Group2

JIA Yunshuo
Mikihiro TANAKA
Keitaro KUNO
Kudakwashe MUTENDA
Haruko NAGANO
Kazumi MIYATA
Keely BRANDON
Motoko TOKUSHIMA
Wee Meng GOH
Yuki KUBOTA
Chie HASHIMOTO
International Marriage as a Microcosm of Multi-Cultural Societies

Globalization is complex and multi-faceted: it has far-reaching economic, cultural, political and social effects. Rapid globalization has stimulated many debates about the changes, whether from a negative perspective of warning or an optimistic perspective of opportunity. Opponents and proponents are to be found in all parts of the world, and the debates are unlikely to be completely resolved in the foreseeable future. There are strong advocates and detractors for each aspect of globalization, but some aspects are more clearly beneficial than others.

One major facet of globalization is an increased mobility of people and cultures. People from opposite sides of the globe are meeting and exchanging ideas more than ever before. Advances in communication technology, notably widespread access to the internet, has allowed people around the world to connect directly with individuals from previously much more “distant” lands. Furthermore, with economic globalization more and more people are working overseas, whether short or long term, and increasing diversity in communities worldwide.

Within this multi-culturalization is an important phenomenon which is increasingly common. International marriage is becoming more and more common, with far-reaching impacts on global society. What makes this topic of particular interest is its resemblance to the larger pattern of multi-cultural society. The challenges and benefits inherent in an international marriage relationship parallel those faced by two distinct cultural groups living side by side in a community. Lessons from successful international marriages could be applied to societies struggling to deal with the challenges brought by the introduction of large numbers of foreign immigrants.
In both international marriages and multi-cultural societies, people from widely different backgrounds are brought together during their daily lives. Whether they interact at home, at work or at the grocery store, many of the same conflicts may arise. Differences in religion, communication styles, expectations, priorities and family traditions can cause friction, misunderstandings or overt conflict in marriages or between different culture groups in society. With respect and dialog, conflicts can diffuse and both sides may be enriched.

One of the major issues that arises in both situations is a clash of cultures. In marriages one major issue can be confusion and tensions arise about national identity and cultural differences. These clashes are particularly common with the extended families of couples in international marriages. Likewise foreigners in a new host country struggle with striking a balance between their own culture and adapting to the culture of their new home. These can be seen as problems or as opportunities to learn from another culture.

Within marriages conflicts also arise having to do with lifestyle differences. Different ideas about food, clothing, family values, time concepts and relationship styles can cause stress between people. On the other hand, couples can be enriched by sharing their respective cultures and particularly their children can benefit from a multi-cultural and often multi-lingual background. When cultural exchange is taken to a community level it has an even greater impact. In a positive environment a community can gain a lot from immigrant communities. Particularly if a large group from a particular culture is developed, all of the community’s members can benefit from increased exposure to that culture’s art, music, language, food, etc. Children can grow up with diverse friends, better equipped for lives in the modern globalized world.
Work expectations can also cause conflict. Different expectations of work styles, policies, and work hours can cause conflict both at work and at home. In a marriage people may disagree about how to balance their work lives and private lives. The expectations placed on Japanese businessmen are very different from those in other countries, particularly those in Europe. Another conflict that often arises is whether or not both partners will work. Again, if a couple is able to talk through these issues they can grow closer and come to a conclusion that makes everyone happy. Meanwhile, diversity in the workplace brings a variety of viewpoints that can increase productivity and enrich everyone’s worldview.

As a final example, language barriers are an often cited issue facing individuals and communities. However, if handled well it can be one of the greatest benefits of intercultural interaction. In marriages a couple’s communication can actually be enhanced by a language difference. Conversations are more deliberate, and there is less assumption that the other should automatically understand the other. With greater effort there are often better results. Other forms of communication can be developed, and ideally both partners can learn parts of the other’s language. Certainly the children are likely to benefit from bilingualism. Friends and community members, if they embrace the opportunity, can also learn and grow from relationships with their neighbors.

International interaction presents a diversity of challenges and opportunities. Some differences, such as religious differences and family expectations, are particularly difficult to resolve, but with mutual respect and effort, any cultural conflicts can be converted to assets. It is our hope that as the world’s people are brought closer and interact more frequently, we will embrace our differences, learn from each other, and live in harmony.