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DRIVERS OF POST-SOVIET MARRIAGE MIGRATION TO JAPAN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN GENDER, LEGAL STATUS, CULTURAL ASPIRATIONS

The motives of marriage migrants are dominated by economic interest in the works studied so far. The image of international marriage migrants is those who travel from developing countries to developed countries in order to improve their economic situation. The purpose of the research work is to analyze the motives of marriage migration directed from the post – Soviet states to Japan and identify the current trend. This research explores the diverse motivations for marriage migration from post-Soviet countries to Japan, arguing that these movements are not limited to simple economic incentives. The empirical data consists of 25 semi-structured interviews with marriage migrants from the post-Soviet space (aged 25–45 years) all of whom are legally married to Japanese nationals and have resided in Japan for at least one year. Additionally, the study incorporates content analysis of open-source social media materials of Russian-speaking migrants in Japan. The research employs an intersectional approach as an analytical framework to examine migratory drivers at the intersection of gender identity, residency and legal status, socio-economic positioning, education and cultural assets. The study's findings indicate that motivations for marriage-based migration emerge from a combination of strategies: while for some participants, the primary driver is the pragmatic pursuit of legal stability and social security; for others, it is a means of departure from traditional gender norms and expectations in the country of origin. Beyond pragmatic factors, cultural interest to Japan also plays a significant role frequently serving as the critical precursor to both marriage and residency. In conclusion, the study highlights the necessity of considering the marriage migration not as a one-dimensional act, but as a complex social phenomenon integrated into the broader life strategies and international mobility frameworks of individuals. The value of the research work shows the transformation of the motives of marital migrants. The practical significance of the work is that the collected materials cover an extensive period of the causes and motives of marital migrants from post-Soviet countries and the materials can be used as a historiographical overview of this research topic.

Keywords: marriage migration, Japan, post-Soviet countries, migrants, gender, migration status, migration motivations.

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Посткеңестік елдерден Жапонияға бағытталған неке миграциясының мотивтері: гендер, миграциялық мәртебе және мәдени бағыттар

Неке мигранттарының мотивтері осы уақытқа дейін зерттелген жұмыстарда экономикалық мүдде басымдыққа ие. Халықаралық неке мигранттарының бейнесі – дамушы елдерден дамыған елдерге экономикалық жағдайын жақсарту мақсатында баратындар. Зерттеу жұмысының мақсаты – посткеңестік мемлекеттерден Жапонияға бағытталған неке миграциясының мотивтерін талдап, қазіргі кезде қалыптасқан тенденцияны анықтау. Зерттеудің эмпирикалық негізін посткеңестік елдерден келген жапон азаматтарымен отбасын құрған, Жапонияда кемінде бір жыл тұрған неке мигранттарымен (25–45 жас) жүргізілген жартылай құрылымды сұхбат құрайды. Қосымша Жапонияда тұрып жатқан орыс тілді неке мигранттарының әлеуметтік желідегі ашық қолданыстағы дереккөздері контент-анализ қолданылды. Сонымен қатар Жапониядағы посткеңестік елдерден келген неке мигранттарын зерттеген ғалымдардың еңбектері жинақталып, шолу жасалды. Методологиялық талдау негізі ретінде интерсекционалды тәсілі пайдаланылды. Бұл тәсіл мигранттардың мотивтерін гендер, миграциялық және құқықтық мәртебе, әлеуметтік-экономикалық жағдайы, білімі және мәдени капитал қиылысында қарастыруға мүмкіндік береді. Зерттеу нәтижесінде неке миграциясының мотивтері миграцияға дейінгі, миграция кезінде қабылданған стратегиялар жиынтығы екені анықталды. Респонденттердің бір бөлігі үшін

халықаралық неке тұрақтылыққа ұмтылыс, құқықтық мәртебесін заңдастыру болса, екінші бір бөлігіне туған елінде қалыптасқан гендерлік шектеулер мен нормалардан шығу, тең құқылы отбасылық қатынасқа ұмтылу, сонымен қатар Жапонияға қатысты мәдени қызығушылық некеге тұру мен көшуге шешім қабылдауда шешуші роль атқарған екен. Қорытындылай келгенде, неке миграциясын бір фактормен түсіндіретін біртұтас миграциялық әрекет ретінде емес, халықаралық мобильділік стратегиялары мен өмірлік ұстанымдарының өзгерісімен байланысқан күрделі әлеуметтік феномен ретінде қарастыру қажет екені анықталды. Зерттеу жұмысының құндылығы неке мигранттарының мотивтерінің трансформациясы көрсетілген. Практикалық маңыздылығы – зерттеу жұмысында посткеңестік елдерден келген неке мигранттарының себебі ауқымды уақыт аралығын қамтыған, сол себепті осы зерттеу тақырыбында тарихнамалық шолу барысында қолданылуға ұсынылады.

Түйін сөздер: неке миграциясы, Жапония, посткеңестік елдер, мигранттар, гендер, миграциялық мәртебе, миграция мотивтері.

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Мотивы брачной миграции из постсоветских стран в Японию: гендер, миграционный статус и культурные траектории

Долгое время в исследовании мотивы международных брачных мигрантов рассматривали в контексте экономической необходимости. Развитые страны притягивали мигрантов из развивающихся стран соевой стабильной экономикой, развитым обществом. Цель данной статьи – сделать анализ мотивов международных брачных мигрантов из постсоветских стран в Японии. Эмпирическая основа исследования – 25 полуструктурированных интервью с брачными мигрантами из постсоветского пространства (возраст 25–45 лет), состоящими в зарегистрированном браке с гражданином Японии и проживающими в стране не менее одного года, дополнительно использован контент-анализ открытых материалов в социальных сетях русскоязычных мигрантов в Японии. В качестве аналитической рамки применяется интерсекциональный подход, позволяющий рассмотреть мотивы миграции на пересечении гендера, миграционного и правового статуса, социально-экономического положения, образования и культурного капитала. Результаты исследования показывают, что мотивы брачной миграции формируются как совокупность стратегий: для части респондентов ключевым является стремление к устойчивости и легализации статуса, для другой – выход из гендерных норм и ожиданий страны происхождения, а также ориентация на более равноправную модель партнерства, значимую роль играет и культурный интерес к Японии, который нередко предшествует решению о переезде и браке. В итоге делается вывод о необходимости рассматривать брачную миграцию как сложный социальный феномен, связанный с изменением жизненных траекторий и стратегий международной мобильности, а не как единое миграционное поведение, объяснимое одним фактором. Ценность исследовательской работы показана трансформация мотивов брачных мигрантов. Практическая значимость работы – собранные материалы охватывают обширные период причины и мотивов брачных мигрантов из постсоветских стран и материалы можно использовать как историографический обзор данной исследовательской темы.

Ключевые слова: брачная миграция, Япония, постсоветские страны, мигранты, гендер, миграционный статус, мотивы миграции.

Introduction

International marriages serve as a reflection of globalization, which dissolves national borders and creates favorable conditions for human mobility. Advancement in information technology and social networking simplify the development of romantic relationships between people. These processes act as both direct and indirect catalysts for the rise of international marriages. The acquisition of independence and the opening of borders in post-Soviet countries have accelerated internation-

al cooperation in the economic and cultural sectors with foreign countries. The influx of foreign investment, the development of global tourism, and increased participation in international academic programs develop have collectively given an impetus to the expansion of education, labor, and marriage-based relocation. Building on a long history of regional interethnic cohabitation within the post-Soviet space, these marital patterns have expanded beyond the boundaries of a single country or region and have expanded into a truly international dimension.

Literature review

This research utilizes a comprehensive theoretical and methodological framework by analyzing international migration through an intersectional approach. This approach allows us to frame marriage migration as a complex life-choice strategy instead of a response to any single dominant life choice. Within the concept of marriage migration, international marriage serves as a strategic mechanism for resolving residency status, achieving socio-economic stability, and accessing new life opportunities. However, restricting the analysis of such motivations only through migration theory risks a reductional view on marriage migration. By relying solely on economic incentives, the research often neglects the gendered and cultural aspects of the phenomenon. To address this, the intersectional approach of Kimberlé Crenshaw was adopted for the study. In this paper, marriage migration is analyzed at the intersection of gender and legal status, socio-economic positioning, education, and cultural capital. This approach reconceptualizes marriage as a sophisticated life-choice strategy beyond economic benefits. These factors do not exist in isolation, but rather complement and reinforce one another (Crenshaw K., 1989).

The modern migratory landscape has deeper roots and reasons dating back to the 90s. The systematic political, economic, and social changes around the world catalyzed a significant rise in the number of migrants worldwide, where labor, educational, and marriage migration are deeply intertwined where one serves as a cause, and the other is an effect.

Japan, as one of the developed countries, faced with socio-demographic problems, has become a «receiving country» for marriage migrants since the 1980s to the present day, especially in the East Asian and Southeast Asian regions. This development peaked mid-decade in 2005, demonstrating the maturity of marriage migration as a significant social trend (Kim V., Balgoa N., Yamamoto B., 2021).

The academic discourse on Japanese migration concept reflects a shift from considering migrants as passive subjects to strategic agents. One prominent area of study concerns migrants from the Philippines, who were historically viewed as a labor force or as a commodity, but at the same time were active members of society with distinct needs and desires (Suzuki N., 2003). Although early work on Filipino migrants examined mail-order brides as domestic servants and nightclub performers pursuing economic advancement, N. Suzuki portrays them as

free, independent agents of society. Another significant group consists of foreign spouses from Europe, highly skilled workers and with significant motivations for migration (Morgan Ch., 2016). More recent works examine the marriage strategy of highly educated marriage migrants from China, focusing on their motivations for marriage, and the aim of securing a quality education for their children (Shikita K., 2014). Marriage migration serves as a solution to the demographic problems, such as the shortage of women in rural areas of Japan (Kamiya H., Lee H., 2009). Divorced women stigmatized in Chinese society leave their country to marry Japanese men, and through marriage migration they gain the opportunity to reside in Japan and raise children from previous marriages (Sari K., 2022). Research also examines maintaining national and gender hierarchy through marriage norms concluded with foreigners (Nagayoshi K., Torngren S., Takenoshita H., 2023).

Migration became a mass phenomenon during the period of German reunification and the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to major economic, political, and social changes in Europe (Komai H., 2001). Political unrest, and socio-economic crisis throughout the world have led to the emergence of new migrant groups. Economic necessity and poverty forced people to leave their country in search of employment as developed economies attracted migrants from less developed regions. In the era of globalization, marriage migration evolved into a global phenomenon, with developed economies attracting migrants from all over the world. By the 2010s, «supernewcomers» emerged in Japan including many educational and professional migrants, as well as those pursuing «lifestyle migration». Those coming from Russia often have different ethnic backgrounds; in some cases, this is due to the fact that their parents had previously moved to Russia from other post-Soviet countries, reflecting Russia's historical status as a migration destination (Mukhina V., 2013). Post-Soviet countries, including Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have seen a steady flow of migrants to Japan for their purposes of education, marriage, and family reunification. Online surveys of Russian-speaking migrants in Japan showed that these individuals tend to have high levels of education, and many had professional work experience before migrating (Golovina K., Mukhina V., 2017). Many female immigrants entered Japan on artist visas and worked in bars and clubs as hostesses. Others either arrived as marriage migrants or married locals after previously working in the entertainment industry (Mukhina V., 2013; Golovina K., 2017; Kim V., 2021). Russian-speaking researchers also

examine migration and gender policy and its influence on female marriage migration (Kim V., 2014; Mukhina V., 2012). Their work covers social integration, the socialization of migrant women in Japanese society, and the role of spouses in this process (Baibikov E., 2006; Kim V., Yem N., 2023).

Factors that influence marriage migration despite cultural differences include structural elements such as a country's economy, education levels, and gender dynamics (Mukhina V., 2012). Furthermore, a nation's immigration policy significantly shapes international marriage patterns. Regardless of geographical and cultural disparities, the strategies employed by migrants from developing countries are often similar, as marriage to a Japanese national frequently represents the most accessible pathway to residency. Japan's immigration policy typically grants short-term, six-month visas to unskilled workers in the entertainment industry. Once these visas expire, workers are required to return to their home countries and are only permitted to re-enter after one year.

Existing research indicates that domestic and socio-economic instability, precarious living conditions, and concerns regarding children's futures act as a «push factor» for pursuing international marriage. Women with children from previous marriages often utilize marriage migration as a proactive life-course strategy who seek partners abroad to secure a better standard of living in a developed country. This is particularly prevalent among residents of the Russian Far East, where proximity to the Japanese border offers greater opportunities for relocation. Due to the presence of Japanese workers in the region and widespread information about Japan, local interest is high, facilitating opportunities to meet and build relationships. A 2002 survey revealed that 71% of Russian Far East residents viewed international marriage positively. In contrast, respondents from regions more remote from Japan indicated that they met their spouses by chance and had not previously considered marrying a Japanese national. Consequently, it is evident that the motivations and drivers of marriage migrants are highly diverse. Female migrants from Russia are mainly focused on marriage or academic pursuits, whereas migrants from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan arrive in Japan predominantly for education purposes. Survey results indicate that the majority of these women possess higher education degrees and are employed in Japan within their professional fields (Mukhina V., Golovina K., 2017). Consequently, women's motivations vary by country of origin and geographic

location, influenced by cultural differences, diverse upbringings, and domestic socio-political situations. Following changes in Russian and Japanese visa and tax policies between 2006 and 2009, the number of migrants entering the entertainment industry decreased significantly (Mukhina V., Golovina K., 2017; Kim V., 2021). As a result, the drivers for marriage migration shifted; during this period, individuals began meeting through social networks and dating applications. Additionally, some were introduced to Japanese nationals through friends or relatives already living in Japan, while others enrolled in language schools with the dual aim of seeking professional employment or marriage.

During the Soviet Union, women were often instrumental in addressing political, economic, and social challenges. Women were raised with the ideal image of a «housewife» leading many to strive for a traditional marriage, a characteristic that distinguishes them from migrants of other nationalities. Since this family model becomes unattainable in their own country, they seek to realize their happiness in another country (Kim V., 2014). Despite the fact that gender equality was promoted in the Soviet Union, women were raised according to the model that a woman's happiness lies in the family, motherhood, and marriage. Men were viewed as the primary breadwinner who provides for his family. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic crisis changed the structure of these concepts; men who lost their jobs could no longer provide a secure life for their families prompting women to look for this ideal relationship model abroad. Japan also attracted interest as a highly developed country. Marriage migration became a way to legalize one's status in the country, providing economic stability, and the opportunity to support and reunite one's family. It is an alternative to labor migration, but an easier and more stable form. In labor migration, there is no guarantee of staying in Japan long term, losing a job often forces one to leave the country. It is important to be a highly specialized person and have a high level of Japanese language. There are a number of requirements to find a good job and obtain a long-term work visa. Compared to these requirements, a spousal visa is an easier way to solve the residency issues. However, not everyone is fortunate enough to meet their destiny and build relationships based on love. In some instances, migrants engage in marriages of convenience to secure residency, which exposes them to severe legal repercussions and exploitation. Exploitative actors or predatory locals often capitalize on the migrant's urgent need for a spousal

visa, imposing coercive conditions and fostering an environment of structural vulnerability. The legal dependency often causes even in marriages founded on love, with spouses taking advantage of their position and blackmailing. But many women are trapped in a cycle of endurance because marriage is the only mechanism to obtain a visa and legalize their status within the law.

Early studies identify economic gain as the primary motive. However, other aspects based on alternative motivations, such as human emotions, relationships, and gender, remain largely unexplored (Constable N., 2005). Viewing all migrant women solely as victims or as individuals seeking economic incentive fails to provide a complete picture of contemporary international marriages. In the contemporary world, an increasing number of highly educated women who choose to live in different countries, pursue education, professional aspirations, and build relationships regardless of their place of residence. Consequently, the notion that economic gain is the singular, dominant reason for marriage migration has become obsolete. One contributing factor is the crisis of the domestic family model. The traditional heteronormative model of labor viewing the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the homemaker is outdated; today, contemporary women proactively engage in professional life, seek career perspectives, frequently achieving or exceeding income often earning as much as or more than men. Many women can no longer accept the old model, yet men often remain reluctant to adapt to this new reality. The reasons for seeking familial happiness abroad are diverse, influenced by various social, economic, political, cultural, and psychological factors (Ryazantsev S., Sivoplyasova S., Rostovskaya T., Bushkova L., 2018).

Materials and methods of research

The data collection methodology for this study utilized semi-structured interviews with marriage migrants from post-Soviet countries, supplemented by a content analysis of open-source materials on the social media of Russian-speaking migrants in Japan. The empirical basis of the study consists of 25 semi-structured interviews with marriage migrants from Kazakhstan and Russia currently residing in Japan, aged 25 to 45. Interviews conducted in Russian. Materials related to migrants from Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus were used as supplementary contextual data through content analysis of open-source social media sources, in order to broaden the comparative background of the study. A purposive

sampling method employed according to the following criteria: a registered marriage with a Japanese national, a minimum of one year of residence in the country. The interviews were conducted remotely in Russian from April to July 2025. The questions were structured and aimed at identifying the reasons and conditions for the initial arrival in Japan, the influence of migration and legal status on the decision to marry, the roles of education and professional experience, and language proficiency. Additionally, the study tracked shifts in life strategies following relocation and marriage. Qualitative data were coded according to semantic categories including economic status, education, profession, legal status, cultural interest. Additionally, open-source materials from social media pages of marriage migrants from Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine were studied to further identify the main motivations for their migration and marriage to Japanese nationals.

Results and discussion

Interview results

Table-1 presents the main migration routes, the initial reasons and motives for relocation reported by the respondents. However, to gain a more detailed understanding of these findings, the results of the semi-structured interviews are presented below. The respondents' answers provide a clearer picture of how their initial motivations such as education, professional opportunities, cultural interest, and legal status subsequently developed into marital relationships. The interview data not only cover the categories identified in Table 1 but also show the diversity of motivations among marriage migrants.

Education, life strategies, mobility:

Alla, 30 years old, from Russia. *«My purpose in coming to Japan was to study. Initially, I came for a one-year Mext scholarship program. After graduating from university in my home country, I returned to study for a master's degree in the same program. After finishing my studies, I found a job and decided to stay permanently. I met my future husband at the university during my first visit, and we became friends, and our friendship continued after my arrival. I thought I would marry a Japanese man because I found it easier to communicate with them and found it easy to find a common language. In fact, I really appreciated that the Japanese maintain their distance and respect other people's personal space; if you say no, they understand and respect it; they may date for a very long time simply holding without rushing into physical contact. And I liked that he respects my personal space and respects my word».*

Table 1
Migration Routes and Motivations of Marriage Migrants

No.	Migration Path Type	Path Description	Primary Motivations	Additional Factors	Count
1	Type of migration path	Path description	Primary motivations	Additional factors	Count
2	Marriage	Marriage to a Japanese citizen prior to relocation	Love, starting a family	Gender expectations	11
3	Work	Labor migration – marriage	Economic stability, mobility	Legal status	2
4	Study	Educational migration / MEXT scholarship program / language schools	Education, life strategies, mobility	Social integration	10
5	Introduction through relatives	Social ties	Improving standard of living, search for stability	Ethnic / transnational networks	1
6	Website / Agency	Marriage agencies / social networks	Safety, stability	Intermediation	1

Lidiya, 30 years old, from Russia. *«My purpose for coming to Japan was to study; I studied at the university under the Mext program. I specialized in oriental studies; I studied Japan and the Japanese language at university. I fell in love with the culture and traditions of Japan, and during my studies I realized that Japan is closer to me in spirit than Russia. That's why I wanted to study and live in Japan. I like that the Japanese are very caring and always think about others, and not just about themselves. I had no intention of getting married at all, let alone to a Japanese man. But I found my person and decided to get married. What I like about my husband is his kindness, respect, and the fact that he takes me into account. In Japanese families there is less selfishness, they think more about their partner, but in our country it's either my way or nothing».*

Diar, 26 years old, from Kazakhstan. *«I've been interested in Japan since childhood, and one day a friend told me that I needed to go to Japan, and this became a kind of impetus, so I began to study Japanese and came to study at a language school in Japan».*

Nina from Russia, Primorsky Krai, living in Tokyo: *«In the 90s, Japanese goods and strange candies began to appear in our city, and people began to talk about such a distant country as Japan. In 2000, business between our countries began to actively develop, and I thought it would be good to get a second education to earn money; so, I came to study at a language school in Japan and began to learn Japanese. At the same time, I met my future husband. I studied and lived in Japan for a year and a half. After graduation, I returned home and then returned at the invitation of my future husband to*

visit. We decided to live together, get to know each other, and then start a family. But I never thought about marrying a Japanese man. This nation is so distant and incomprehensible for a European, so I thought it would be difficult. I liked the responsibility of the man in the family – that he takes everything into his own hands, he is the breadwinner, and the wife is the “rear” (support). When creating a family, the Japanese do not rely on such a fickle feeling as love, and this is very different from our model. They are much more responsible towards their family and the decisions they make».

Gender expectations and the search for a new model of family and family relations:

Dinara from Kazakhstan, 38 years old: *«I always knew that I would not marry a man of my own nationality because I did not like the place of a woman in the family or the way they treated her. I thought I would marry a foreigner, but I didn't think it would be a Japanese man. But I liked his attitude towards me, how carefully he treated me».*

Zhanara, 44 years old, Kazakhstan: *«My future husband and I met in the United Arab Emirates where we worked, and after starting our family, we relocated to Japan to accommodate his professional career I was open to the prospect of international marriage. I had a long-term relationship with a Kazakh man, and nothing good happened there. What I liked about the Japanese man was his attitude towards me, how respectful and careful he is, and that we do everything together and in a coordinated manner».*

Interviews with women from Kazakhstan and Russia reveal the apparent reasons behind their decisions to migrate. Mostly women opt to migrate

initially for education and career purposes. After completing their basic degrees in their home countries, they relocate to Japan to continue their studies at universities or language schools, and marriage becomes a natural consequence of this educational migration. Furthermore, the respondents' answers reveal deep-seated issues in their home societies. Many faced gender inequality within their closest circle of communication: in the families, universities, at work, and personal relationships, ultimately seeing no viable future in their home countries. Having experienced life in foreign countries with more progressive approaches to family and gender roles, they refuse to tolerate disrespect. In their pursuit of personal happiness they start to consider international marriage. A common trend in the female respondents' answers is that attitudes toward family in Japanese society differ from those in post-Soviet countries. From the respondents' perspective, they found an escape in their spouses from those issues, and were offered a level of gender equality, respect for personal boundaries, and mutual appreciation that they had never experienced before.

Legalization of Status: the results of the content analysis also identified the legalization of their status as a major driver for marriage migration. Many women arrive on artist or temporary worker visas, forcing them to leave Japan every six months to renew their visas and employment contracts. Having grown accustomed to the local work culture, their specific workplaces, and daily life in Japan, these migrant women are reluctant to leave and start over from scratch twice a year. For them obtaining Japanese status becomes their way out of this situation. In cases where no partner is available, the women look for pathways to enter into a sham marriage. Certain agencies misuse this vulnerability as a way to make a profit out of it by providing services to arrange sham marriages for a certain fee. While some of these cases unfortunately end in abuse and domestic violence, there are also cases with positive outcomes where migrant women eventually grow into happy relationships and get married with their Japanese partners.

The socio-economic and cultural dynamics in post-Soviet countries have undergone a significant transformation. People now have unprecedented access to education, travel, and career opportunities abroad. Consequently, the worldview of women from post-Soviet countries is also shifting; they strive to pursue education, build independent career paths, and expect mutual respect and equal treatment and equal rights within the family. While they pro-

vide for themselves and their families, working and earning money, they also expect active care and support from their partners. Educated, forward-thinking young people who have the freedom to study, work abroad, and travel the world choose comfortable living conditions for themselves, despite the inherent difficulties of migration.

The data indicate that marital migration to Japan should not be understood as a one-time decision to migrate motivated primarily by the intention to marry. Rather, the trajectories revealed through the interviews indicate that marriage is often one stage in a longer process of educational, professional, cultural, and social mobility. Thus, the five migration routes listed in Table 1 should not be regarded as isolated categories, but rather as different entry points into a process in which migrants' initial motives may change as their length of residence in Japan increases and their social conditions improve. One of the most noticeable patterns in the data is the prevalence of educational migration. Ten respondents came to Japan through educational pathways, including MEXT scholarships and enrollment in universities and language schools. The findings show that education has become not only a reason for migration but also an institutional environment conducive to subsequent social integration. Respondents such as Alla and Lydia initially came to Japan to study and only later established relationships with Japanese nationals. In this sense, the educational route created conditions under which marriage could become a subsequent stage of migration rather than its initial goal. Thus, this mechanism can be understood as a sequence of processes in which educational mobility provides access to Japan, language learning and social networks contribute to integration, and long-term residence expands opportunities for interpersonal relationships.

The same pattern can be observed in the respondents' accounts of their cultural interests. For some participants, interest in Japan preceded migration and motivated them to learn the language or pursue educational opportunities. For example, Diar reported that she had been interested in Japan since childhood, subsequently learned Japanese, and enrolled in a language school. Lydia also attributed her decision to study and live in Japan to her interest in Japanese culture and traditions. These cases indicate that cultural interest functioned not only as a preference for a particular destination but also as a mechanism facilitating the acquisition of the cultural and linguistic resources necessary for migration and subsequent adaptation.

The surveys also showed that the importance attached to marriage was shaped by gender expectations. For some respondents, international marriage was associated with the possibility of establishing family relationships that differed from the gender norms they had previously encountered or expected. Dinara clearly contrasted her expectations regarding family relationships with her perception of the position of women in families within her own nationality, while Zhanara emphasized respect, care, and coordination between partners. These data suggest that gender should not be considered an independent explanatory variable. Rather, gender expectations interacted with the respondents' levels of education, international mobility, and familiarity with alternative models of family relationships. Thus, international experience can expand the range of family relationships that women perceive as possible when making decisions about marriage and long-term residence.

The study's results demonstrate that the motives and reasons for international marriages are not uniform. Viewing this issue solely through the lens of economic benefit does not fully reveal the underlying causes of marriage migration. Instead, it is an intersection of various factors: a reevaluation of gender roles and family hierarchy in society, career trajectories and expectations, educational strategies, the legalization of migration status, and the pursuit of lifestyle migration. Furthermore, the profile of marriage migrants in Japan is not homogeneous and continues to change. Many are no longer dependent solely on spousal visas, but instead they work and reside under independent work visas. Some have obtained, or plan to obtain, a residence permit and change their citizenship status independently of their Japanese spouses, often having already gained experience living in Japan as students or professionals.

The given findings of the research are fully consistent with previous studies on super-newcomers (Suzuki N., 2003). These findings challenge existing perceptions of marriage migrants (Golovina K., 2023). They are independent agents who make active choices based on specific life strategies, mutual feelings, and choices. Furthermore, the interview results also reveal gender expectations.

The respondents' answers indicate that gender inequality in their country of origin is a significant motive for choosing international marriage, specifically in relation to the respondents' educational level and cultural capital. This aligns with the view of Kim V. (Kim V., 2014), who argues that the rea-

son behind the rise in international marriage is not economic gain, but rather a crisis in the institution of marriage within the country. Women who have faced stigmatization due to marriage migration seek gender equality (Sari K., 2022). Women have long since ceased to view marriage as protection or an obligation; in the modern world, they seek equal relationships, respect, personal growth, and shared interests. The model of the man as breadwinner and the woman as homemaker is outdated. Women can no longer live by the old model, while men are unwilling to replace the old model with a new one. Women with higher education and experience in international mobility do not view international marriage as a means of economic gain, but rather as a way to break free from the gender norms prevalent in the society of their home country. In the eastern regions of the post-Soviet space, a clear family hierarchy and stereotypes regarding women deeply entrenched. The perceived societal pressure to conform to traditional roles of an «Eastern woman», «keeper of the hearth», or «the compliant daughter-in-law» fosters a negative attitude toward marriage in their home countries. In contrast, the progressive attitudes of foreigners regarding gender equality in the family and society are perceived as offering a safer and more stable foundation for a family. In this context, cultural interest in Japan is not merely a secondary factor but a significant one in choosing a destination country. Japan's positive international image, unique cultural heritage, and advanced technology serve as a powerful attraction tool for foreigners.

Marriage serves as a tool to choose a new way of life, as well as a mobility strategy (Shikita K., 2014). Eventually education migration results in marriage migration. The interview results demonstrate that women from women from post-Soviet countries also relocate primarily to study. They have prior education background, they are well-educated, possess international experience or have been employed by a foreign company. They are both proficient in Japanese language and have a good understanding of Japanese culture. This refers not only to an interest in the tea ceremony, ikebana, etc., but also to an interest in Japanese social life, a desire to obtain or continue their education, to work for a Japanese company, and to adopt social and cultural values. In turn, an interest in culture can serve not only as a motive for migration but also plays a vital role in how well adaptation to the new society proceeds. One of the study's findings is that gender, cultural preferences, and

legal status are fundamentally interrelated; these factors intersect throughout the entire process of migration and adaptation to Japanese society. The study's findings show that marriage migration is not driven by a single dominant motive but rather by a combination of many external and internal factors. From the perspective of intersectionality theory, the migration experience is not explained by a single factor or reduced to a single category; gender, nationality, educational level, legal status, and cultural capital reinforce each other's influence throughout the lives of marriage migrants.

These individuals began their integration only after arrival or after marrying a Japanese national. Conversely, there is another group of marriage migrants who were genuinely interested in Japan and chose the country as an attractive place to live. Before migrating, they studied the language and culture, arriving in Japan with the specific intention of living there and discovering the country for themselves.

Conclusion

The study shows that post-Soviet marriage migration to Japan is a multidimensional process shaped by several interrelated factors. This qualitative study of the motivations behind marriage migration from post-Soviet countries to Japan confirms that explaining the drivers of international marriage solely in terms of economic gain fails to capture the current dynamics of marriage migration and does not account for the diversity of respondents' life trajectories. The respondents had different mi-

gration routes, with the main ones involving education, employment, marriage, social ties, and cultural interests. Education was one of the most important pathways and often preceded marriage, creating opportunities for language learning, employment, social integration, and the establishment of relationships with Japanese nationals.

Cultural interest in Japan and the Japanese language also influenced destination choice and subsequent adaptation, while gender expectations were associated with some women's perceptions of marriage and family relationships. For some respondents, international marriage was associated with the possibility of establishing more respectful or egalitarian relationships. Legal status represents another important aspect, as marriage may contribute to greater residential and social stability, particularly for migrants with less stable forms of residence. Overall, the findings show that gender, education, cultural capital, professional and socioeconomic resources, and legal status intersect in shaping individual migration trajectories. Thus, marriage cannot be regarded as a single or uniform motive: in some cases, it constituted the initial basis for migration, whereas in others, it emerged later as part of an already established educational, professional, or cultural trajectory.

Authors' contribution:

Nurelova A.M. – conceptualization, writing the original draft, data collection and processing, methodology, preparation of tables and visual materials. Contribution percentage: 70%

Ninomiya T. – conceptualization, editing: 30%

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