

A Narrative Inquiry into Educational Decision-Making in Thai-Japanese Families in Thailand

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Abstract

In the past decades, marriage migrants in Asia, including Thai-Japanese couples, have increased. Previous literature predominantly focused on issues related to adaptation and integration for *foreign wives* into the host society underlining the hypergamous (marrying a spouse of a higher status) nature of their marriage, which renders the majority of husbands and non-hypergamous marriages understudied. Therefore, the current study focuses on a population that includes husbands and wives, Japanese migrants, and Thai spouses. This study is exploratory and employed a qualitative approach with snowball sampling, which resulted in the inclusion of five Thai nationals and three of their Japanese spouses raising children in Thailand as participants. The study aims to examine their educational decision-making, including the language used in each family and school choice, since the parenting process is a succession of adjustments in response to the conditions of society, where values are explicitly manifested. Data were collected through face-to-face or online interviews, and content analysis was used to clarify themes. Analysis revealed factors that relate educational decisions to preconditions, such as the place of the first encounter, socioeconomic status, and location of their home. Another prominent issue is the strong belief in the English language. All participants claim that their decisions were made unanimously, while their characteristics, high levels of education and overseas experience, the preference of Japanese spouses to live in Thailand, and their lack of knowledge about educational options in Thai society contribute to the rational recount of their decision-making process.

Keywords: intermarriage, Thai-Japanese couples, cultural adaptation, Japanese culture

1. Introduction

Present-day life is characterized by increased mobility, as an increasing number of migrate and adapt to new countries for educational, professional, political, or other reasons. Consequently, marriage between people of different nationalities is an increasing social phenomenon, including Thai-Japanese relationships. Thailand and Japan have long historical relations and celebrated the 130th anniversary of their diplomatic relations in 2017. The number of Japanese corporations in Thailand marked a record high of 5,856 in 2020 (Japan External Trade Organization, 2021), and the number of Japanese nationals reached 81,187, with 58,783 (72.4%) in Bangkok in 2020. These statistics make Thailand one of the few countries where Japanese nationals increased amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2021).

As a result, much intermarriage occurred between the Thai and Japanese. A demographic survey in 2019 (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2022) reported 1,283 Thai-Japanese marriages: 79.7% of them registered in Japan (1,023 cases), where the overwhelming majority involved Thai wives and Japanese husbands (986 cases). For marriages registered overseas (260 cases), the Thai wife-Japanese husband pattern was also more common but to a lesser extent (173 cases). Table 1 presents that the number of children by Thai and Japanese couples in 2019 was 667. Among them, 286 (42.2%) lived overseas, 7,495 people since 1995. Given that the population of Japanese people in Thailand reached 81,187 (approximately 14,500 are aged less 20 years), the number of children of Thai-Japanese couples highlighted the importance of investigating the parenting of these couples living in

Thailand, which has been overlooked or rarely documented until recently. However, finally, the education of these children, especially from the Japanese parent perspective, is attracting scholarly attention (Fujita-Round, 2021, Nishijima et al., 2021)

The parenting process consists of making a series of adjustments and decisions in response to society's political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. The values of each family are explicitly manifest. A study on the marriage of two individuals from different nationalities could reveal their process of striking an optimal balance between their values and beliefs through continuous dialogue.

Against this background, this study examines the narratives of Thai-Japanese intermarried couples about socially negotiated adjustments and decisions made in the area of education. Specifically, this study focuses on 1) Thai-Japanese couples raising children in Thailand, 2) the language used in each family, 3) their future expectations for their children, and 4) their integration into the Thai and Japanese cultures at home. Through this investigation, the study presents and discusses the educational views of each family to shed light on the process of reaching an agreement on various aspects of the lives of Thai-Japanese families in Thailand.

1.1 Context of the Study

1.1.1 Intermarriage of Thai and Japanese and Their Children

Research on intermarriages is in large part gender-based and centers on migrant wives or mothers (Kuramoto, 2017). Moreover, studies on marriage migrants in Asia tend to depict foreign wives or mothers as meek and feeble and needing the support of non-governmental organizations, local governments, or the community (Ishii, 2016; Kawahara & Okado, 2009; Piper & Roces, 2004; Satake & Kim, 2017; Takeda, 2011). When this field refers to spouses belonging to the host country, it typically refers to the context of power politics, which proposes close ties to their society.

Although any marriage can be considered "intermarriage" because each partner originates from different social groups and family cultures, cross-national marriages present specific challenges. Regardless of visible differences in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, education, or socioeconomic background, cross-national couples face a unique challenge in that at least one spouse was socialized in a different country and may feel isolated or marginalized as a result (Cirio, 2008). Rodriguez-Garcia (2015) argued that causality varies in the relationships between intermarriage and greater social, cultural, economic, and political integration. For instance, when considering personal and social networks, various notions of integration and negotiation styles and adjustment are presented according to countries, regions, and even cities in the same country or province due to geographical, historical, demographic, economic, political, and cultural characteristics. Therefore, reviewing the context-specific literature is critical, in this case, Thai-Japanese intermarriage, although relatively little literature is available.

Niwa and Nakagawa (2015) found that one of the unique features of young Japanese living in Bangkok was their personal preference for local employment despite the lower standard of living in Thailand. This group of Japanese, many of whom were already married to Thai partners, displayed a strong tendency to be satisfied with life in Thailand. Their characteristics correlated to those found in the research on Japanese migration overseas (Fujita, 2008; Matsutani, 2014; Saito, 2017; Sato, 1993; Yamashita, 1999). Such research also examined Japanese migration for better mental well-being in the new location, which is a phenomenon known as *lifestyle migration*. Concerning international marriage, Ni Nengah (2014) argued that an increase in lifestyle migration lagged behind the current trend of non-hypergamous intermarriage between Japanese women and Balinese men in Bali, Indonesia. This trend is consistent with that observed by Sakurai (2002), in that modern family ideology encourages free individuals to marry by voluntary decision and mutual agreement. Thus, love marriages result from personal choice and depend on the social conditions of matching.

Intermarriage can be regarded as a pattern of a consequence of the individual preference for life overseas. Although the scholars above are relatively prominent in their field, most of them focus on the motivation of migration or life abroad because of personal choice. In contrast, this study focuses on the process of the decision-making of the family regarding educational choices for children during intermarriage and child rearing.

Regarding Japanese marriage migrants, especially to Thailand, Watanabe and Kubo (2018) point out that Japanese marriage migrants in Thailand frequently and consciously embrace behaviors that fit within the culture of the families of their spouses through marriage and parenting experience. In addition, although they understand language education is key to developing the cultural tie between their children and themselves, they face challenges in meeting expectations as providers of Japanese language education due to long working hours. This scenario partially outsources Japanese language education to outside institutions, including Japanese schools. They also find that the common belief that the English language offers more investment value than the Japanese or

Thai language leads to the development of multilingual, instead of bilingual, educational settings. Such positioning of the English language above the Japanese and Thai languages leads to the emergence of an educational framework in which the Japanese and Thai cultures are rarely opposed. As a result, rearing children in more global environments at “international schools where it is easy to gain access to English education” (Watanabe & Kubo, 2018, p. 22) is a more favored albeit expensive strategy. Although these findings present refreshing insights into Thai-Japanese families, the narratives analyzed were solely limited to Japanese spouses leaving *the other* story understudied. Examining the narratives of Thai nationals married to Japanese nationals enables the achievement of a holistic understanding of the educational view of such families.

Table 1. Change in the number of children with Japanese-Thai parents by place of registration and cumulative total (1995-2019)

| | No. registered in Japan | No. registered at overseas offices | Yearly total | Cumulative total |
|-------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1995 | 873 | 260 | 1,133 | 1,133 |
| 1996 | 861 | 290 | 1,151 | 2,284 |
| 1997 | 911 | 258 | 1,169 | 3,453 |
| 1998 | 910 | 273 | 1,183 | 4,636 |
| 1999 | 885 | 229 | 1,114 | 5,750 |
| 2000 | 813 | 275 | 1,088 | 6,838 |
| 2001 | 807 | 259 | 1,066 | 7,904 |
| 2002 | 752 | 288 | 1,040 | 8,944 |
| 2003 | 710 | 260 | 970 | 9,914 |
| 2004 | 656 | 319 | 975 | 10,889 |
| 2005 | 598 | 302 | 900 | 11,789 |
| 2006 | 587 | 330 | 917 | 12,706 |
| 2007 | 612 | 364 | 976 | 13,682 |
| 2008 | 537 | 369 | 906 | 14,588 |
| 2009 | 509 | 364 | 873 | 15,461 |
| 2010 | 478 | 344 | 822 | 16,283 |
| 2011 | 477 | 308 | 785 | 17,068 |
| 2012 | 405 | 336 | 741 | 17,809 |
| 2013 | 425 | 310 | 735 | 18,544 |
| 2014 | 432 | 320 | 752 | 19,296 |
| 2015 | 462 | 344 | 806 | 20,102 |
| 2016 | 394 | 284 | 678 | 20,780 |
| 2017 | 387 | 282 | 669 | 21,449 |
| 2018 | 385 | 241 | 626 | 22,075 |
| 2019 | 391 | 286 | 677 | 22,752 |
| Total | 15,257 | 7,495 | 22,752 | |

Note. Compiled by the author based on the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, “Vital Statistics” (1995-2019)

1.1.2 Schooling Choices of Thai-Japanese Families

The Constitution guarantees 15 years of free basic education in Thailand, covering pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. The majority of state schools operate under the Office of the Basic Education Commission, local governments, or universities, whereas private schools, including international and Japanese schools, operate under the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC) oversight. As of December 2020, Thailand has 37,175 schools. Specifically, 31,286 schools are under the Office of the Basic Education Commission; local governments operate 1,726; 57 are university demonstration schools; 414 are Phrapariyatidhamma (Buddhist) schools, and 3,975 are private schools with 220 international schools and two Japanese schools under OPEC (2020).

However, Thai-Japanese families select from four schooling options and perceive each option differently.

- 1) Demonstration schools: Although demonstration schools are classified as state schools, they receive special treatment compared to other schools (Note 1). Universities operate most demonstration schools with a faculty

of education for teacher-training programs and research in the education field. Thus, they can develop a unique curriculum and flexible minds, that is, by trying out new and experimental teaching methods among teachers. Demonstration schools are highly respected for their high-quality education and are popular among intermarried couples. However, acceptance to these schools can be extremely competitive.

- 2) Private schools: These schools are established by for-profit private entities or charitable organizations, yet they remain under the Ministry of Education through OPEC. However, the management of private schools is relatively autonomous, where most private schools open reputable English programs, international programs, or other language courses. Although the education fee can be high, private schools are relatively popular among affluent parents, including intermarried families.
- 3) International schools: These schools are also under the oversight of OPEC. Although their curricula require approval from the Ministry of Education, authority is exercised moderately, and schools enjoy high levels of autonomy in their education. One of the leading attractions is that English is used as the medium of instruction, which ensures a good process of English acquisition. Although known for their high education fees, many children of foreign ex-pats and wealthy Thai families enroll in these schools. As of December 2020, the number of international schools across Thailand is 220, where 79 are located in Bangkok.
- 4) Japanese schools: Japanese schools are also private schools under the Thai educational system and set under OPEC along with other international schools and private schools. However, the curricula of Japanese schools are granted by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology as equivalent to that of schools in Japan. Thailand is home to two Japanese schools. The Thai-Japanese Association School in Bangkok was established under the ownership of the Thai-Japanese Association to provide compulsory education for Japanese children whose parents are working in Thailand. The school was established in 1926, ceased operation after World War II, and reopened as an affiliated institution within the Japanese embassy in 1956. The Thai government granted a license to the Thai-Japanese Association School on July 24, 1974, established as a special international school under the Private Education Act and under the supervision of the Private Education Commission, Ministry of Education. The school provides education from primary to junior high school (Note 2). In 2022, 2,016 students attended the school, with 220 teachers and staff (Taniguchi, 2022, p. 1). Another Japanese school is in an industrial city, Si Racha, Chonburi province, 120 km southeast of Bangkok. This Japanese Association School opened in 2009, where 375 students are currently enrolled, with 54 teachers and staff (Sakai, 2022, p. 1). Japanese schools are especially popular among Thai-Japanese couples who intend to emphasize their ties with Japan. However, its high tuition, geographical issues, and potential long commuting hours discourage many families from sending their children to Japanese schools (Watanabe & Kubo, 2018).

Given the context of their lives, focusing on the families in Bangkok is only reasonable, where 72.4% of the Japanese population resides and where all four schooling options are widely available, as the prime area of the participants.

2. Materials and Methods

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Before the following process, the interview was approved by the ethics committee of the author's institution.

Using snowball sampling, the study identified five participants using the following inclusion criteria: (1) Thai nationals married to a Japanese person and living in the Bangkok metropolitan area, and (2) a parent living in Thailand at the time of the survey. The Japanese spouses were also asked to join the interview to supplement the narratives of the Thai spouses, and three out of the five agreed.

Formal interviews in-person and online (using Zoom) were conducted with the five participants (male: 2; female: 3) in September and October 2020. The language used in the interview was Thai for the Thai participants and Japanese for the Japanese participants. To ensure anonymity, they were identified as A, B, C, D, and E. The length of the interviews varied, with each lasting between about 1 and 2 h.

Before the interviews, the participants were informed about the study's objective and their rights. The major questions asked during the interviews include the following:

- 1) Basic information of key informant and their spouse: Hometown, educational background, occupation, history with the spouse, and current family;
- 2) Language education: Language beliefs, the ratio of language(s) used with the child in the family, and future plans;

- 3) School choice: Reason for choosing the current school, education fee, degree of satisfaction, and plans; and
- 4) Perspectives about Thailand and Japan: How they present the international relationship between Thailand and Japan and their relationship with parents in Thailand and Japan.

The questions were designed to elicit their chronological histories since childhood, including their marriages and child-rearing experiences. Although the main focus was on language education and school choice, which manifest their educational belief (Watanabe & Kubo, 2018), the participants were encouraged to speak freely about their understanding of the content of their narratives within their lives. Their narratives were analyzed by categorizing the content into themes, after which relationships among the themes were discussed along with the overall trends that emerged from the content.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Background of the Participants and Their Families

In general, one of the characteristics of snowball sampling is that the interpersonal relations of informants who recommend or introduce others are reflected in the participant sampling. The attributes of the participants may have reflected those of the authors, because many of them were middle class and highly educated, which were noted during the analysis of the collected narratives.

Table 2 presents that the Thai participants were three women (Participants A, B, and E) and two men (Participants C and D) aged 38-58 years. Two participants completed bachelor's degrees (Participants A and C); one received a diploma in vocational education (Participant B), and two completed doctoral degrees (Participants D and E). The level of education is particularly high given that the enrollment rate for tertiary education within this age group (1990-2000) varies from 15.9% to 34.9% (World Bank n.d.). As for occupation, there are two business owners in the jewelry (Participant A) and tourism/renting sectors (Participant C), one (Participant B) housewife, one manager at a Japanese company with a branch in Bangkok (Participant D), and one was an academic at a university in Bangkok (Participant E).

Table 2. Participants' basic information

| Participant | Thai participants | | | Japanese spouse | | | Interviewed |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|---------------------------|-------------|
| | Gender, age | Education | Occupation | Gender, age | Education | Occupation | |
| A | Female, 38 | BA | Business owner (jewelry) | Male, 50 | BA | Business owner (jewelry) | ✓ |
| B | Female, 47 | Vocational diploma | Housewife | Male, 68 | BA | Consultant for JP company | ✓ |
| C | Male, 45 | BA | Business owner (tourism and renting) | Female, 45 | BA | Housewife | |
| D | Male, 42 | Ph.D. | Manager at JP company | Female, 39 | BA | Housewife | |
| E | Female, 58 | Ph.D. | University professor | Male, 57 | Ph.D. | University professor | ✓ |

The Japanese spouses of the participants comprised three males (Participants A, B, and E) and two females (Participants C and D) aged 39-68 years. Four of them achieved bachelor's degrees, and one completed a doctoral degree (Participant E). This level of education is also extremely high compared with the enrollment rate for tertiary education in this age group (36.3% and 49.1% in 1990 and 2000, respectively; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science, and Technology [Japan], 2020). In terms of occupation, one is a business owner, one is a business consultant, one is a university professor, and two are homemakers, which may not necessarily reflect the female labor participation rate of either country (59.2% Thai, 53.2% Japanese in 2020; World Bank, n.d.). Table 3 indicates other background information of participants that is relevant to the following discussion points. Participant.

Table 3. Hometown, number of children, and place of meeting spouse

| Participant | Hometown | No. of children | Children's gender, age | Place of meeting spouse |
|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| A | Nakorn Si Thammarat | 1 | Girl, 12 | Bangkok, Thailand |
| B | Bangkok | 1 | Boy, 10 | Bangkok, Thailand |
| C | United States/Bangkok | 3 | Boy, 13 / Boy, 9 / Girl, 7 | Los Angeles, United States |
| D | Bangkok | 2 | Girl, 9 / Boy, 4 | Tokyo, Japan |
| E | Udornthani | 3 | Girl, 20 / Girl, 18 / Boy, 16 | Sydney, Australia |

3.2 Matching Process and Decision-Making in the Family

The five Thai participants emphasized that they married people from different countries and cultures due to love, self-value, and belief, rather than hypergamy. In order to do so, the Thai wives also stressed that it was their first marriage. As Sakurai (2002) pointed out, the modern family ideology encourages free individuals to marry by voluntary decision and mutual agreement. Thus, love marriages result from personal choice and are dependent on the social conditions of matching. The gender roles practiced at home were relatively conventional regardless of employment status. That is, wives are responsible for cooking and cleaning, whereas husbands are in charge of fixing and providing financial and emotional support.

In contrast to Saisanguan (2013)'s findings, the minority of Thai intermarried women were single, well educated, met their spouse at work or in close relations, and earned their income. The current study's participants had good educations and careers. They emphasized that their marriages were based on love, as if dismissing the stigma of the claim of Kraikrueng (2013) about the marriage of Thai women. The author conducted a study on three Thai women and demonstrated unsuccessful relationships with Thai men and avoidance of hardship as factors influencing their decision to marry foreign nationals. In the present study, however, all Thai participants repeatedly emphasized that their marriages were based on love.

I met my husband while studying for my Ph.D. in Sydney, Australia. I love him so much and wanted to marry him only ... so we kept in contact even after I graduated and went back to Thailand. He had to work in Japan as his scholarship contract required ... we went on a long-distance relationship but finally got married. (Participant E)

This view is consistent with Thinkham's (2009) findings on spouse selection among Thai women, which demonstrated that they make the majority of decisions independently with an occasional reliance on seniors or relatives in participatory decision-making. The current study observed that Thai spouses are relatively defensive and use the discourse on love-based marriage to claim the legitimacy of their marriage.

That their marriages were based on love was also frequently mentioned in the narratives of the Japanese husbands. Although others counteract the past media coverage of Japanese husbands in intermarriages by describing their wives as more autonomous (Nakamatsu, 2003), mainstream scholars and media continue to depict the foreign wives of Japanese husbands as *victims*, which demonizes these husbands in the process. The repeated statements of love-based marriage and the preference to live overseas, especially in Thailand, function as the justification for their marriage. In addition, it echoes the discourse of lifestyle migration, which makes their narratives more convincing.

Another common feature of all participants is a mutual decision-making process in education. Participatory decision-making can be interpreted as a representation of love-based marriage, where mutual respect is at play due to their strong incentive to regard marriage life as mutual, at least in appearance, such that they can claim that their marriage is supported by genuine love and respect.

However, this mutual decision does not necessarily indicate that both spouses provide an equal share of opinion and decide based on merits. In fact, one of the Japanese husbands specifically stated that he delegated educational issues to his wife because he lacked knowledge about the Thai education system. Notably, this attitude may contribute to the formation of the Thai spouse's account of "mutual decision" wherein the Japanese spouse agrees with the Thai spouse.

Hence, the matching process seemingly influences their decision-making process in their married life, including their children's education.

3.3 Positioning of Languages and Their Education

3.3.1 Overview of Language and Education Practice

Language education is an important part of children's education and is the principal concern of intermarriage

families after their children are born. The three languages that were mentioned in the interview were Japanese as a minority language, English as the global language, and Thai as the language of foundation in the society. Each language was assigned a distinct meaning that reflects the unique language experience of the participants, which directly correlated with their educational ideology of such a language.

In interviews, scholars frequently observed that the dominant language in the family, especially between spouses, is patterned to a certain degree according to the language learned before marriage, which is typically associated with their initial meeting place, such as Thailand, Japan, or a third country. For example, Participants A and B have Japanese husbands and were in Thailand at the first encounter. Participant A did not speak Japanese, whereas Participant B could. Their initial common language remains the dominant language of the family: Thai for Participant A and Japanese for Participant B. The initial meeting places of Participants C and E were in the United States and Australia, respectively, and English, which was the initial common language, remained the dominant language of the couples. Only one case (Participant D) met in Japan and later moved to Thailand. Their initial common language, Japanese, remains the dominant language between them. Under these conditions, the home language policy was consciously determined according to certain beliefs in language education, such as the belief that one parent should use one language, that is, the mother tongue, with the child. In fact, all families, except for Participant C, practice this one-parent one-language policy.

In contrast to previous studies (Watanabe et al., 2019), the current study observed no instance in which the couples changed the family language: although English, which is the language of the third country where they met, was spoken initially, they switched to speaking Thai at home as the Japanese spouse made progress in the local language. In other cases, both spouses learned their partner's language and started using three languages at home. Nevertheless, an important point to note is that the home language may change over time.

3.3.2 Prioritization of the Japanese, English, and Thai Languages

Although all families desire that their children acquire the three languages at one point, they need to prioritize each language with the available time and other resources.

First, Japanese was mostly intended to symbolize ethnic identity. Parents frequently mentioned that they wish that their children live in Japan at a certain point in their lives. On the other hand, the Japanese were also given the meaning of investment for the future. One common understanding of Japanese as an investment was that Japanese language skills would expand future work opportunities. If they can speak Japanese in Thailand, then salaries will change dramatically (Watanabe & Kubo, 2018). Thus, parents are conscious that employment opportunities will increase if their children are proficient in Japanese.

I think Japanese is important for my son and me. I think I was able to get a good job and salary both in Thailand and Japan because I had good Japanese language skills. My son should be able to benefit from good Japanese skills in the future. (Participant B)

Meanwhile, the participants are aware that they need to create a reliable Japanese environment from the time that their children were infants and teach them intentionally at home and using external resources, such as Japanese schools, Japanese language supplementary schools, and private tutors. Although the Thai spouses who are proficient in Japanese (Participants B and C) tend to be more conscious of teaching Japanese, teaching Japanese was primarily considered a responsibility of the Japanese spouse in all families. They were aware that conversations with grandparents in Japan and occasional lessons with private tutors would be insufficient for acquiring high levels of proficiency in the Japanese language. However, the resources for studying Japanese are very limited because Japanese is a foreign language and is less prestigious than English in Thailand. The three Japanese spouses interviewed expressed anxiety about teaching Japanese simultaneously with children learning Thai and English. When the simultaneous acquisition of the three languages is impossible, delaying the acquisition of a third language, Japanese, is only reasonable for the majority of families.

I think learning two languages (Thai and English) is already overwhelming. And Japanese is a third language. Also, because my son likes programming, he seems to value English much more than Japanese. (Husband of Participant B)

Except for parents who send their children to Japanese schools supplemented by private lessons on Saturdays, they seem to give up at a certain point and provide the *best* they can. The husband of Participant B recalls an unsuccessful attempt to motivate his son to continue studying Japanese as follows.

I tried to teach the Japanese language, but my son is not so much interested in the things I gave. And now I am giving up on it. I exhausted all possible means, including buying him a Honda kids bike to orient him to the automobile, which is my specialty. I hope someday he realizes the importance of

learning Japanese. And start learning like “switched on.” But right now, as he is into an adolescent, he doesn't follow what his parents say that easily. My son uses a Japanese name in Thailand, which may motivate him to study Japanese in the future. (Husband of Participant B)

English is highly valued in Thai society. However, the degree of emphasis varies significantly for each household. An interesting aspect to note is that where Thai and Japanese are frequently presented in the discourse of ethnic identity, culture, and traits of people, English was discussed as if it did not concern those features and is treated as an asset that is detached from the English or American culture. Moreover, English education for children is frequently based on various reasons, such as “to become able to act globally.” In fact, English is learned to be directly connected to the global stage in Thailand, such as being hired by a foreign company or transferred overseas (Watanabe et al., 2019). Participant B, who is the only Japanese-speaking Thai wife, prioritizes how they teach languages as follows.

(Because my son goes to a Thai school) At home, my husband and I speak and teach our son in Japanese every day. I speak less Thai with my son. But I see English is important for our son in the future, so we hire a western teacher to give him more English lessons after school and Thai teachers for extra classes at home on the weekend. (Participant B)

These beliefs were partially supported by the language experience of the parents in highly valuing the English language. For example, although Japanese spouses lived in Thailand for a considerable period, their motivation to learn the Thai language was seemingly less significant than their first foreign language, English. Except for Participant A, proficiency in the Thai language was limited to a minimum to an intermediate level.

Thai is a very difficult language, for Japanese, with its tone and impossible scripts. Besides, it is easy for foreigners to live in Thailand without speaking Thai. In fact, I only use Thai to buy lunch at work and English for all other purposes, and it is fine. (Participant E's Japanese husband)

From their experience, the participants are aware of the importance of English language in Thai society, such that some Japanese spouses say they can avoid speaking in Thai on most days. With this power of English in society, their greater emphasis on English learning than other languages is reasonable. These experiences, that is, using the English language to communicate with other non-native speakers of English, make them realize the instrumental aspect of the English language. This attitude was also observed in the Thai parents, and Participant D articulated the influence of his educational experience on this belief.

I studied Japanese after I graduated with a bachelor's degree in Thailand, so my children can also do this. In Thailand and the rest of the world nowadays, English is also an important language for my children, in addition to Thai and Japanese. (Participant D)

Consequently, the participants developed a positive atmosphere of English language education for instrumental purposes, whereas the Thai and Japanese languages were necessary for ethnic and investment purposes, respectively. With this social atmosphere, the effort required to maintain the use of the Japanese language in the family tends to be greater.

Finally, Thai was naturally regarded as an essential language for living in Thai society. The usefulness of the Thai language is well understood. However, the necessity of conscious learning of the Thai language varies by family. The majority believes sending children to Thai (private) schools and the daily use of the language in the community was sufficient for learning Thai to the necessary level. The couples were seemingly successful in this regard.

Table 4. Languages used at home and school

| Participant | Thai at home | Japanese at home | English at home | Language used with spouse | Schools of the children Gender, age | Language used at school |
|-------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| A | With mother | With father | | Thai and some English | Girl, 12, Japanese school | Japanese |
| B | With mother (less) | With father and mother | | Japanese | Boy, 10, Thai school | Thai and some English |
| C | Rarely | With mother | With father | English | Boy, 13, International school/ Boy, 9 and Girl, 7, Japanese school | English (1 child) and Japanese (2 children) |
| D | With father | With mother | | Japanese | Girl, 9 and Boy, 4, Thai school | Thai |
| E | With mother | With father | With mother | English | Girl, 20, Girl, 18, and Boy, 16, Thai schools | Thai and English (bilingual program) |

3.4 School Choice

The language of instruction at school plays a critical role in developing the language. School choice is the most important symbolic decision regarding the extension of language education at home and the amount of money spent. When selecting a school education service, the family's economic situation is a crucial determinant (along with the ability and willingness to study of the children; in the case of younger children, the willingness of the parents) for attending certain schools.

The cost of education from kindergarten to university varies significantly and ranges from 20,000 to 500,000 baht per semester (Note 3). In addition to tuition fees every semester, each family pays for admission and extramural activities after school, which costs approximately 2,500-3,000 baht for primary and 5,000-10,000 baht for secondary school. On weekends, they pay for English, Thai, and Japanese classes, sports, and music, whose costs are dependent on the program.

Table 5. Children's schools and school fees per semester

| Participant | Children's gender, age | Local private school | Japanese system school | International school | University |
|-------------|------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--|--|
| A | Girl, 12 | - | Grade 6 (58,400 baht) | | |
| B | Boy, 10 | Grade 5 (30,000 baht) | | | |
| C | Boy, 13 | | Grades 4 and 1 (58,400 baht/child) | Grade 7 (382,550 baht plus selected activity fees) | |
| D | Boy, 9 | | | | |
| | Girl, 7 | | | | |
| D | Girl, 9 | Grade 4 and kindergarten (34,000 baht for primary school and 30,000 baht for kindergarten) | | | |
| | Boy, 4 | | | | |
| E | Girl, 20 | | | | Architecture (3rd year, University; 22,000 baht) |
| | Girl, 18 | Grade 11 (20,000 baht) | - | - | Pharmacy (1st year, University; 66,000 baht) |
| | Boy, 16 | | | | |

Among the available options explained in Section 2, no participants sent their children to demonstration schools. All other options were observed: private schools, Japanese schools, and international schools.

First, private schools are vastly expensive compared with state schools, whose tuition fee is free of charge by the Constitution; however, they were considered the most economical option. Although private schools vary in size and standard, the participants frequently mentioned the standard of English education offered when making their choices along with proximity and facilities.

We send our son to a local private school. It is quite a good school located near our house, it provides an English program, and the school fee is reasonable. Its English program entails daily English lessons (Participant B)

He can communicate in Japanese, but Kanji letters are difficult to learn. My husband and I considered transportation to choose the children's schools, so the school should be located close to our offices at the university, and the school should be safe and clean. (Participant E)

In Thai society, English proficiency is considered crucial for maintaining and improving one's socioeconomic position (Watanabe & Kubo, 2018). Alternatively, private schools offer very few opportunities to study Japanese; hence, when families chose private schools, Japanese language education was conducted at home and in other private spaces. Moreover, the belief that Japanese education can be delayed until the children become eager to study Japanese.

So, I send my children to Thai school; it is a private school, but it provides English courses every day. My children can learn both Thai and English and communicate in Japanese at home. When they grow up, they can learn more Japanese from extra courses on the weekend or as a school subject of their choices. (Participant D)

As demonstrated by the following extract, Participant A explicitly made her point. Japanese schools are considered to provide the ideal environment for securing a Japanese identity. The other participants also identified an advantage of the Japanese schools: once children begin attending school, concerns about the Japanese language and culture cease to exist, and the children can go on to build networks with other Japanese (or Japanese-Thai children) (Watanabe & Kubo, 2018).

As my husband is a lapidary and working with Japanese people in Japan, and he teaches about jeweler studies to Japanese people, he would like our daughter to hold a Japanese identity, so he sends her to study at Japanese school even though the school is far away, about 40 kilometers from home, ... and it is more expensive than a Thai school. (Participant A)

The husband of Participant A, however, makes use of his teaching experience and network within the Japanese community in Thailand by operating free Japanese classes for children from Thai-Japanese families on Saturdays. These lessons intend to socialize these children to embrace their Japanese identity, learn Japanese culture, and provide their daughters with the opportunity to gain friends from similar backgrounds. Conversely, the difficulty of sending children to Japanese schools, such as the Japanese language requirement, as an acceptance priority is given to children of expats. Moreover, the narratives of the Thai spouses lack a discussion on language barriers in joining parent-teacher associations and very limited education options after junior high school (Watanabe & Kubo, 2018).

International schools, which were frequently described in terms of the considerable financial burden they impose, charge between 35,000 and 400,000 baht per semester for tuition fees only, which makes a few of them cheaper than Japanese schools. Most participants considered international schools as a means of acquiring the English language, except for Participant C, who sent his child to an international school. For Participant C, school choice is a means of merging into the country's educational system represented by the language, and making this choice is worthwhile compared with other costs, such as time and energy, in addition to financial ones.

I am quite satisfied with my eldest son's international school; we hope he can write the SAT examination at the end of high school and apply to study at a university abroad, maybe in the USA where we used to live. The two younger children attend Japanese school, even though it is located far away; they go by a school bus early in the morning and arrive home late in the evening. Though it is tiring for the kids, this school is one of the best schools teaching Japanese, using the Japanese education system, and providing a Japanese environment. (Participant C)

Nevertheless, an interesting point to note is that other parents maintain the possibility of changing the child's school by securing linguistic ability in a language apart from Thai. Therefore, emphasizing that the current choice of school is not always the final choice is important. The selection of schools is not completed in a single decision but continues to occupy the minds of family members going forward.

I dare say that all my children are good at English and Japanese. My younger daughter wants to study in Japan after graduating with a bachelor's degree in Thailand, while my youngest son wants to study in the UK or Australia like us, because he is excellent in English. (Participant E)

The study proposes the following model of language education and school choice, given the interviewees' narratives. First, children would be unable to acquire languages apart from Thai without taking deliberate

educational action. Although public schools are free of charge, families who can afford to spend more on education typically send their post-elementary children to costly private schools in Thailand, Japanese schools, or international schools, suggesting that family economic power is important. However, people going to all school groups acquire Japanese language education outside school, including Japanese private tutoring schools similar to the one operated by the husband of Participant A.

4. Conclusions

This study examined the narratives of Thai-Japanese intermarried couples in terms of educational decisions to shed light on how these families in Thailand reach agreement when dealing with the different aspects of their lives. Based on the in-depth interviews with eight participants (five Thai and three Japanese), this study identified the factors that relate educational decisions to preconditions, such as the place of their first encounter, socioeconomic status, and location of their home.

The study derived several important conclusions from the findings. First, the language used by the couple when they met for the first time was a clear indicator of the primary language used by the couple even after marriage. This tendency frequently manifests in the place they live. Subsequently, this language potentially becomes the default language of the children. Additionally, socioeconomic status is an important factor determining their choice in their children's education. The couples interviewed originated from relatively affluent families in Thailand; however, they frequently cited financial issues as a limiting factor in selecting an ideal school when asked about how they will select the school. Proximity to a desirable school was another factor.

Another issue that stands out among others is their strong belief in the significance of the English language. However, many accept the importance of the Thai language for living in Thai society. Thai and Japanese spouses believe that the English language is more important in terms of future opportunities than the Japanese language; thus, Japanese spouses rarely propose intensive Japanese education apart from the objective of inheriting the Japanese identity. With this clear priority among languages, parents intend to minimize an excessive burden on their children in learning three languages, especially during the school age.

Analysis of the interviews revealed that love and a series of decision-making formed an important basis for the cross-cultural marriage between the Thai and Japanese people. The participants claimed that their decisions were made unanimously after a fair and rational discussion. Spouses were able to accept and learn from each other's cultures, and the parents supported their children's education to provide them with local and international opportunities. Their characteristics, that is, all of them achieved post-graduate education, and most have overseas experience with at least one parent living in a country where they did not originate, contribute to this rational account of their decision-making process. Meanwhile, the study points out that the Japanese spouses genuinely found value in living abroad, specifically in Thailand for many cases, whereas one articulated the delegation of educational issues with the wife because he lacked sufficient knowledge about the education system in Thailand. This factor and sentiment may be easily overlooked.

This study has its limitations. First, all the participants resided in Thailand, which indicates that the scope of this study excludes people who decide to live in Japan or elsewhere as a place of residence. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that those who decide to live in Thailand indicate a preference to remain living in this country after all the efforts and sacrifices they have made. Another limitation is that the findings do not represent the entire population of Thai-Japanese families due to the qualitative nature of the study; however, it reveals several potential scenarios for understanding the complexity of their lives. Future studies can explore a few of the issues identified by the current study using a larger and more representative sample of such families. Therefore, however exploratory, this study may offer a few insights into the lives of Thai-Japanese families in Thailand.

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Notes

Note 1. While other schools play a crucial role in providing free basic education for all Thai and they can be found within relatively proximity of any residence across Thailand, they are not quite popular among the Japanese in Thailand due to a lack of confidence in the quality of education.

Note 2. There is a Japanese senior high school in Bangkok called *Josuikan*, but it announced it will discontinue recruiting new students from the academic year of 2022. 2022年度生徒募集停止のお知らせ

<http://www.josuikan-bkk.com/news/2022年度%e3%80%80生徒募集停止について（お知らせ）.html>

Note 3. Average monthly income per household in Thailand in 2020 is 41.9 thousand baht in Bangkok and greater Bangkok areas Statista. (2022, March 3)

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