Globalization and resulting increased mobility have been increasingly interconnecting different populations and cultures. This in return has resulted in increased interaction among people from diverse cultures. One of the important outcomes of this process has been the increase in the establishment of transnational ties and formation of transnational families.

The case of Japan is no exception to the trend outlined above. The number of transnational marriages in Japan has increased significantly in past decades. When we look at the gender breakdown of foreign spouses in Japan, most of them are Asian females. Japanese men’s foreign spouse choices are strongly marked by the rate of Chinese, Koreans and Filipinas who account for the majority of these marriages. Japanese females’ foreign spouse choices on the other hand show diversity. Within this diversity, the rate of Muslim foreigners has increased significantly in the past two decades. Japanese women’s marriages with Muslim men from Pakistan and Iran in particular has been attracting more attention with emphasis on conversion of these women to Islam and its impact on these families’ everyday family lives.

When we look at the existing literature on transnational marriages in Japan it has few shortcomings. First of all, most of the research remains focused on above outlined foreign spouse groups which undermines the diversity of foreign spouses. Although 30 per cent of immigrants in Japan are highly skilled, their transnational marriages remain underrepresented as most of the research is focused on spouses from middle or lower social classes. The number of spouses from lower social classes might be higher as marriage migration provides a loophole for low skilled workers to enter Japanese labor market (Brody, 2000). When we look at the largest categories of foreign spouses in the literature, a huge number of them have previously worked in Japan, legally or illegally and many have over stayed their visas at the time of marriage.

The second shortcoming of the literature is its foundation on women’s narratives as Japanese wives of foreign men or foreign wives of Japanese men. This is both the strength and the weakness of previous research. It is the strength as it provides detailed accounts by focusing on a specific unit. However it remains weak in explaining gender relations in intercultural communication. In simple terms, it leaves the reader with only one side of the story. I argue that research on marriage requires the incorporation of both genders in order to go beyond the monologue of one gender.

Thirdly, although studies on marriages with Muslim men have been attracting more attention, the relation between social class and religiosity is often overlooked. An important reason underlying this limitation is the difficulty for researchers to access these groups. Researchers who are outsiders to groups they study tend to search for Muslim interviewees through mosques and religious organizations. This inevitably produces data on religious people only. This handicap is important to overcome as research has shown that religiosity is closely linked to social class (Çarkoğlu & Toprak, 2006; Baltas & Steptoe, 2000).

This research contributes to the literature on transnational marriages in Japan by addressing the shortcomings outlined above. The research presents data on intercultural communication of Turkish – Japanese couples with reference to gender, culture and the Turkish spouses’ religiosity. The focus of the research is on marriages with middle and upper middle class Turkish spouses. I argue that social class plays an important role in Japanese transnational marriages but it has often been overlooked. The research portrays this through de-emphasis of some topics that were significant in previous research, such as visas of foreign spouses, and through emphasis on topics that had not been previously explored, such as living space arrangements.

The ethnographic data for this research was collected from September 2009 to October 2013 through semi-structured interviews with Turkish – Japanese couples and participant observation at activities organized by diverse Turkish immigrant groups in Japan. Based on research findings, I suggest that religious or cultural differences are not significant in couples’ initial decision to get married. Furthermore, similarities in the way gender relations are defined in Turkish and Japanese societies allow couples to have a smooth transition to married life. Couples deal with religious and cultural problems as they arise during their marriage. Most of these are companion couples who found their marriages on friendship and communication. The most problematic areas of these marriages are in line with most transnational marriages, such as relations with in-laws and bicultural childrearing. Religion, on the other hand, does not cause major problems in these marriages or families’ everyday lives. These transnational families have an incorporative approach to embracing all religions rituals rather than choosing one and following strict rules. This is highly influenced by these spouses’ social classes as well as how religiosity is constructed in Turkey. Turkey as a laic state does not require foreign spouses to convert to Islam for marriage.

**References**

