation emerges. Indeed, informants were very articulate about their long-term goals to transform Japanese society – and transform themselves – while keeping a low accommodating profile. Often, the women perceived themselves to be potential agents of change in Japanese society:

- It's micro internationalisation – internationalisation within the home (S)
- Japanese will change...(my family) have changed – probably it's my influence (J)
- A Japanese society which properly understands 'internationalisation' will take a little more time. In order to help Japanese understand foreigners even a little bit, I'm doing what I can in the form of volunteer work. For example, I participate every year in the (local international) salon festival and help in the support of Chinese international students. My purpose is to extinguish the gap between Japanese and foreigners as quickly as possible. I want to build a Japanese society that can accept us foreigners (H E-mail feedback)

Signs of change are occurring, particularly in the crucial distinction between Japanese and foreigner that Hikaru mentions. On the one hand, the women themselves tend to maintain a sharp *nihonjin/gaijin* division, talking in stereotypical terms and frequently saying that they are not Japanese. In fact, such a stance may be less a choice and more a reflection of their exclusion from the

role of ‘Japanese’. As Bourdieu (in Scott 1990: 76) observes, less-powerful groups tend to ‘refuse what is anyway refused’. The desire to ‘do something that Japanese can’t do’ is part of the strategy that responds to being excluded, one that attempts to mobilise and acquire social capital through constructing alternative ‘spaces of control’ in society. Becoming ‘Japanese’ is obviously not the same thing as becoming a member of Japanese society, yet by securing recognition and acceptance as actively participating and contributing members of Japanese society notions of who is ‘Japanese’ are indirectly challenged.

In attempting to understand changes in notions of national identity, it is useful to look at the number of times the women include and exclude themselves from particular categories:

**Figure 4: summary of identity self-categorisation**

	Ethnic identity	Foreigner	Japanese	domestic roles	outsider ( <i>ta'nin</i> )
Include themselves in	10	11	3	12	3
Exclude themselves from	3		15	1	

Figure 4 shows, not unsurprisingly, that the women tend to place themselves *in* the category of ‘foreigner’, Chinese/Korean/Filipino, and bride, mother, wife etc. while placing themselves *out* of the ‘Japanese’ category. The only other ways they categorise themselves are as senior (*sempai*), global citizen, and (possibly – the comment is ambiguous) as non-resident. Indeed, ethnic/foreign identity and Japanese identity (as well as home country and Japan in general) are frequently portrayed as mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the strength of such contrasts or oppositions might appear odd considering the length of stay and level of integration achieved by the women. The strength of the *tan-itsu minzoku* (‘one race’) ideology may be one reason why the Japanese/foreigner dichotomy remains remarkably resilient. There are, however, indications that such dichotomies may be beginning to break down. The first suggestion of this is revealed by the presence (five instances) of the global citizen Discourse – the *kokusaijin* ‘all people are the same’ stereotype – which challenges the Japan(ese)/foreign(er) dichotomy. More importantly, there are many times when an ethnic category is being used but it remains unclear whether the speaker is including herself in that category or not. For example, when Jane says there are many Filipino brides who want to divorce the impression is that she is somehow different from these other Filipinos. This is epitomised in Shiho’s discussion of Korean brides which is pervaded by a strong sense of superiority – *sonna hitotachi* – and difference, as if she is not one of ‘them’. Indeed, there *are* occasions, as Figure 4 shows, when the subjects explicitly exclude themselves from the ethnic identity category and include themselves in the Japanese category. Thus, Jane refers to herself as being ‘half and half’ and acting just like a Japanese on occasion, while Mari and Hikaru talk about not being ‘complete’ Chinese and not being Chinese-like. Even these examples, though, suggest that the Japanese/foreigner dichotomy is still pretty much intact and still an either/or category of exclusion. Nevertheless, the many times when categorisation is ambivalent or unclear suggest that the subjects here may be *in between* categories, at a transitional stage that sees them as yet unable to be

fully Japanese but at the same time very different from newly arrived brides from their own country. As the number of permanent migrants increase the untenability of a strict Japanese/foreigner distinction will no doubt become more obvious. As Miyajima (1996: 12) writes, it is no longer possible to categorise all Japanese as resistant to and refusing of 'outsiders':

Today, in the workplace, in local communities - in every possible place - leaving aside (the question of) structure (the question of) how 'people' are receiving foreigners is becoming more and more important. Criticisms of 'closed Japanese' and the inside/outside (division) are, as ever, not insignificant and, starting with landlords of apartments, the tendency to uniformly categorise foreigners remains strong. However, recently we can see examples of the thinking that Japanese people's global consciousness is developing. For example, many Japanese are participating, as non-paid volunteers, in Japanese language instruction for foreigners, and there are also Japanese language teachers who take their students around estate agents and act as guarantors so that they can sign contracts. Also, there are citizen and student groups who hold free classes for those who were originally Indonesian refugees. It is no longer appropriate to describe Japanese peoples reception and treatment of foreigners in such singular terms.

Neither is it possible to describe so-called 'foreigners' in such generalised terms, as the women here appear very different from the newer arrivals. The foreigner/Japanese distinction may well be breaking down and women like Jane, Shiho, Hikaru, and Mari, may well, through a remarkable drive and energy that has created a presence and status in the local community, be the harbingers of such social change. That they could well be more effective potential agents of change than the 'Japanese' that Miyajima describes above relates to the fact that, as international migrants, they possess standards of comparison – an imaginative capacity – that many Japanese do not have full access to. 'Reality' does not appear inevitable or natural to the women and common-sense – 'the unspoken authority of everyday life' (Lock and Kaufert 1998a: 5) – is more easily subject to disputation. If identity can be seen as a representation (Mato 1996:64), an image (Ferdman 1990: 182), or self-image (Tajfel and J.C.Turner 1986: 16), then a wide repertoire of imaginary ideals allows for more flexibility in the (re)construction of roles and identities. Scott's view of hegemony not as the control of ideas but as the suppression of ideals supports this. "[T]he main function of a system of domination", he (1985: 326) writes, "is to accomplish precisely this: to define what is realistic and what is not realistic and to drive certain goals and aspirations into the realm of the impossible, the realm of ideal dreams, of wishful thinking." The potential of international migrants – particularly international marriage migrants who are making a long-term investment to the country – to be agents of social change relates precisely to their capacity to imagine beyond the immediate conditions of possibility.

## CONCLUSION

The critical debate taking place in Japan concerning the issue of migration reflects the fact that the social conditions are ripe for change. The increasing numbers of international migrants in general and of permanent migrants in particular – most noticeably international marriage migrants – are potential agents of social change. This paper has explored the ways such migrants can exercise human agency which, given the fertile conditions of a Japan which may have reached a turning point or critical mass, suggests major transformations in Japan and Japanese identity. By deconstructing popular notions of ‘resistance’ and enriching the concept of agency through the incorporation of strategic activity, social capital, and social ties/networks, a better understanding of the dialectic between the individual and the social was achieved. Interview data gathered during a period of fieldwork in Northeast Japan supported the argument that migrants seek to restore social capital that was lost in the transfer to a new environment by actively gaining access to, transforming, and creating new social resources and roles or identities. It is hoped that this reformulated conception of agency may act as tool for understanding not only how migrants can be agents of social change but also how minorities in general can act as agents of change in a globalising Japan where ideologies of cultural homogeneity are becoming increasingly untenable.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Asian Studies Association of Australia’s (ASAA) Biennial Conference, Hobart, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2002. I am most grateful to Robyn Spence-Brown, Ross Mouer, Lyn Parker, Penny Kinnear, Tomoko Nakamatsu, and particularly the two anonymous ASAA referees for comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>2</sup> The international ageing data is taken from (<http://jin.jcic.or.jp/stat/stats/01CEN2C.html>) and (<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/c02cont.htm>). The total special birth rate is the average number of children one woman gives birth to in her life. Figures for 2000 are taken from ([http://group.dai-ichi-life.co.jp/dlri/e\\_data/#3](http://group.dai-ichi-life.co.jp/dlri/e_data/#3)) and figures for 202? are taken from REF

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this paper, I am using ‘international marriage migration’ to mean the marriage of a Japanese with a non-Japanese who was not born and brought up in Japan (although either party may at a later date change their nationality). This definition is narrower than the simple ‘international marriage’ (*kokusai kekkon*), a term which also covers the case of a Japanese marrying say, an ethnic, say, Korean who was born and brought up in Japan but has not naturalised. Interestingly, during the annexation of Korea (1910-45) such a union would have been considered as an ‘in’ marriage, as is the case today for a naturalised ethnic Korean who marries a Japanese (Takeshita 2000: 2). For more on the history and modern-day reality of the ‘international marriage’ see (Kamoto 2001; Koyama 1995; Takeshita 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Although Japan does not recognise dual nationality, in the case of a Japanese securing, say, Australian citizenship, as long as the individual does not inform the Japanese government there is no need to turn in their Japanese passport.

<sup>5</sup> This is evidenced by Halfacree’s (1993: 343) introduction of a biographical turn as a way of ‘gaining appreciation of the intentions implicated in the migration decision’, a move which, as he reluctantly acknowledges, introduces so much complexity as to make his task impossible.

<sup>6</sup> As Willis and Yeoh (2000) point out, there is a growing recognition of the importance of the ‘non-work’ sphere in the experience of skilled migrants, particularly the role of *household* members. The Special Issue on Migrations and Family Relations in the Asia Pacific Region (*Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 11:1 (2002)) focused on this issue.

<sup>7</sup> The notion of transnational networks maintaining and consolidating links with ‘home’ is currently

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popular (e.g. Kastoryano 2000; Schiller, ?, and ? 1993) in migration research. Indeed, Faist (2000: 11) claims that migration in transnational social spaces denotes a third generation of migration scholarship in the making. In the International Relations literature too, ‘international relations’ (relations between governments or their agencies) is commonly contrasted with ‘transnational relations’ (relations deployed across nation-state borders among two or more social subjects when at least one subject is not an agent of a government) (Mato 1996: 70). While seeing migrants as members of transnational communities may indeed represent “a fundamental shift away from the idea of migration as a one-off even leading to assimilation” (Castles 2000a: 25), one that, moreover, ensures migration is not reduced to an economic logic (Faist 2000: 211) it may also, ironically, perpetuate the tendency to prioritise national models over other collective cultures.

<sup>8</sup> Talking specifically about foreign wives of Japanese men, Piper (2001: 3), notes that in the public arena the only agency acknowledged to them is typically as self-interested exploiters’ of the system (i.e. bogus wives): the possibility of contributing to the ‘host’ society is apparently not even considered.

<sup>9</sup> *Dekasegi* 帰国労働, (seasonal labour migration) or *tenkin* (transfer) is more commonly used to describe intra-national movement, words that carry clear economic and patriarchal overtones.

<sup>10</sup> Moren-Alegret (2002b:1) points out that the term newcomer is also used more generally to refer to young people ‘new’ to society.

<sup>11</sup> The revised Immigration Control Law of June 1990 allowed South Americans of Japanese descent (up to third generation) and their spouses and families to reside in Japan for three (now four) years without job restrictions (Sellek 1997: 185). Unfortunately, there is the suspicion that the visa concession, stemming from the demand for cheap labour, is rooted in the belief that Japanese blood descendants would not be so different from other Japanese, and would assimilate and learn the language relatively quickly. “[T]he decision of the Japanese government to accept nearly 200,000 *Nikkeijin*”, argues Sellek (1997: 202), “while excluding all other migrant workers, has reinforced assumptions of racial homogeneity.” However, none of the Japanese in Tsuda’s (1998: 357) extensive survey considered the *Nikkeijin* ethnically Japanese and he raises doubts as to how long the tolerance and veneer of politeness currently shown towards “the country’s newest ethnic minority” can be sustained. In fact, despite being included in the ‘newcomer’ category with all its connotations of permanence and holding ‘long-term’ visa status, recent research has suggested that most do not hope to settle down in Japan with all their family members and might be more accurately described as ‘trans’ or circular migrants who shuttle back and forth between Japan and Brazil (Mori 2000; Takamachi 1999). This adds weight to later claims that international marriage migration is the best example of settlement.

<sup>12</sup> The (in principle non-renewable) three to twelve-month ‘entertainers’ visa’ was introduced at the beginning of the eighties (Piper 2000: 210) partly in response to growing protests in Asia and domestically over Japanese sex tours to Southeast Asia (Matsui 1987; Tyner 1996: 84). Thus, instead of having to go abroad for such services, Japanese men could now get them at home. According to Piper (1997: 322), between 1979 and 1985 women constituted about 90% of the total number of foreign workers, and it was not until 1988 that the gender balance was reversed. It is important to note, though, following Suzuki (2000: 441), that the ‘entertainer’ visa is granted not only to the women under discussion but also to other professional performers such as artists and athletes.

<sup>13</sup> In 1990 the Japanese government decided to expand the trainee system it had established in 1982 and accept more Asian trainees, resulting in a three-fold increase between 1987 (17,081) and 1997 (49,594) (Shipper 2002: 57). The increased numbers coming through (quasi)governmental rather than business routes is also noteworthy. The Japan International Training Cooperation Organisation (JITCO), which supervises both the general trainee scheme and the more recent (1993) Technical Internship Training Programme (where trainees can be promoted to technical interns with the same legal rights as their Japanese colleagues (OECD 2001: 212)), has reportedly (Shipper 2002: 57) set a goal of bringing in 100,000 trainees from foreign countries annually.

<sup>14</sup> All Ministry of Justice data is from [www.moj.go.jp](http://www.moj.go.jp), accessed October 19<sup>th</sup> 2002. Since direct links to the relevant pages appear not be possible, the only way to access the data is through the search function available on the first screen.

<sup>15</sup> October 1<sup>st</sup> 2001, Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts, and Telecommunications (<http://www.unescap.org/stat/statdata/japan.pdf>). It is estimated that by 2005, the declining birthrate will result in negative population growth ([www.unesco.org/most/apmrjap2.htm](http://www.unesco.org/most/apmrjap2.htm)). Looking further forward, the UN Population Fund estimates that Japan’s population will drop to 121 million by 2025 and to 105 million by 2050 (Nikkei Weekly 15.1.01)

<sup>16</sup> 1999 (OECD 2002: 198)

<sup>17</sup> 1999 (OECD 2002: 201). The figure includes illegal workers but excludes permanent residents.

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<sup>18</sup> 1999 (OECD 2002: 198)

<sup>19</sup> January to December 2000 (Nyuukan-Kyokai 2001: 72)

<sup>20</sup> In a study of undocumented Filipinos in Japan, Ballecas (1993: 45) found that most could not give a definite answer regarding their intended length of residence, illustrating how the line between ‘permanent’ and ‘non-permanent’ may be especially blurred in the case of illegal migrants.

<sup>21</sup> A good example of the difference between formal citizenship and substantive citizenship (i.e. acceptance in the wider society) are those of Korean ancestry who, despite naturalising, find their ancestry can limit school admissions, employment, and club memberships (Weiner 1995: 68). See also (Fukuoka 2000).

<sup>22</sup> (Nyuukan-Kyokai 2001: 74).

<sup>23</sup> One reason for the lack of attention resistance has tended to receive in the migration literature may be that poststructural accounts “have had little impact on the theorisation of global migration” (Phizacklea 1998: 27)

<sup>24</sup> The popularity of the theme of resistance is illustrated by the title of the JSAA 2003 Biennial Conference (Queensland University of Technology, July 2-4): ‘Innovation and Resistance’.

<sup>25</sup> Compare also Marx’s notion of ‘political emancipation’ which is ‘emancipation only within the framework of the prevailing social order’ as opposed to ‘human emancipation’ or genuine liberation/transformation (Kishima 1991: 117).

<sup>26</sup> Norton (1997: 411) offers one of the most succinct descriptions of this position.

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, the recent trend of defining resistance as those acts which show conscious intention (a move which sees resistance become practically synonymous with ‘agency’) run counter to Gramsci’s original construction in which resistance was actually *opposed* to agency, a passive and unconscious resistance (subaltern discontent) only becoming revolutionary agency (i.e. becoming the stuff of transformative change) due to the presence of ‘organic intellectuals’ (Kaplan and Kelly 1994).

<sup>28</sup> The distinction between unconscious reproduction and conscious creation of identities is framed by Mato in terms of the difference between ‘constructionist’ and ‘inventionist’ approaches. “Symbolic ‘construction’ may be largely unconscious and is an ongoing activity in all human societies”, he (Mato 1996: 65) writes quoting Linnekin, “[i]nvention’ emphasizes creativity and implies a degree of conscious reflection.”

<sup>29</sup> As we shall see below in the discussion on the data, participants frequently stressed that they could/would never be Japanese, despite the fact that they, at many times in the course of their day, lived, thought, acted, and talked like ‘Japanese’. The Discourse on identity forced them to paint a black or white (either/or) picture which clearly contradicted reality.

<sup>30</sup> Activity is most fully elaborated in activity theory, the overall theoretical framework which informs sociocultural research (Lantolf 2000: 1). Initiated by the founders of the cultural-historical school of Russian psychology (Vygotsky, Leont’ev, and Luria) in the 1920s and 1930s (Engstrom and Miettinen 1999: 1), it has its philosophical roots in Marx’s notions of labour as a fundamental human activity that changes nature.

<sup>31</sup> Intentional action is clearly not part of Foucault’s notion of power – or correspondingly of his vision of resistance. For Foucault (1972: 122; 1977: 137/38), qualities such as creativity, desire, will, interest, affection, and impulse are all qualities characteristic not of a subject but qualities Discursively produced within a social order. By incorporating such qualities into a definition of agency some of the problems associated with notions of resistance (and connected notions of agency) may be overcome and the individual as agent (rather than ‘vehicle’) of productive power re-emerge.

<sup>32</sup> The data for this section is drawn from a number of sources, particularly the *Yamagata Kenmin Techou* (Yamagata Citizen’s Handbook) (Toukei Kyokai 2002: 22-25), and various web pages including [www.prefecture.yamagata.jp](http://www.prefecture.yamagata.jp), [http://dir.yahoo.co.jp/regional/japanese\\_regions/tohoku/yamagata](http://dir.yahoo.co.jp/regional/japanese_regions/tohoku/yamagata), and [www.pref.yamagata.jp/kt/toutopix/kttk0000.html](http://www.pref.yamagata.jp/kt/toutopix/kttk0000.html). All data is from the 1995 census unless otherwise stated. Data on foreign residents was obtained through the *kokusai shitsu* (international office) which is part of the *bunka shinko ka* (Section for the Promotion of Culture) in the prefectural office ([bunka@mxg.mesh.ne.jp](mailto:bunka@mxg.mesh.ne.jp)).

<sup>33</sup> Because the subjects did not form a ‘community’ as such, this is not fieldwork in the traditional anthropological sense of living with and participating in the ways of a cultural group for a period of time, but simply spending time outside the ‘classroom’ mixing with and getting to know certain people who share particular traits.

<sup>34</sup> Although ethnicity may well influence actions or beliefs, it is also important to be sensitive to the danger of prioritising this social variable. The result may be that data analysis becomes a search for national difference, thereby disguising the commonalities migrant women may have with, say, other

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(Japanese) women who have also come to marry from outside Yamagata.

<sup>35</sup> Although giving interviewees the opportunity to reflect on and respond to what was said undoubtedly contributes to the quality of the research both ethically and in terms of validity, participants had the opportunity to decline my offer of the transcript if they so wished. None did. In fact, one even asked for a copy of the tape. That only three responded may reflect insufficient Japanese literacy but more likely reflects lack of time and/or the fact that they were quite happy just to have the transcript to keep.

<sup>36</sup> Much of the leading English qualitative software – such as QSR's N6 – can't handle Japanese text and there does not seem to be any sophisticated Japanese language software available. However, if a Japanese document is imported to NVivo and the font then switched to MS-gothic, Japanese text can be read and manipulated. I am most grateful to Charlie Morgan for supplying me with this information.

<sup>37</sup> In order to get an idea whether these longer term 'success stories' are exceptions or not, some idea of the number of spouses who divorce, disappear, or return home is needed. Divorce is the easiest to quantify of these three categories. Although the divorce rate for intermarriage is widely considered to be higher, most serious studies have found it to be slightly but not significantly so. For example, in the Japanese context, Piper (1999), drawing on Fujita, notes that the overall divorce rate is 'almost the same in both types of marriages' citing 1995 figures of 25% and 29%, while Komai (2001: 72) notes that it is "not all that different from that of Japanese couples", citing 1997 figures of 28.6% against 32.4%. It is important to note though, as conversations with NGO officials revealed, that divorce rates among Chinese and Korean women (the two largest groups in Yamagata) were estimated to be significantly higher, approaching one in two. According to Kieko Nishigami (personal communication), deputy-head of the NGO IVY, this may be partly related to the rising phenomena of such women coming to Japan to marry in order to pay off large debts back home.

<sup>38</sup> A number of newspaper articles have appeared about the group since, containing fascinating insights as to the reasons (as given by the members' themselves) for the group's establishment. These reasons included 'making use of our skills for the sake of the locality', 'making ourselves useful as a window to foreign countries', 'making a contribution to the locality', and 'thinking what we can do as foreign women who have come here to settle'. The collaborative nature of the group and their long-term strategy to transform (local) society show the value of replacing resistance with wider notion of activity. Unfortunately, the required ethical anonymity means I cannot give references to these articles. Nevertheless, it is important to note that migrants are active in forming groups, clubs, and support networks (Piper 2001).

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*"social organisations, which are often termed associations, are the necessary bridge that may allow social movement to shift from 'short wave' mobilisations to 'medium wave' popular movements and, later, to 'long wave' historical movements"*<sup>2</sup>

*[but what of individual resistance?]*

*Points out that collective actions, social movements, or organisations may have a key involvement in the dynamic processes of State construction* <sup>3</sup>

*Resistance, in the sense of resisting in an organised way the system's threat is "better understood by bearing space and class in mind". Quotes Steve Pile: "resistance is as much defined through the struggle to define liberation, space, and subjectivity as through the elite's attempts to defeat, prevent, and oppress those who threaten their authority" <sup>4</sup> [ie not just defined through domination a la Foucault but in its own right as a search for subjectivity! Does point out though that 'subjectivities of resistance cannot be divorced from the institutions of subjectification' such as immigration policies <sup>4</sup>], edited by Rocard Moren-Alegret. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 1-9.*

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