

## **Educational Views of Japanese–Thai Couples in Thailand: A Narrative Inquiry on the Procurement of Educational Commodities**

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### **1. Introduction**

The manufacturing industry rapidly expanded into the ASEAN region after the 1985 Plaza Agreement, and many Japanese corporations started moving manufacturing hubs to Southeast Asia, particularly to Thailand. Recently, this overseas expansion has been remarkable not only in the manufacturing industry but also in the retail and service industries. While the actual numbers vary depending on statistics, the number of Japanese corporations in Thailand increased rapidly from 3,884 in 2008 to 6,134 in 2017 (Japan External Trade Organization 2017). Particularly within retail and service industries, there has been an increase not only in the number of corporations active in the Japanese market have made advancement into Thai market but also in the number of Japanese corporations founded in Thailand; thus, the Japan–Thailand connections are entering a new phase. Along with expansion of this cross-border corporate activity, the number of Japanese living in Thailand is rising. According to the Japanese Embassy in Thailand (2017), the number of Japanese living in Thailand more than tripled from 2001 to 2016, rising from 22,731 in 2001 to 44,114 in 2008 to 70,337 in 2016. As a consequence of these changes, Japanese society in Thailand is also becoming more diverse. Although the number of Japanese employees dispatched to Thailand by companies operating there has tended to rise, along with the number of family members accompanying them, from 1994 to 2013, the proportion of Japanese employed locally with foundations in the country dramatically increased from 8% to 21% (Niwa et al. 2016).

Accordingly, this study focuses on Japanese–Thai married couples who are raising children, a group that is likely to have stronger connections with Thailand than other

Japanese living there. The process of parenting consists of making a succession of adjustments and decisions in response to the conditions of the society, in which the values of each family are explicitly manifest. This article examines narratives about socially negotiated adjustments and decisions made in the area of education, while placing these within the framework of fulfilling life needs through the procurement of commodities. Through this investigation, the educational views of each family are presented and discussed to throw light on certain aspects of the lives of Japanese in Thailand. The article begins with a review of previous research, followed by a discussion of the general circumstances of Japanese–Thai couples. Next, understandings of the procurement of educational commodities—including aspects such as the childrearing environment in Thailand, Japanese commodities,<sup>1</sup> overall procurement conditions, and school choice—are explored through narratives of Japanese–Thai couples living in Thailand, which were elicited in a survey conducted in February and July 2017.

### **2. Previous Research**

#### *2.1 Research on Japanese Lives Overseas and International Marriage*

When living in an environment where conditions are different from those in Japan, the task of fulfilling life needs, symbolized by the procurement of commodities, is a major concern. Discussing the state of commodity procurement in environments where the flow of commodities was restricted from the

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<sup>1</sup> “Japanese commodities” is used as a general term that includes products manufactured in Japan, products manufactured overseas that are widely distributed in Japan, and products produced overseas by Japanese manufacturers.

perspective of distribution, Kubo et al. (2017) explored examples characteristic purchase behavior in Japanese childrearing families in Thailand and Vietnam, analyzing narratives on the procurement of commodities to examine aspects such as the economic power of families, social capital, and circularity of commodities in the area of residence. Using the concept of “local preference” (the degree to which a person thinks positively about objects and activities connected to the area in which they reside) as a determinant of commodity procurement decisions, the same study also suggested that the attitude toward the procurement of commodities and satisfaction with the success/failure to procure commodities might vary between people who do not necessarily move there on their own will, such as overseas dispatch employees, and people who choose to reside there, such as those who are employed locally or have established their own businesses in the country. In other words, it is not always the case that satisfaction is high among those who receive considerable support in procuring commodities from the companies that dispatch them. It is fair to say that such findings are similar to those obtained from the series of studies on Japanese who move overseas based on a preference for life there (Sato 1993, Yamashita 1999, Fujita 2008, Matsutani 2014, Saito 2017), in that they link the circumstances of emigration to feelings of satisfaction with life in the new location.

In recent years, research has also examined such searches for greater mental satisfaction, known as “lifestyle migration,” in relation to international marriage (Ni Nengah 2014). A study by Niwa and Nakagawa (2015) found that one characteristic among young Japanese living in Bangkok was the prevalence of people who chose to be employed locally based on their preference to live in Thailand; there was a strong tendency to be satisfied with life in Thailand; many of the people who were already married had Thai partners. International marriage as a consequence of people’s preference for life in Thailand can

be regarded as one archetypal pattern. Reporting on the trends in international marriage research from a broad perspective, Qu (2009) classified research into different categories, such as quality, satisfaction, and child-rearing in international marriage life, and introduced studies that have shown marital satisfaction to be connected to marital communication (Shi 2000) and cross-cultural adaptation (Takeshita 2001). On the other hand, Kuramoto (2017) provided an overview of previous research over a period of more than 100 years, using both Japanese and international databases. After pointing out the lack of research on “international marriages and interracial couples,” she asserted the need to examine the influence of various attributes that influence international marriage as a challenge for the field, citing as examples the economic power of families—measured on indicators such as income—and the degree of development of the area of residence. In an examination of views on education among multicultural Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese families, Watanabe et al. (2016) also addressed international couples living outside Japan; however, the cases discussed were limited to East Asia, and the state of Japanese families in Southeast Asian countries Thailand remained unaddressed.

## *2.2 Research on Education from an Economic Perspective*

In the field of education, the necessity and importance of education in child-rearing is treated as self-evident, and there has been little discussion of the topic from an economic perspective. However, with the expansion of competition-based principles of neoliberalism, new views on education were also presented in Japan (Arai 1995 & 2002, Oshio 2003). A prominent example is the theory of commodification of education, in which Seo et al. (2015), drawing on the work of Heller (2003) and Piller et al. (2010), define “commodification” as “the process in which an object or activity becomes connected to economic activity or social status, thereby

acquiring value,” and “consumption” as “the process in which people pay a price, obtain commodities, and use them to satisfy desires and construct identities.” Although this relationship between “commodities” and “consumption” corresponds to the understanding of general economic discussions, inasmuch as tradable goods and services are obtained and benefits are derived from them, an expansion in the concept can also be seen in the sense that intangible systems—continuous behavior such as education and intangible systems such as language, for instance—are also assumed to function as commodities, because these are addressed in discussions by including identity construction in the concept of consumption. This allows for discussions to be conducted along similar lines to those on the procurement of non-educational child-rearing commodities. If we accept the premise of “commodification” and “consumption” as defined by Seo et al., in the case of Japanese–Thai international couples living in Thailand, we can see that the “commodities” of Japanese language education and Japanese language not only serve as an investment for accumulating human capital that broadens the possibilities for children’s future economic activity (Becker 1976) but are also “consumed” in the form of identity construction centered on parent-child continuity as a result of their procurement. By incorporating the perspective of commodity procurement in our discussion of educational choices, it should be possible to gain new insight into the educational views of Japanese national living overseas.

### **3. Japanese–Thai Marriage and Children with Japanese–Thai Parents**

#### *3.1 Japanese–Thai Couples in the Context of Japanese International Marriage*

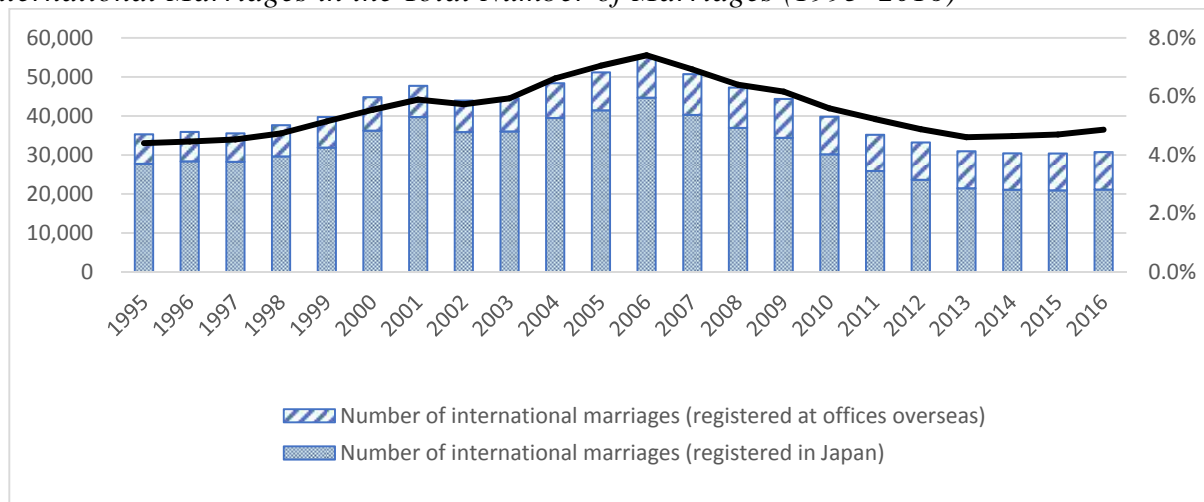
According to a demographic survey conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, since 1995, the proportion of Japanese marriages registered in Japan and overseas that involved a non-Japanese partner increased from 4.4% in

1995 to 5.5% in 2000, before peaking at 7.4% in 2006. After that, there was a moderate fall to 4.6% in 2013 and 2014; then in the most recent survey in 2016, there was another slight increase to 4.9% (30,747 marriages)<sup>2</sup> (Table 1).

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<sup>2</sup> The total number of Japanese marriages continued to fall from about 800 thousand in 1995 to 630 thousand in 2016.

Table 1: Number of International Marriages by Place of Registration and Proportional of International Marriages in the Total Number of Marriages (1995–2016)



Compiled by the author based on the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, “Vital Statistics” (1995–2016)

According to the data for 2016, the most common nationalities were Chinese (7,442), Korean (4,516), Filipino (3,793), American (3,525), Thai (1,236), Brazilian (930), British (642), and Peruvian (215). The overall difference in the number of marriages by gender is small (Japanese husband, non-Japanese wife: 16,430 marriages; Japanese wife, non-Japanese husband: 14,317 marriages); however, significant differences can be seen among the various nationalities: although there is an almost equal balance for Koreans, Brazilians, and Peruvians, overwhelming majority of marriages with Chinese, Filipinos, and Thais involve Japanese husbands and non-Japanese wives, while the pattern is reversed for Americans and British.

There is also a considerable difference in gender regarding the country of registration, which is also the country where the couples are most likely to be living: most marriages involving Japanese husbands and non-Japanese wives are registered in Japan (90.4%), whereas the majority of marriages involving Japanese wives and non-Japanese husbands are registered at government offices

overseas (55.8%)<sup>3</sup>. Although there are some differences among the partner countries, the figures suggest that, on the whole, it is women who are more likely to migrate for international marriages involving Japanese partners. Of the 1,236 Japanese–Thai marriages, 81.6% were registered in Japan, the overwhelming majority of which involved Japanese husbands and Thai wives (970/32); for marriages registered overseas, the Japanese husband–Thai wife pattern was also more common but to a lesser degree (155/79). This ratio is slightly higher than other Asian countries,<sup>4</sup> suggesting that a relatively large

<sup>3</sup> Government offices overseas are not necessarily those located in the spouse’s country, but also include a third country.

<sup>4</sup> The proportions of “Japanese husband–non-Japanese wife” marriages registered overseas are 9.6% for all marriages, 2.1% for Korea, 7.2% for China, 2.9% for the Philippines, 13.8% for Thailand, 33.9% for the United States, 24.7% for the United Kingdom, 49.9% for Brazil, and 1.1% for Peru; for “Japanese wife–non-Japanese husband,” the figures are 55.8% for all marriages, 33.3% for Korea, 46.9% for China, 53.3% for the Philippines, 71.2% for Thailand, 66.4% for the United States, 56.4% for the United Kingdom, 36.9% for Brazil, and 35.2% for Peru.

number of Japanese–Thai couples choose to live in Thailand in comparison to international marriages involving other nationalities.

### *3.2 Children with Japanese–Thai Parents*

In 2016, 677 children were born to Japanese–Thai parents, of whom 283 were registered at government offices overseas (Table 2).<sup>5</sup> Although 18.9% of Thai–Japanese couples chose to register their marriages overseas, as many as 42% registered the birth of their child overseas, highlighting how important it is to investigate Japanese–Thai couples living in Thailand when considering parenting issues among them. Moreover, the number of children born since 1995 is over 20,000, and 6,667 of these children were registered overseas (Table 3). Given that there are also cases where children are born in countries other than Japan and Thailand, families migrate after children are born, or, for example, families live in Thailand but spend the time between the birth and its registration in Japan, there is considerable scope for error when following these figures. However, they ought to provide a useful reference when considering the number of people who are still domiciled in Thailand. When we consider that there are over 70,000 Japanese people living in Thailand, it is easy to understand how the parenting of Japanese–Thai couples can easily arouse interest in Thailand.

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<sup>5</sup> It can be assumed that the figures also include the number of cases where unmarried couples acknowledge and register the child.

**Table 2: Number of Children with Japanese–Thai Parents by Place of Registration (2016)**

Country of registration	Japan	Overseas office	Total
Japanese husband – Thai wife	318	223	541
Japanese wife – Thai husband	76	60	136
<b>Total</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>677</b>

Compiled by the author based on the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, “Vital Statistics” (2016)

**Table 3: Change in the Number of Children with Japanese–Thai Parents by Place of Registration and Cumulative Total (1995–2016)**

	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	258	1,168	4,621
1999	885	229	1,114	5,735
2000	813	275	1,088	6,823
2001	807	259	1,066	7,889
2002	752	288	1,040	8,929
2003	710	260	970	9,899
2004	656	319	975	10,874
2005	598	302	900	11,774
2006	587	330	917	12,691
2007	612	364	976	13,667
2008	537	369	906	14,573
2009	509	364	873	15,446
2010	478	344	822	16,268
2011	477	308	785	17,053
2012	405	336	741	17,794
2013	425	309	734	18,528
2014	432	319	751	19,279
2015	462	343	805	20,084
2016	394	283	677	20,761
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,094</b>	<b>6,667</b>	<b>20,761</b>	<b>20,761</b>

Compiled by the author based on the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, “Vital Statistics” (1995–2016)

#### **4. Overview of the Survey**

Interview participants were identified using snowball sampling, with the author Yukinori Watanabe as the starting point, and selected based on the three conditions of (1) being married to a Thai person, (2) having experienced parenting in Thailand, and (3) still living in Thailand at the time of the survey. Formal interviews were conducted with ten participants (five males and five females) in February 2017 (two participants) and July 2017 (eight participants). All of the male participants were interviewed separately; one of the female participants was interviewed separately, and the others were interviewed as a group. The interview participants’ age ranged from late 20s to 50s, with children aged between 2 and 28, and they had lived in Thailand for between 10 and 35 years (see Table 4 for more details). Generally, one of the characteristics of snowball sampling is that the interpersonal relations of the informants who introduce others are easily reflected in the participant sample. In the same way, the attributes of the participants in the present study may have reflected those of the author, since many of them were middle class, almost all of them were engaged in work of some kind, and a large number of them were employed locally during their early years of their life in Thailand but are now self-employed.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Japanese, at locations such as cafés and a rental meeting room that were introduced by intermediaries. Before the interviews, the purpose of the study and the rights of the participants were explained, and the interviews were conducted after the participants had signed a consent form. Although the participants were invited to speak relatively freely, to understand the content of their narratives within the context

of their lives, the interview questions were designed to elicit their histories chronologically from the time of their own childhood, including their arrival in Thailand, the history of their marriage, and their experiences with child-rearing. However, to explore the participants’ experiences within the specific framework of procuring child-rearing commodities and their views on education, themes such as procurement of items, language education, and school choice were introduced into the dialogue at appropriate junctions. The length of the interviews varied somewhat, each lasting between about one and three hours. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then analyzed by categorizing the content into themes, following which the relationships among the themes were discussed along with the overall trends that emerged from the content. It should be noted that all names appearing in this article are pseudonyms to prevent the possibility of participants incurring disadvantages if identified.

In addition to the formal interview described above, to inform our understanding of Japanese–Thai families in Thailand, informal interviews were conducted with Japanese families who were raising children in Thailand and other Japanese residents with close relationships with such families. Moreover, as a fieldwork designed to explore child-rearing conditions in Thailand, we visited Japanese residential areas in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, shopping malls used for routine shopping, and parenting circles for Japanese couples; during these visits, we also conducted observations and informal interviews. Furthermore, several interviews were conducted in Japan with informants who had experience of raising children in Thailand.

Table 4: Interview Participants

Japanese Men Married to Thai Women					
	Mr. Sato	Mr. Nishiyama	Mr. Tabe	Mr. Aoki	Mr. Hosokawa
Age	30s	30s	50s	40s	50s
Years in Thailand	10	15	30	15	35
Age of children	7 (boy)	6 (girl)	8 (girl), 6 (girl)	8 (girl)	28 (girl), 21 (boy)
Place of meeting	Australia	Thailand	Thailand	Thailand	Thailand
Time of interview	17-Feb	17-Jul	17-Jul	17-Jul	17-Jul

Japanese Women Married to Thai Men					
	Ms. Ueno	Ms. Matsuda	Ms. Kurosaki	Ms. Kawabe	Ms. Ogura
Age	30s	50s	50s	50s	30s
Years in Thailand	12	23	25	25	13
Age of children	2 (girl)	22 (girl), 20 (boy)	20 (girl), 18 (girl)	22 (boy), 18 (boy)	12 (boy), 10 (boy)
Place of meeting	America	Australia	Thailand	Thailand	America
Time of interview	17-Feb	17-Jul	17-Jul	17-Jul	17-Jul

\* All names are pseudonyms

\* Some of the items include information that was inferred from the interview content

## 5. Analysis of the Interview Narratives

### 5.1 On Japanese-Thai International Families Living in Thailand

#### 5.1.1 Moving to Thailand and Getting Married: Thailand as a Place to Realize Wishes

Although all participants were Japanese people in international marriages with Thai partners, their experiences in moving to Thailand and marrying can be broadly divided into two patterns. The first group comprised people who met their partners during study abroad in third countries and decided to move to Thailand with marriage in mind; the second group comprised people who came to Thailand to study or work before meeting and marrying their partners within the country. There were no cases in which couples met in Japan and then, for some reason, moved to Thailand. The majority of participants who met their

partners in Thailand did so through their work. The circumstances of the participants varied considerably by gender: only one male participant met his wife while studying abroad, whereas three of the female participants, the majority, met their husbands in that way.

The participants who met their partners while studying abroad were not interested in Thailand at the beginning of their period of stay in the third country, but rather had a vague longing to live overseas, before deciding to move to their partners' country of Thailand, which they saw as a place where they could satisfy their wish to live overseas. For example, Ms. Ueno met her husband while studying abroad in America as an undergraduate student. Then, after studying abroad, both of them returned to their respective countries of Japan and Thailand. After that, she moved to Thailand after



maintaining a long-distance relationship with her boyfriend for a few years, and then decided to marry him after working in Thailand for another few years. Describing how she felt immediately before moving to Thailand and her impression of other Japanese–Thai couples, Ms. Ueno stated the following:

*In my case, I wasn't sure what to do, but I really liked the feeling of freedom I had when I went to America. It's a totally different country from America, but I came here thinking that it might be a good idea to work outside Japanese for a few years...Sure enough, the vast majority of women with Thai partners meet their partners in different countries. [For men] it's my impression, but people who like Thailand, or backpackers, come here. (Ms. Ueno)*

Mr. Tabe is a good example of a person who had a strong interest in Thailand from the beginning of his life there. Based on his experiences as a backpacker, he focused on the possibility of living in Thailand when choosing his career, moving there immediately after graduating from university, before meeting and marrying the person who would become his wife in the process of working various jobs.

*The reason why I came to Thailand was because I was a backpacker. After making several trips to Asia, I realized that I wanted to become a journalist on the subject of Asia...I thought it would be better to actually go to Asia, and so immediately after graduating I was looking for something that would fly me over here and found my first job. (Mr. Tabe)*

In this way, the participants in the study are similar in that they actively chose Thailand, which they regarded as place where they could realize their wishes. Moreover, some of the participants realized Thai society's favorable view of Japan as they experienced life in Thailand, and one participant commented, "Thailand is not difficult for Japanese people." More Japanese–Thai couples chose Thailand as their country of

residence than did international couples of other nationalities, a pattern that may well also have to do with the existence of a sizeable group of people who see the idea of living in Thailand itself as an appealing prospect.

Furthermore, the participants considered that the economic power of their partner's family is related to the circumstances in which partners meet and enable them to imagine the nature of their subsequent marriage. The participants who met their partners during study abroad knew that their partner's family had sufficient economic power to afford to send their son or daughter to study abroad, which served as an indication about what married life would be like. On the other hand, many of the participants who met their partners in Thailand spoke of a wider range of possibilities surrounding the economic power of the partner's family. There was also a case in which a couple met in an English-speaking country and also used English as the family language after marrying (the parents of the spouse were also proficient in English), and a case in which a couple met in Thailand and experienced problems because the partner came from a rural area and relied economically not only on the immediate family but also on other relatives.

### *5.1.2 Views on International Marriage in Thai Society: Tolerant Attitudes Toward International Couples*

The interviews with the people living in Thailand elicited a large number of comments about the general tolerance of Thai society toward international marriage. As reasons for this, participants cited the fact that Thais of Chinese origin occupy a central position in Thai society, making it difficult to view the subsumption of other races as a special case, and that although Thais rarely marry across class lines, non-Thais fall outside this social class framework, meaning that international marriages (especially with Thai women) can easily function as a means

of moving between classes. Despite the fact that the gap in GDP between Japan and Thailand is decreasing annually as a consequence of economic growth in Thailand and economic stagnation in Japan, it is likely that the dimension in which Japanese men are regarded as targets for marriages with people of higher socioeconomic status (hypergamy) still remains. Indeed, for Thai men, marriage of Thai women with non-Thais could mean a decrease in the number of potential partners for equal marriages (homogamy). Therefore, it is also conceivable that negative attitudes toward marriages with non-Thais (heterogamy) might exist in Thai society. However, there was no mention of this in the interviews. Regardless of how the Thai partners might feel, the Japanese partner, at least, would seem to be in a situation in which such aspects are not easily perceived.

When we view the situations against the background of the economic gap between Japan and Thailand in this way, although Japanese–Thai marriage may be viewed as hypergamy from the perspective of Thai women, there are also some Japanese women who conclude that international marriages are not hypergamous from their point of view. Reflecting Ni Nengah's (2014) discussion of the cases of Japanese women who married Balinese men as lifestyle immigrants in search of a sense of satisfaction that is difficult to gain in Japan, Ms. Kurosaki, while laughing, gave the following comments, conscious that her own marriage was a case of extreme hypergamy:

*My husband is different from others because he was from a very poor family, even in a country like Thailand where there's such a big gap between rich and poor. Because of this, I think that my children found the gap between the two countries even bigger. (Ms. Kurosaki)*

However, at the time of the study, Ms. Kurosaki's daughter was studying “abroad” in Japan—evidence that she has acquired some degree of economic power—and it would seem that through her married life so

far, she has continued to present an example of hypergamy to Thai society from the perspective of a Thai male.

Japanese–Thai couples in Thailand tend to associate hypergamy with Thai women, but as shown by the statistics, there is also a considerable number of Japanese wife–Thai husband couples. In addition to Ms. Kurosaki's lifestyle migrant-type marriage, a wide range of marriage forms can be seen, including those such as Ms. Ueno's, in which partners meet during their study abroad and marry into families of high socioeconomic standing. Thus, the fact that various forms of Japanese–Thai marriages exist—not only marriages that appear to constitute hypergamy for Thai women—may also help shape Thai society's tolerant attitude toward Japanese–Thai couples.

### *5.1.3 Thai Child-Rearing Culture: Growing Similarity between Japan and Thailand*

The ages of the participants' children varied considerably, from two years to 28 years, which made it possible to elicit and compare the experiences of child-rearing several years back and at the time of the study. According to Onode (2007), although the traditional style of child rearing in Thailand is characterized by strong kin networks, in recent years, the situation has changed significantly as a result of urbanization. Specifically, use of commercialized babysitting and day nursery services has become more common, the mother's child-rearing burden has increased due to the nucleation of child rearing, and there has been a shift from “care” to “education.” This also chimes with the interview narratives, indicating that, on the whole, the gap between the Japanese and Thai child-rearing cultures appears to be shrinking because of both changes in the living environment caused by urbanization and greater similarity between the child-rearing commodities available in the two countries. Ms. Kawabe, who raised her children about 20 years before the survey, reflected on the conditions at that time, which

made is impossible to raise children in the way they would be raised in Japan, due to not only cultural differences but also the differences in the kind of products that were available in the two countries:

*It's not helpful to ask people in Japan. And it's not helpful to ask the wives of the people stationed here. The environment is not such that you can directly apply the Japanese method of child-rearing to the Thai one. Paper diapers, to give one example, were still uncommon in Thailand at that time. (Ms. Kawabe)*

About 20 years ago, Thai people did not normally use diapers, except for a short period after the child's birth, instead preferring to lie their babies down on a clean cloth, which was replaced following each excretion. Although this method was effective for preventing stuffiness and rashes around the baby's bottom at a time when air conditioners were still uncommon, it subsequently lost currency with the spread of coolers and paper diapers. Contrastingly, the narrative of Mr. Nishiyama, who was raising a child at the time of the survey, suggests that the focal point in terms of satisfying living needs has shifted, from whether one can obtain similar items to those available in Japan to whether one can choose from a wide range of items.

*We can get most things in Thailand, but there are more types of powdered milk, for example, in Japan, and they are easier to use. For nappies and things like that, they have the Japanese one's here, and we use them. Also, things like buggies and maternity clothes are really limited in Thailand, so we order those in. We ordered picture books. There are also hardly any types of baby food here. (Mr. Nishiyama)*

Another, more directly influential, example of the growing similarity between the Japanese and Thai child-rearing environments is that Japanese books on child rearing are being translated into Thai and sold in shops. Mr. Sato also stated that he and his wife had discussed child-rearing policies after reading

such books together.<sup>6</sup> Here we can see that Japanese child-rearing culture is being imported into Thailand in its original form. However, this process of convergence has not progressed uniformly in all areas of life: one area where gaps still exist concerns perceived "indifference" to aspects of diet (when viewed from the Japanese perspective), which found expression in the interviews in comments such as, "They let them drink cola and coffee from an age that would be unthinkable in Japan"; "They still have them drink [bottled] milk when they're eight"; "They let them eat sweet things"; and "They rarely feed them baby food." Besides diet, attitudes toward "discipline" are different to prevailing attitudes in Japan, and in many cases, participants explained the Thai style in terms of doing for the child what the child wants ("indulging the child"). Furthermore, although a high level of involvement of the Thai husband in housework and child-rearing was common among the Japanese mothers, the Japanese fathers often spoke of being unable to be sufficiently involved in child-rearing due to work pressures. These differences in expectations concerning the sharing of roles with the spouse may also serve as a point of discussion when comparing child-rearing cultures in the two countries.

#### *5.1.4 Experiences in Thailand: A Strong Sense of Pride in Understanding Thai Society and the Degree of Preference for Life in Thailand*

All the participants had lived in Thailand for more than ten years. One of the participants did return to Japan temporarily, for a long period (about two years), but then

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<sup>6</sup> A representative example is the *Kosodate Happi Adobaisu* [Happy Advice for Child Rearing] series by Daiji Akehashi, which also has a wide readership in Japan. <http://www.akehashi.com/>. Thai version: *Kosodate Happi Adobaisu: Shittete Yokatta* [Happy Advice for Child Rearing: Glad to Know] (accessed December 14, 2017)

moved back to Thailand. Moreover, all the participants had lived in Thailand continuously for almost the entire period since they began raising their children. The narratives conveyed a strong sense of pride among the participants in having understood Thai society through this experience, and the participants frequently mentioned that their understanding of, and feelings toward, Thailand had changed as a result of their prolonged stay in the country.

*I think this is probably the same for most people, but in the first year everyone likes Thailand. They think it's a good county, but then after one year they all start to hate it. There are a lot of people who start to hate it, be it the national character traits, the shoddy aspects, or so on. Then when you've lived here for 10 years, you start to understand things a lot better. I think this also happened to me. After that, you come to like it. It took me 10 years to understand. Until that point, there were also certain times when things didn't go well with the relatives in the house. (Mr. Aoki)*

Although we should bear in mind that family situations are indeed diverse, in describing people's preference for life in Thailand and interaction with Thai society based on the example of food, Mr. Aoki cast those "employees stationed in Thailand" sent there regardless of their own will as prototypical Japanese expats in Thailand; on the other hand, he places himself at the opposite extreme, as a person who moved to Thailand and married a Thai woman because of his fondness for the country.

*The people living here in Thailand generally come here because they like Thailand, so I think they are different from those who are stationed here. There are people who live in Thailand because they like Thailand, and then most of the people who are stationed here were told to come here on business, so there are also some people who feel scared or those who may feel that they cannot eat Thai vegetables because they might get an upset stomach. But I came here because I like Thailand, so eat Thai food. (Mr. Aoki)*

Although whether a person came to Thailand on their own will is an important point, it is really only the starting point. Not everyone who moves to Thailand willingly continues living there, and many people return to Japan after several years, perhaps because their fondness for the country fades or their work takes a turn for the worse. In this sense, it is far to say that Mr. Aoki is a "successful" example of a Japanese person who came to Thailand because he liked the country. Similar to Mr. Aoki, other participants who met their partners in Thailand proceeded to marry them precisely because, prior to marriage, they had not only adapted to the new culture by living in Thailand but had also experienced enough economic success to foresee the possibility of sustaining their lives in the country. It can be inferred that by strengthening their various connections to Thai society over time in this way, their degree of preference for life in Thailand further increased. On the other hand, Ms. Ueno, a participant who met her husband while studying abroad in the United States, also stated that she had deepened her understanding and fondness for Thai society, and decided to marry there based on her experience of working in the country and spending time with her future parents-in-law.

*So I started working and thought two or three years would be alright. I thought Thai was fun and might be a good choice, and so I decided to get married...Since coming to Thailand, I had spent time with my future parents-in-law, and they seemed open and unreserved, frank in fact, so I thought things would probably be okay in the future. (Ms. Ueno)*

This strong sense of pride in having understood Thai society was not simply a self-affirming feeling of superiority in having lived in the country for a long time, but rather seems to stem from the participants' awareness that they had experienced new aspects of Thai society each time their life changed and deepened their understanding

through their experiences over time. It is not difficult to imagine how people who actually marry international partners as well as live in the country for a long time experience Thailand in a way that is qualitatively different from those who stay in Thailand as an all-Japanese family—through their experiences of married life with a Thai person, relationship with in-laws, and experiences of raising children in a Japanese–Thai family. It would seem that this situation is also connected to the fact that people in international marriages hold a sense of pride in being able to understand Thai society better than other Japanese people living in Thailand. This sense of pride can be taken as an expression of the participants' positive interpretation of their relationship with Thai society, indicating that this long-term understanding of Thai society and people's affirmative self-evaluation of it are background factors that shape preferential attitudes on life in Thailand.

## *5.2 On the Procurement of Japanese Commodities in Thailand*

### *5.2.1 Narratives on Life Commodities: Rapid Improvements in the Distribution Environments of Goods and Services*

At present, in Bangkok, access to Japanese commodities, both goods and services, is excellent. In recent years, in addition to ethnic supermarkets aimed at Japanese residents, a wide range of products are available in local supermarkets, thereby sufficiently satisfying the expectations of almost all target consumers. However, around 20 years ago, the situation was very different, and some participants often recounted their experiences of buying large quantities of goods during temporary trips to Japan or other countries. After remarking that, “You can get anything,” now, Mr. Hosokawa recounted his memories as follows:

*Back in those days, and especially with our first daughter, you couldn't buy Japanese foods in Thailand, so our choices were very limited. Then, when I was going to Singapore on*

*business about once a month, in the MEIDI-YA [supermarket chain] there, they had an aisle full of condiments, an aisle full of snacks, and so on. In Thailand, there was only one aisle for everything. So when I went to Singapore, my colleagues and I took along empty bags and did our shopping there before returning. (Mr. Hosokawa)*

Despite the opening of the Japanese supermarket UFM FUJI SUPER, which exists even today, in 1985, at that time, there was only one store in Bangkok, and prices were high, making it difficult for people to use the store easily on a daily basis. This supermarket increased its number of stores to two in 1996, three in 2008, and four in 2010, as the number of Japanese living in Thailand increased. The stores are concentrated in the area of Bangkok with a large Japanese population and also function as places where Japanese residents can share information. Apart from selling quality products for Japanese clientele and catering to the needs of the Japanese living in Thailand, the supermarkets also serve as luxury foreign goods stores. However, in terms of the range of products available, the primary focus is on food products, and there are relatively few child-rearing items. In many cases, the prices of items imported from Japan are two to three times higher than in Japan, and there is indeed a sense that the products are expensive.

On the other hand, since the opening of the first Maxvalu store by the AEON Group in 2007, almost 100 Maxvalu stores, including the smaller stores, have opened.<sup>7</sup> While these stores are often used by Japanese residents, they have also gained popularity primarily among local Thais. The stores also stock the TOPVALU brand, which is also available in Japan, and although these items are slightly more expensive than in Japan, the range of products available, including daily necessities,

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<sup>7</sup> AEON (Thailand): <http://www.aeonthailand.co.th/store-information> (accessed November 30, 2017)

is almost the same as in Japan. Recently, in addition to the supermarkets, the drugstore TSURUHA Drug has opened 18 stores<sup>8</sup> that cater to increasing local demand, further increasing the range of options for purchasing Japanese commodities.

In addition to the goods described above, the supply of services has improved. The presence of Japanese cuisine in the Thai food service industry is highly significant. In Bangkok in particular, not only does what one might call traditional Japanese cuisine exist, specialist establishments offering dishes such as *ramen*, *okonomiyaki* (savory pancake), *yakiniku* (grilled meat), and Japanese-style Western dishes, and entertainment such as Karaoke, command a conspicuous presence: from the luxury restaurants to the shopping mall food courts, restaurants serving Japanese cuisine can be seen throughout the city. Although the sudden increase in Thai tourists visiting Japan has contributed to this, interest in Japanese cuisine across Thai society as a whole is also high (Japan External Trade Organization 2017). The number of establishments offering beauty treatments (beauty salons, massage parlors, and so forth) has also increased, partly due to attempts to cater to tourists from Japan. In the last few years, the number of Japanese-run beauty parlors has also increased from just a handful to almost 30, and such businesses have begun to reach beyond the Japanese expat market into Thai society on the strength of technical skills and fashion sense. Meanwhile, medical establishments—luxury hospitals in particular—are now providing Japanese interpretation services and seem to be catering exclusively to the needs of Japanese clients, culminating in an astounding level of service provision (Watanabe 2012).

In general, the participants in the present study appeared to be satisfied with this situation and seemed to be fulfilling most of

their daily life needs with the Japanese commodities available in Thailand, or locally produced substitutes, and hardly importing items directly from Japan on an individual basis, in consideration of the fact that they would also be living as a family in Thailand in the future and the need to balance quality with financial restrictions.

*I think we're lucky to be living in Thailand because there are 50 to 60 thousand Japanese people in Bangkok alone. We're living abroad, but there's also a Japanese environment, so I think it's a bit more Japanese than if you married and lived in a different country. I feel that there's more of a Japanese environment here than if we were bringing up children in another foreign country. (Mr. Nishiyama)*

However, although products manufactured or produced in Japan are often regarded as typically safe, one participant also pointed out that it is wrong to give hasty credit to commodities that are shipped from Japan. After raising the problem of agrochemicals, which also frequently surfaces as an issue in Japan, Mr. Sato stated that it is also difficult to trust produce imported from Japan and mentioned that he was ordering in produce directly from a Japanese organic farmer in Thailand. The families that were raising children at the time of the study could be seen to be fulfilling their life needs by, quite selectively, purchasing some items in Thailand and importing others from Japan.

### *5.2.2 Narratives on Educational Commodities: Japanese Language Education and Improvements in the Japanese Language Education Environment*

It can be assumed that, compared to the various other educational commodities, intangible goods and services have a special dimension. A typical example of such a commodity, Japanese language education was often spoken of as an essential component in the development of a Japanese identity; however, at the same time, many participants regarded it as an effective additional

<sup>8</sup> TSURUHA Drug (Thailand): <http://www.tsuruha.co.jp/service/thailand/> (accessed November 30, 2017)

investment linked to future income. Mr. Hosokawa stated that when his daughter, who had studied at the Thai-Japanese Association School through elementary school, was applying for jobs, he advised her to request treatment as a locally hired Japanese person, since there was a threefold gap between the salary systems for Thais and (locally employed) Japanese.

*When I told her to be sure to request treatment as a locally hired Japanese person, the people in charge of the interview said sorry but please join the company as a Thai person. We want you to come straight away, but as a Thai person, they said. Well, I thought, she passed the first grade the highest level of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test when she was in university...She has the paper saying she passed, and I told her to take that with her. So she received a Japanese [language] allowance that was higher than the starting wage for Thai people. What she was doing was close to the work of an interpreter or translator. (Mr. Hosokawa)*

According to Mr. Hosokawa, as a result of this, despite entering the company as a Thai person, his daughter was satisfied because she could obtain the equivalent Japanese language allowance and succeeded in advancing her career by also utilizing her Japanese ability when she switched jobs several years later. Such differences in salary resulting from the ability to speak Japanese were also mentioned numerous times in other interviews, if less directly. The idea that acquiring Japanese language ability was an effective investment, in the sense that it was expected to bring tangible benefits in the future, was widely shared.

On the other hand, in terms of the educational commodity of teaching materials, the participants recognized that it had suddenly become much easier to obtain items, mirroring the situation surrounding other Japanese commodities. Parents whose children were already grown up reflected that, in recent years, education must have become less of a challenge than before because of the

fact that it is now easier to obtain Japanese commodities and information on Japan in Bangkok. Ms. Kawabe recalled the time when she was raising her children about twenty years before the survey:

*My younger brother's wife is a kindergarten teacher, and she'd say, "We have this one," and so on. We ordered in stuff like Hanamaru Kids [educational material for children], and when someone visited on a business trip, we'd ask them to bring stuff. We ordered in the picture books that come out each month and bought videos when we went back to Japan on business. When my kids were young, there were still no Japanese broadcasts, so I was dying to show them Okasan to Issho [Japanese children's TV show]. So I bought heaps of singalong videos and so on, and just left them playing the whole time. My eldest son liked them, so he was engrossed in them every day. (Ms. Kawabe)*

In this way, participants often talked about the situation about 20 years before the study, when they used to obtain recordings of educational television shows and picture books in large quantities upon returning to Japan, or have their relatives in Japan send items *en masse*. However, since there are now large bookstores selling Japanese books in Bangkok and people can watch Japanese television in their homes without the problem of time difference, such problems rarely arise; moreover, it was pointed out that distance-education materials can be obtained and administered to children at roughly the same timing, and access to private Japanese tutoring schools is possible. These suggest that, as with living commodities, the focus seems to have shifted away from the situation in which people are primarily concerned with satisfying needs, and the gap between the Thai and Japanese educational environments appears to have closed. On the other hand, it is needless to say that a certain degree of economic power is necessary if these commodities are to be obtained. Japanese bookstores are avoided because they are expensive, and some participants mentioned that they were making use of educational

materials available free of charge online. It was also pointed out that, for older children, using Japanese language materials designed for Thai learners is effective.

An interesting characteristic in terms of educational commodities was that examples representing opposite ends of the financial spectrum were observed: while some people purchased expensive face-to-face lessons, such as those provided by the private tutoring schools, others described obtaining free educational materials online (for example, language drills and lessons on YouTube). Moreover, in recent years, one frequently hears about efforts by families to use applications such as Skype or LINE to engage in regular conversation with family members in Japan, as a way of stimulating their children's Japanese development.

*If you are poor then it's out of the question, but if you can afford it, there's nothing better to spend your money on than that, I think. If possible, the easiest way is to pay for education. If you don't buy it, you as parents have to do the hard work (laughs). (Mr. Aoki)*

Suzuki and Kubo (2018) pointed out that Japanese families in Vietnam used methods of procurement that were distinct from simple market transactions to obtain the child-rearing commodities that they needed. One example of this kind of behavior is that international couples organize regular activities, such as child-rearing circles, with the intention of having their children use Japanese while playing together. As with general child-rearing items, when discussing educational commodities, it may well be necessary to consider the reasons why Japanese families are living in the country and their economic situations, in addition to aspects such as how closely connected they are to the society in which they live.

### *5.2.3 Narratives on School Choice as a Form of Procuring Educational Commodities: Local Schools, Japanese Schools, and International Schools*

When treating educational decisions as a

form of commodity procurement, the most important and symbolic decisions—in terms of the amount of money spent, the length of time, and the degree of influence on present and future life—are those of school choice. Unlike other commodities, where school choice was concerned, the focus of the narratives did not appear to have changed over the past 20 years. When choosing a school as an educational service, in addition to the willingness to study and attend school (or, in the case of younger children, the willingness of the parents) and ability, the family's economic situation is an extremely important determinant. As the main options, local, Japanese, and international schools were understood in the following ways.

First, local schools can be either public<sup>9</sup> or private, and the level of trust in the education provided by the former was extremely low among the participants. There were no examples of families who sent their children to public schools, and those who used local schools always chose private establishments, which were understood to be the cheapest option. Although the private schools vary in size and standard, it would seem that the participants often cared about the standard of English education offered when making their choices. In Thai society, English ability is considered crucial for maintaining and improving one's socioeconomic position, and one of the participants stated that a kindergarten teacher had strongly recommended sending the child to a private elementary school. On the other hand, the private schools offer very few opportunities to study Japanese, and where families chose these kinds of schools, Japanese language education was conducted in the home on a

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<sup>9</sup> Although the participants referred to these schools as “public (*koritsu*)” during the interviews, in fact, with the exception of a few school schools in Bangkok, the vast majority of these schools are state-run (*kokuritsu*). However, this article will use the term “public” in keeping with the wording used in the interviews.



regular basis. Where the mother was Japanese, it was easier for the children to acquire Japanese since they spent more time with the mother; in contrast, where the father was Japanese, there was an understanding that it would be extremely difficult for the child to master Japanese.

*We're sending them to a normal private elementary school. Both our first and second daughters. It's called a mini-English program, although that doesn't mean that all of the classes are conducted in English. They normally speak in Thai, but they have English lessons every day... We thought it was good enough if they could speak Thai and English to an acceptable standard... So I know I should really teach them Japanese, but it's impossible at the moment. School finishes at 3:30. Then after that, they're learning Thai dancing at school. Then, they get home at 6:30, eat their dinner, and do their homework, so there's no time. So my feeling right now is that the most important language is Thai. For things like who am I, where am I, and ethical perspectives and so on, they will think about those things in Thai. In that sense, I think it's good enough for them to grow up into brilliant Thai people. (Mr. Tabé)*

While Japanese schools (Thai-Japanese Association School) are understood to provide the ideal environment for securing a Japanese identity, it was noted that because priority is given to children who are expected to return to Japan—including the children of the corporate employees stationed in Thailand—and because the schools are expensive (about 700 thousand yen per year for tuition fees and bus fare) and require a certain level of Japanese upon entry, these schools were difficult to gain access to. (However, some participants did recount certain “rumors,” stating, “The policies often change depending on the quota fill rate,” and, “Decisions on admissions are influenced by whether contributions are paid by the employer.”) Furthermore, factors such as the Thai partner being forbidden from attending PTA activities even if the child enters the school and concerns regarding progression

after graduating from junior high school (there is a Japanese senior high school in Bangkok called Josuikan, but it is separate from the Japanese schools) were regarded as barriers when making this choice. Nevertheless, the participants also identified as an advantage of the Japanese schools the fact that once children begin attending the school, concerns about Japanese language and culture cease to exist, and the children can go on to build networks with other Japanese (or Japanese–Thai children).

*The kindergarten provided education in Japanese, and they had English teaching in the afternoon, it wasn't an “international school,” but we chose a kindergarten with the word “international” in the name. We were wondering what to do about elementary school, and because the only way to master Japanese is to do it properly, and my wife seemed to understand that, we chose a Japanese school. (Mr. Hosokawa)*

Mr. Hosokawa has two children, a daughter who transferred from a Japanese school to an international school during grade three of junior high school and a son who went on to study at an international school after completing the junior high section of a Japanese school. Having acquired a basic grounding of Japanese during the primary school, they were expected to develop advanced English ability through English-centered education. While continuously providing a Thai language environment through interaction with their mother in the home and Thai society, the aim was for them to master three languages. Other families had also implemented or considered similar policies, and this seemed to be a common strategy, which was convincing to a certain degree.

The international schools, which were often described in relation to the considerable financial burden they impose, tend to charge from between 300 thousand yen and three

million yen per year,<sup>10</sup> making some of them cheaper than the Japanese schools. However, in actual practice, most families had chosen schools priced between 500 thousand and one million yen per year. Although participants commented that, for the expensive schools, “You have to be an employee stationed in Thailand subsidized by your company,” and, “It is impossible to send both children there,” the less expensive schools, known as “Thai-inters,” were avoided based on an understanding that they were “phony inters full of Thai people.” In either case, the international schools were cast as a means of acquiring English, and while Japanese education was considered important in terms of identity as well as an investment for acquiring additional capital, mastery of English was strongly believed to provide basic socioeconomic capital for the children’s future.

*Identity, being Japanese, and being able to speak Japanese are also important, but we thought that rather than going narrower we should go wider, and she needs to use English in the future to become global...She can get into a Thai inter, but then in the end, there’ll be problems like not being able to speak English fluently, and so on, because our child is going to just speak in Thai. It would be okay if she wasn’t half Thai; if she was Japanese. She’d learn English because she would have to speak English. (Mr. Nishiyama)*

To synthesize the interview narratives, the following model of language education and education and school choice is proposed. First, there was a common understanding that unless deliberate action was taken on education, children would not be able to acquire languages other than Thai. Moreover, all of the participants in fact shared the view that, “It is a good idea for one parent to continue talking to the children in one

language.” (*As a native speaker of Japanese, I will speak to my child in Japanese*). With the exception of cases in which the couples met in English-speaking countries or the couples still spoke to each other in English, the main language used in the home was Thai, and during the period shortly after the child was born, efforts were made for the Japanese parents to speak to the child in Japanese and the Thai parent to speak to the child in Thai.

Yet, to administer bilingual education in the home, in early childhood in particular, it is necessary for the Japanese partner to spend time with the child. For participants with jobs in particular, this is considered a difficult task, and as the child becomes older, the parents begin to feel that due to the lack of Japanese input, the child no longer has sufficient Japanese ability. Therefore, in most cases, Thai becomes the dominant language at home, and while the child is in nursery school or kindergarten, the parents make their first choice regarding how much Japanese language education to provide. As a result, people often choose bilingual (Japanese–Thai) schools where there is a large number of mixed race children. Because some schools now also teach English, when considering the possibility of progression to an international school, the level of English education also becomes an important factor in this choice.

Beyond elementary school, families who can afford to spend more on education often send their children to Japanese school or mid-level international schools, suggesting that the economic power of the family is an important determinant in this choice. However, for all the different school groups, there were participants who used Japanese language education outside school, including Japanese private tutoring schools, distance education from Japan, or child-rearing circles. There was also an example of a family whose children were not attending a Japanese school, which was using authorized textbooks distributed by the Japanese embassy to help their children study at home.

Nevertheless, there was also a case in

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to the tuition fee, bus fares cost between 200 and 400 thousand yen per year, depending on the distance to the school.

which the parents changed the child's school from a Japanese elementary school to an international junior high school with the intention of helping the child become fluent in English after the child acquired a foundation in Japanese. Therefore, it is important to note that the current choice of school is not always the final choice. The task of choosing schools is not completed in a single decision but continues to occupy the minds of family members going forward.

#### *5.2.4 Narratives on Japanese Identity: Components of Educational Commodity Needs*

In the interviews, the notion of relinquishing either the Japanese or Thai identity and educating the child as a “fully Japanese/Thai person” was considered not only impractical but also unnecessary. Rather, the participants were often concerned about how to achieve a balance between not only the two cultures of Japanese and Thai but also a third “global” identity, symbolized by English, amid economic constraints. Although some participants were worried that their children would become confused through being exposed to multiple languages during early childhood, and some mentioned the possibility that the child may end up living outside Thailand in the future, all of the participants had placed Thainess as the core of their children's education, which reflected the parents' own wishes to live in Thailand in the future. One participant who held such an attitude was Mr. Aoki, whose child was attending a Japanese school:

*When my daughter is 20, if she had to choose between being Japanese or Thai, I think she'd probably choose Thai. Thai people are basically kind-hearted, and maybe you could say they accept anything. In Japan, people tend to be less accepting in some ways, because there's such an effort to encourage independence. When I look at my child and bring her up, I feel that she'll grow into a Thai person. Of course, Thai people also have their bad points. I feel that I want to do what I can about those aspects myself. Even if it doesn't go*

*as far as having a Japanese identity, I am always thinking about it. On the question of how I should approach that challenge, I also don't have an answer to that. (Mr. Aoki)*

While Mr. Aoki's concerns are described within the framework of himself and his child, the narrative of Ms. Ueno, the mother of a two-year-old child, suggests that, on the issue of school choice, in addition to her own wishes, she was also considering the opinions of her husband and parents-in-law. Ms. Ueno's concerns can be gleaned from the way in which she, while accepting her child's adaption to Thai society as a matter of course, finally gave air to her feelings, encouraged by the positive attitudes toward Japanese held by her husband and parents-in-law.

*First of all, my child is Thai and is living in Thailand, so I want my child to be able to read and write properly in Thai. At the same time, Thai people are also passionate about English, and children of that age, and the children of the people I know, are attending international schools. So I think it's important to help the children speak English more like native speakers at that age, and I personally want my child to be able to read and write Japanese properly as part of its identity, but recently I feel that the priority of Japanese is a little low... But it seems like my in-laws and my husband see Japanese as a slightly higher priority than I do. Sending my child to a Japanese school and then moving her to an international school at the age of 9, 10, or 11 is also an option, I think, until my child's old enough to understand how to study Japanese kanji and the ways of Japanese schools. Yes, actually, I also kind of felt like, “Thank goodness!” when his parents said that to me. Then there's my own ego. After all I want my child to know about Japan, so I felt a little relieved, thinking that sending her to a Japanese school until the age of about 10 also wasn't bad idea. (Ms. Ueno)*

However, neither Mr. Aoki nor Ms. Ueno felt pressured about the fact that their children would be raised primarily as a Thai person, instead focused on the issue of how to incorporate the dimension of Japanese-ness.

There were also cases where, as the child grew up, the situation seemed to change as the parent began to accept the situation (such as their child becoming more and more Thai). As another example of incorporating Japanese-ness, Mr. Sato, who could spend very little time with his child due to divorce, did feel pressured because, at one point, his son was only conscious of his Thai identity, during which time Mr. Sato continued to convey his own life ideals on life whenever he had the opportunity to do so.

*In terms of nationality, he is both Thai and Japanese, and he doesn't need to choose one. Even if I went to a different country in the future, that would be included in the family. Well, not family but home. I'm trying to tell him that this is home, Bangkok is home, and he has family in all of the places. And he's gradually coming to see that in a positive light. (Mr. Sato)*

Thus, while the issue of language education served as an opening to the narratives, what was considered important when choosing schools was actually how to help the children build an identity in which the countries of Japanese and Thailand are connected. In the narratives on language education, although the participants invariably regarded the languages Thai, Japanese, and English as valuable assets, the approaches to the various languages were different: while it was considered that the children would learn Thai naturally through interaction with their Thai relatives and Thai society, the participants thought that the children would not acquire Japanese unless the Japanese parent made an effort (to spend time educating the child, or alternatively “outsourcing” this task to a school or private tutoring school where financially viable). However, regardless of the nature of this balance between Japanese and Thai, all of the families viewed English as something to invest in in order to broaden the child's potential in the future, and it was common for them to use school education as the principal method of acquiring the language. In view of

the above, when considering the educational needs of international families, it is necessary to bear in mind that, contra to needs surrounding life commodities, there is a considerable variation in the substance of the needs themselves.

All participants had chosen Thailand as the place to raise their children, yet on many occasions during the interviews, the participants also referred to examples where Japanese–Thai couples had chosen Japan as the location of child rearing. Accordingly, it was possible to perceive two separate dimensions, in which people were pleased in having chosen Japan or regretted not choosing Thailand. This difference was evaluated along the lines that whereas in Japan, children are brought up in the Japanese way, in Thailand, children can (potentially) be raised more globally, as symbolized by English education; this understanding was characterized by the fact that went beyond the dichotomous structure wherein Japan is defined by the Japanese way and Thai by the Thai way. This invites the interpretation that, for Japanese people in Japanese–Thai families in Thailand, global education, as symbolized by the “international schools,” occupies a more familiar position, both socially and financially, than its equivalent in Japan. Mr. Hosokawa, who sent his two children to an international school after they had studied at a Japanese school, helping them become proficient in Japanese, Thai, and English, described the experience of a friend who also married a Thai partner at around the same time:

*He returned to Japan. And his wife also returned to Japan. They had three children, and his wife worked incredibly hard to learn Japanese. So their daughters don't understand Thai. They were brought up as typical, ordinary Japanese persons. They're all grow up now, so I'm sure they also recognize that their mother is Thai. Their mother made the mistake of working hard at her Japanese, and apparently that they use Japanese to communicate. Once I told the mother that they need to learn Thai as well, but whenever she talked to them in Thai, they never*

*listen to her and just said, "You must be kidding." As a result, the children lost the ability to speak Thai. When that happened, I guess the mother made up her mind to communicate with them in Japanese. (Mr. Hosokawa)*

The daughters of Mr. Tabe, who, as we saw earlier, moved to Thailand aspiring to live overseas and is now self-employed, attend a local private school and have limited Japanese ability; however, Mr. Tabe stated that he often takes them to his workplace so that they can see him engaged in his work. According to Mr. Tabe, this was not so much an attempt to secure the continuity of an identity by inculcating the children with Japanese language and culture, but rather the result of his wish to foster in them an ethical perspective, in which he too could share, by spending time together. This can be regarded as a form of educational ideology, held by those with an especially high degree of preference for, and adaption to, life in the country of residence. Continuity with the Thai parent may also be maintained in this way in cases where families return to Japan.

## **6. Discussion**

### *6.1. Multifocal Educational Ideologies: Educational Needs from the Perspectives of Goods and Services*

The interviews have shown that, first, due to rapid improvements over the last 20 years in the range of commodities available in Bangkok, where the participants lived, difficulties surrounding the procurement of commodities that arise as a result of "living overseas" have decreased while satisfaction with the level of commodity procurement has increased. At the same time, the interview participants had deepened their relationship with, and understanding of, Thai society, through marriage and child rearing amid these changes, and had developed a stronger preference for life in Thailand. This corresponds to the view that this process is related to the degree of satisfaction with life and the degree of preference for life in the

country (Niwa and Nakagawa 2015, Kubo et al. 2017). When the relationship between preference for life in Thailand and satisfaction concerning the availability of commodities can be procured is expressed in its simplest form, it appears that people whose lives are rooted in Thailand—particularly those who have married Thai partners and are raising children—tend to have a flexible approach to substituting goods and services with those designed for the locals, while also tending to evaluate their own flexible attitude highly.

One characteristic of the procurement of child-rearing commodities is the involvement of dimensions that require parents to predict and suppose the value that commodities might hold for their children.<sup>11</sup> In the interviews, it became clear that there were previously some people who insisted on purchasing Japanese commodities from the point of view of product safety; however, recently, because the Japanese and Thai child-rearing cultures have become more similar and the quality of local commodities has improved, although Japanese commodities are still highly trusted, people are selectively and strategically choosing between Japanese and local products while considering factors such as necessity, timing, price-based constraints, and so forth. To give a concrete example, to fulfil their children's clothing needs, parents choose between methods such as ordering in from Japan, buying from Uniqlo in Thailand, and buying in local Thai stores, based on factors such as economic power, convenience, and their feelings. This shows that people's needs for child-rearing commodities are measured

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<sup>11</sup> The key points here are heterogeneity of product commodity evaluation (whether considerable differences arise when the commodity is evaluated after purchase and use) and interrelatedness with other products (commodities do not have independent use value but are meaningful when used with other commodities). This will be examined in further detail in a separate article.

against the criteria of whether commodities are “equivalent to those in Japan,” and commodity procurement is considered on the basis of how much supplementing (with local alternatives and so on) must take place for these needs to be satisfied amid restrictions on the methods of procurement. Although this pattern was conspicuous across the whole spectrum of life products, in the area of education commodities in particular, a similar response was observed for more tangible product types, such as educational materials.

On the other hand, concerning the procurement of educational services, although some participants did comment that it was now easier to expose their children to Japanese culture through Japanese television broadcasts, the structure of recollections on the situation 20 years ago and narratives of the current situation were similar, both focusing on “how and how much to teach Japanese components while living in Thailand.” Choices surrounding educational service commodities can have an irreversible influence on children’s human development. At the same time, this can also be taken as evidence that the degree of preference for life in Thailand is related to the degree of acceptance of children being brought up as Thai people. In other words, needs for educational service commodities can also be expressed in terms of the development of the child’s identity, or what kind of person the parents want the child to become. Furthermore, when this is observed through the model in which needs are fulfilled through the procurement of commodities, we can see that although needs for goods can be fulfilled completely, if there is an equivalence with Japan, where services are concerned, achieving equivalence with Japan (becoming “Japanese”) is not the goal in the first place. In other words, it must be pointed out that since families’ educational needs are more diverse than their needs for general commodities, Japanese–Thai couples living in Thailand are not necessarily vulnerable in terms of educational choice. For example,

while their situation is unfavorable in terms of education for developing as a Japanese person in which Thai elements are excluded, it is favorable from the perspective of seeking multifocal education that considers Japan and Thailand, or global education, as symbolized by English language learning. Thus, it is evident that the educational ideologies of international couples in Thailand are constructed around multiple axes.

## 6.2. “Education for Global Era”: In Comparison with Marriage Migrants to East Asia

This framework concerning the incorporation of components of Japanese identity corresponds to the findings of previous research on international marriages involving Japanese people who had moved to other East Asian countries (Sakai 2013, Watanabe et al. 2016) and is clearly distinct from cases in which non-Japanese parents make strategic efforts to assimilate into Japanese society, as in the case of Mr. Hosokawa’s friend introduced above. While similar patterns have been found among Japanese migrants in Europe and North America (e.g., Yabuki 2011), this situation likely also reflects the fact that Japanese–Thai couples also recognize the value of their children acquiring Japanese components as they grow up in Thai society.

In Watanabe et al.’s (2016) study on child-rearing among Japanese–Korean and Japanese–Chinese couples, it was widely observed across nationality combinations that partners who moved overseas to marry made various efforts to educate their children in the languages and cultures of their countries, purchasing picture books and educational materials, using networks of people from their home countries, and using Japanese schools with expensive tuition fees. In many cases, the reasons given for these educational efforts were that the parents wanted to help the child develop a Japanese identity or wanted to invest in its future by broadening its socioeconomic potential. In this respect,

there is considerable overlap with the participants of the present study. In the interviews, there were no parents who sought to assimilate their children into Thai society through local Thai education or to instill in their children a completely Japanese identity; Japanese language and identity were instead regarded as additional facets. In other words, despite a propensity to encourage children to “develop a Japanese identity,” the degree to which this was sought differed among the families. Specifically, in cases where Japanese education was arranged, participants showed “preferences” for certain methods—ordering items from Japan, purchasing expensive services provided locally, taking steps independently using the internet, and so forth—in a tradeoff with their financial and time burdens. Moreover, some families chose the option of “study abroad” in Japan once their children had reached a certain age.

On the other hand, one important difference was that in the Japanese–Thai families, a significant number of people procured a kind of “global education,” symbolized by English language education at international schools. While there is also a strong focus on this kind of global education in South Korea and China, in those countries, it is very uncommon to send the children to international schools, and this highlights a dimension specific to Thai society. It can be considered that raising children in Thai society has advantages in terms of the feasibility of global education. But in all cases, it was the balance between needs and economic power that emerged as a problem. The challenge of helping children develop Japanese qualities while living in Thailand poses a great burden, both financially and in terms of time. It is necessary to bear in mind that most participants in the present study were from financially stable middle-class families.

## **7. Conclusion**

First, the study has shown that among

Japanese–Thai couples living in Thailand, there may be a strong tendency to feel satisfied with the goods and services available locally, which would appear to stem from a wish “to spend their life” in Thailand. Although in the past, the high quality of Japanese commodities has been emphasized, we can see that, due to recent developments in distribution and improvements in the quality of local commodities, the consumption of Japanese commodities is now strongly associated with the aspects of developing and maintaining Japanese identity, and as an investment for the future. Moreover, compared to employees of Japanese companies stationed in Thailand, who usually receive generous support from their employers, international couples are often employed locally or operate their own businesses and face considerable financial constraints. Other characteristics of this group is that they have lived in Thailand for a longer period, have a strong preference for Thai society, and actively seek to incorporate the Thai way of life, and such preferential attitudes toward Thailand also seem to be connected to an acceptance of the fact that their children will be raised in Thailand. However, even among this group, there is a keen recognition of the need for education related to the development of Japanese identity. However, education related to the development of Japanese identity tends to be expensive (or take time), and there is also the view that raising children globally, at “international schools where it is easy to gain access to English education,” is a favorable strategy for raising children. In addition, the idea that English has superior investment value than Japanese or Thai is widely shared, and such positioning of English above Japanese and Thai seems to have given rise to a structure in which the Japanese and Thai cultures are rarely opposed.

Since educational commodity needs differ depending on the family’s social and economic situations as well as their children’s development, families must achieve an

appropriate combination of Japanese and Thai language and culture, along with components such as English education, from a long-term perspective, while making adjustments as necessary. While people's evaluation of how well needs are satisfied may also vary between ongoing experiences and reflections on the past, it should be pointed out that in the interview narratives, this also seemed to be changing in a way that positively affirmed the child's development.

Invoking an economic perspective, the study has revealed the various aspects of international couples' commodity procurement and the diversity surrounding their educational commodity needs by considering these on the basis of the classifications of goods and services and a model in which needs are satisfied through the procurement of commodities. However, due to space limitations, it was not possible to fully consider the matter of specificity in child-rearing goods and educational services as commodities. These points remain challenges for future research.

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