

Work-life Balance of Thai Women Married to Japanese Men¹

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Abstract

This article examines the work-life balance of Thai women who are married to Japanese men and live with them in Japan. In-depth interviews were conducted with ten Thai women from Northeastern Thailand, all of whom have at least a bachelor's degree and left their jobs to marry Japanese men for reasons of love and improved living conditions. The study focuses on five key aspects of work-life balance: work, family, time, finances, and the wisdom to be able to keep the first four aspects in a state of equilibrium. Findings reveal that after marriage and childbirth, these women primarily fulfill traditional roles as mothers and homemakers, with less emphasis on the role of daughter-in-law. Their work-life balance shifts as childcare and household duties take precedence over their personal and professional life. Most of the women manage nuclear families and balance intensive childcare routines similar to those of Japanese mothers, including preparing meals, managing school activities, and attending to their children's needs. Financially, Thai wives receive household budgets and child allowances, enabling them to focus on family care. Their proficiency in Japanese also helps them navigate life in Japan. However, because of their husbands' long working hours, they struggle with time management, shouldering most of the family responsibilities alone. While they appreciate weekends with their husbands, they desire more shared involvement in childcare. The study highlights the challenges that Thai wives face in adapting to a different culture without extended family support. They express pride in managing their households, but stress the importance

of learning Japanese for life satisfaction. Many plan to return to work once their children are older.

Keywords: Thai wives, gender roles, work-life balance, Japan society, transnational marriage

Introduction

Transnational marriage and international migration are continuous phenomena in Thai society, driven by social changes, transportation development, and the communication revolution, all of which are part of the globalization process. According to data collected by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan (2020), the number of Thai women who married and migrated to Japan is significantly higher than the number of Thai men who did so. The trend also suggests that the number of Thai women who will marry and migrate to Japan in the future will continue to increase. As the wives of Japanese men, Thai women who marry and migrate to Japan will be required to adapt to the Japanese social context, which includes gender roles, behavioral expressions, and work-life balance.

Japanese society has a clear distinction between the responsibilities of men and those of women after marriage, as evidenced by its social context, values, cultural concepts, and gender roles. The traditional role of men in Japanese society is to be the breadwinner, responsible for working outside the home and providing financial support for the family. By contrast, women in Japanese society have traditionally been expected to take care of household affairs, raise the children, and provide emotional support for their families. Therefore, Japanese women are generally expected to fulfill a wide range of roles in society, including that of daughter, wife, mother, housewife, and even caregiver by the people around them (Kimio, 2019). Many Japanese mothers have instilled in their daughters the traditional ideas of a proper woman's role after marriage, which includes taking care of household affairs and dedicating all her time to child-rearing (Horie, 1996). Many Japanese women are happy and willing to fulfill these roles

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and they prioritize taking care of their families (Boonsong, 2004). Working Japanese wives, therefore, often face work-life balance challenges because they have to balance work and household affairs. In Japan, it is not uncommon for husbands to suggest that their wives quit their jobs and become full-time housewives (Sasagawa et al., 2015). The concept of gender role distinction has had a significant impact on the work-life balance of married women in Japan. This is further evidence of the deeply-rooted and strictly-practiced social values of gender roles in Japanese society.

Japanese people have been instilled with the idea of the proper gender roles that are expected. Japanese women are expected to fulfill these roles, resulting in limitations on their freedom in today's social context (Junnuan and Sawetaiyaram, 2020). By contrast, Thai women who marry Thai men or other international men have more flexible gender roles than wives in the Japanese social context. This is because they are not subject to the same patriarchal expectations as Japanese women. A study of Thai family relationships in the globalization era found that Thai wives living in urban areas in Thailand have similar responsibilities when their children are very young. After the children go to school, however, the husbands would become more supportive in child rearing. As more women need to work to support the family, the roles of wives in urban Thai society have changed significantly (Kanjnakuntorn and Chaiumporn, 2019).

Given the current trend of transnational marriage and migration to Japan, it is interesting to investigate how the expectations of wives in Japanese society impact the life adjustment, gender role expression, and fulfillment of Thai women who have married Japanese men and migrated to Japan. This article aims to understand the work-life balance of these women. The results of this study will shed light on the role of life adjustment and work-life balance for Thai wives in Japan, and lead to suggestions for improving their well-being. The study results can be useful for relevant organizations to develop and implement policies that empower Thai wives in Japan, and to take into account the differences in social and cultural contexts between the two countries.

Literature Review

This study examines the concept of work-life balance, focusing on three parts: (1) work, which includes both paid and unpaid employment, as well as household work; (2) life, which encompasses both family life and work life; and (3) balance, which is the equality of two things that produce both concrete and abstract benefits, in both internal and external layers. Work-life balance is a critical framework for developing life quality (Burton, 2010; Kittisuksatit, Chamchan, and Holomyong 2013).

A significant characteristic of work-life balance is the ability to effectively manage one's work and personal life, with a well-planned daily schedule that allows for both productivity and quality time with family (Wongchan, 2006). Work-life balance is the ability to manage time effectively for work, family, and personal interests, such as hobbies, sports, and social activities with family and colleagues for the benefit of organizations, families, and individuals (Arunlertratsamee, 2010), by not creating conflicts or personal problems (Thokhaew, Boonlua and Pongpearchan, 2014). The goal of work-life balance is to live both a fulfilling working life and a family life, while also creating satisfaction and bonds with others (Greenhas, Collins and Shaw, 2003).

The three components of work-family balance include the following: (1) time balance, which is the equal amount of time devoted to work and family; (2) involvement balance, which is the equal level of psychological involvement in work and family to reduce conflicts and stimulate expression; and (3) satisfaction balance, which is an equal level of satisfaction between work and family (Greenhas, Collins and Shaw, 2003). Creating work-life balance involves five key areas: (1) work, which means promoting work or a career that stimulates creativity within individuals and organizations; (2) family, which means allocating time for creating personal happiness that leads to success in society; (3) time, which means the ability to allocate time for all aspects of life within a timeframe; (4) financial, which means allocating savings as a tool to live in the present and in the future, and to relate work, family, and time; and (5) the wisdom to be able to keep the first four

areas in a state of equilibrium no matter what the circumstances are (Merrill and Merrill, 2003).

The concept of work-life balance, which is the ability of an individual to effectively manage time to dedicate for one's work, family, and personal life, can be applied as a framework to the study of the lives of Thai women married to Japanese men in the Japanese context. The conceptual framework can generate insights into how these women manage their lives to live happily under the conditions of Japanese gender role values and social contexts which require women to have different roles and status, such as mothers, daughters, wives, or daughters-in-law.

Methodology

This qualitative study aims to understand the patterns of life adjustment that Thai wives living with their Japanese husbands employ to achieve work-life balance. The research areas consist of four regions, namely Kanto, Kansai, Hokkaido and Okinawa, which are home to a significant number of Thai women married to Japanese men. The analysis unit is the individual, and the target group is a purposive sample of ten Thai women who are married to Japanese men, who have lived and worked in Japan for at least six months, and are still living in Japan at the time of the study.

The researcher, who works as a Japanese teacher on the university level, knows many Thai women who studied Japanese language and followed their husbands to live in Japan. Volunteers for the study were drawn from this group. The researcher submitted the ethics application required for this research in December 2021. The application was reviewed and approved in March 2022. Snowball sampling was adopted to collect data through an in-depth interview with each informant. As each informant's schedule was very tight all day, the researcher made appointments to interview each of them via Zoom two to three times. Each interview took between 30 minutes and two hours, depending on the informants' convenience. The interview process was

carried out from April to June, 2022. Content analysis and descriptive analysis were then employed to present the study results.

Study Results

The results can be divided into three main themes: the characteristics, marriage and family building, and work-life balance of Thai women married to Japanese men. The following sections will discuss each theme in detail.

The Characteristics of Thai Women Married to Japanese Men

The results of interviews show that the women are from Northeast Thailand, with ages ranging from 30 to 44. Nine have a bachelor's degree, while one has a master's degree. Prior to getting married, the women had careers in Thailand. Seven of them worked for companies in various positions, including Japanese restaurant manager, customer relations, executive coordinator, and event planner. Two were Japanese interpreters, and one was a Japanese lecturer. After marriage, seven of the women became full-time housewives, whose main duty is to take care of their husbands and children. Two continued to have careers while also being housewives, and one worked part-time while also being a housewife. Four of the Thai wives possess a permanent residency visa. As for the Japanese husbands, eight of them work in companies, and two are engineers. Most of the couples in the study have been married for more than five years and have lived in Japan for more than seven years.

The majority of couples have one to three children, with only two families having none. The living patterns of the couples after marriage and migration to Japan can be categorized into two main types: seven of the women live with their husbands and children, while the other two live with their husbands' parents as well. Nine live as nuclear families; while only one lives with her husband, three children, and the husband's parents as an extended family of seven people in a household. In sum, most Thai women married to Japanese men live in nuclear

families with approximately three to four members in their household, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Information regarding ten Thai women married to Japanese men and living in Japan

	Age	Prefecture in Japan	Number and ages of children	Career in Thailand	Career in Japan	Visa type	Living duration in Japan
J1	39	Hiroshima	3 (3, 5, 7 years)	Customer relations	Full-time housewife	Spousal visa	3
J2	44	Tokyo	2 (10, 12 years)	Executive coordinator	Full-time housewife	Permanent residency	20
J3	30	Wakayama	1 (3 years)	Japanese interpreter	Full-time housewife	Spousal visa	2
J4	30	Saitama	-	Company employee	Full-time housewife	Spousal visa	7
J5	36	Aichi	2 (2, 6 years)	Japanese interpreter	Full-time housewife	Permanent residency	9
J6	37	Sapporo	2 (8, 10 years)	Event planner	Social media marketing director	Permanent residency	11
J7	36	Shika	-	Japanese lecturer	Thai language lecturer	Spousal visa	2
J8	43	Okinawa	1 (2 years)	Japanese restaurant manager	Housewife + part-time	Spousal visa	10
J9	33	Yamanashi	1 (5 years)	Company employee	Full-time housewife	Permanent residency	7
J10	30	Tokyo	1 (3 years)	Company employee	Full-time housewife	Spousal visa	2.5

Marriage and Family-building Patterns of Thai Women Married to Japanese Men

The analysis of marriage and family-building patterns among the ten couples in the study reveal that they met through three main channels: four met by online dating, four met in person, and two were introduced by their friends. These relationships developed over time, and eventually, the couples decided to marry for reasons of love.

1. Online dating

Some couples met through online Thai language classes or language learning applications. These classes or applications provided a platform for these couples to meet and interact, and eventually romantic relationships were established. Four informants stated as follows:

We started as language-learning friends before we met in person in Thailand. We decided to see each other after that. When I graduated, I went to Japan to work. When the time was right, we decided to get married (J4 [Pseudonym], 2022).

We met through a language-learning application and became friends. We began dating and eventually decided to get married because he is a good man and he is so caring for people around him (J3 [Pseudonym], 2022).

We got to know each other via on-line Thai lessons. At the time, we decided to spend our lives together (J7 [Pseudonym], 2022).

We knew each other and started talking via the internet. We realized that we loved each other so we moved to live in Japan because we thought that the conditions and environment for raising a child were much better in Japan than in Thailand (J1 [Pseudonym], 2022).

2. Meeting in person

This refers to couples who met in person in Japan or another country, either while the Thai women were studying or working there. These couples had the opportunity to meet and develop their relationships, which led to the decision to marry and move to Japan to build families. Four informants shared their stories as follows:

I came to Japan to study language in a Japanese language school, and that's how I met my husband. We decided to live in Japan because his job had become secure, and he didn't want to change jobs. We also thought about our children's future. We want our children to study in Japan (J9 [Pseudonym], 2022).

I met my husband when I was an exchange student in Japan. When we got married, I was already working here [in Japan] so we decided to live here (J10 [Pseudonym], 2022).

I met him at a university in Japan. We fell in love, and I decided to live with him (J2 [Pseudonym], 2022).

We have been friends since we were in America. Actually, he was my college friend. After he got a job in Japan, we decided to get married and we moved to Japan (J6 [Pseudonym], 2022).

3. Being introduced by friends

Some Thai wives were introduced to their Japanese husbands by friends through various social activities, such as going on trips, working together, studying in the same faculty, or being friends in college. Some of these couples met in Thailand, while others met in the United States, at different times and in different circumstances. Two informants explained as follows:

We knew each other by being introduced by a friend. We got married because we wanted to live together (J5 [Pseudonym], 2022).

My husband was a friend of the manager of the place [where I worked]. The manager asked me to be my husband's tour guide while he was in Thailand. I decided to marry him because he is a good man and is very helpful. He gives me a lot of advice, and I feel that our love is secure. I did not think about financial status or anything else. I wanted a life partner who can help me and give me advice, as well as share the same visions (J8 [Pseudonym], 2022).

The present study, similar to that of Lapanun (2012), found that the aspirations of Northeastern women or their reasons for marrying foreigners are not just about money, but about love and desires. This study shares and emphasizes the same point, that love and the strong desire to build a family together motivated Northeastern women and Japanese men to marry. In the past, Thai women met Japanese men by chance or by match-making and then they decided to get married (Thinkham, 2009). However, the present study reveals that globalization has made it easier than ever for Thai women to get to know Japanese men. Eight of the Thai wives started the relationship on their own. They communicated with their future husbands directly through the activities of language learning or meeting in person. They did not hesitate either to start the relationship or later to follow their husbands to live in Japan.

To some extent, many of the women had already had a plan for living their lives and building their future together with their husbands before agreeing to marry. Five Thai women reported having had casual discussions about the future plans with their Japanese husbands, but they did not go into detail. Four Thai wives did not have any discussions or agreements with their husbands at all. Only one Thai woman reported having had detailed discussions and making an agreement with her Japanese husband regarding their future plans, including the husband's work, the wife's role as a full-time mother until their children reached elementary school age, household expenses, the wife's personal expenses, and financial support for her parents in Thailand. This agreement was made before the woman moved to Japan to live with her husband.

Two Japanese husbands, after getting married, send remittances to their respective wives' families in Thailand every year. Nine of the Thai wives did not have formal agreements because they and their husbands were committed to similar family values and building warm family lives.

Regarding communication at home, the study found that most Thai wives focused on communicating with their husbands and children.

The language used for communication varied, with some families using only Japanese, others using Japanese and Thai, and still others using Japanese and English or English and Thai. The choice of language use depended on the language abilities of both the Thai wives and their Japanese husbands, as well as the wives' preparation for daily communication. Seven of the wives had taken the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT²) and passed the N1–N3 levels. Two of them possess N1, three possess N2, and two possess N3, which means that they are not likely to have any communication difficulties. Three of the wives in the study had never taken the JLPT, so they had to adjust by using other languages, such as English, in their communication at home. Most of the wives in the study realized the importance of Japanese as they needed to use it for shopping, discussions with their children's teachers, and participating in parent-teacher meetings. Moreover, after living in Japan for some time, their Japanese language abilities improved significantly, allowing them to communicate effectively in their daily lives.

Regarding lives in Japan, the study found that full-time housewives have a demanding routine each day. Eight of those who have a child or children share a similar daily routine during the weekdays (Monday-Friday). They typically start their routine around 6:30 a.m. and finish at 11 p.m. An example of the daily routine of one of the informants, J9, who has one child aged 5, is shown in Table 2.

Eight of the Thai wives have children aged 2–12, in kindergarten and primary school, for whom they must provide complete care. During school time, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., some Thai wives spend time grocery shopping, doing laundry, cleaning house, etc. Some use it to pursue activities of their own interest, such as gardening, planting flowers, and exercise.

² JLPT is the reliable means of evaluating and certifying the Japanese proficiency of non-native speakers. There are five levels: N1, N2, N3, N4 and N5. N1 is the most difficult level and N5 is the easiest. N1 and N2 measure the level of understanding of Japanese used in a broad range of scenes in actual everyday life, such as reading newspapers. N3 measures the level of reading slightly difficult writings encountered in everyday situations and understanding the main points of the content. N4 and N5 measure the level of understanding of basic Japanese learned mainly in class (JLPT, 2024).

Table 2 Example of Thai wives' daily routine

Monday-Friday Schedule	Activities	Remarks
6.30 a.m.	Wake up	
7.00 a.m.	Prepare bento for the child	
8.50 a.m.	Take the child to kindergarten school	Walk to school and walk back home
9.00 a.m.-3.00 p.m.	Free time	Go shopping, clean house, etc
3.00 p.m.	Pick child up at school	Walk to pick up child
3.00 -5.00 p.m.	Let the child play outside or do other activities	Let the child play with his friends as much as possible
6.00 p.m.	Prepare dinner and have dinner with the child and give childcare before going to bed	Have dinner, play and talk with the child
9.00 p.m.	Put the child to bed	Read Japanese books
11.00 p.m.	Take a rest and go to bed	

Generally, another main routine for Japanese mothers whose children are in the kindergarten schools is to prepare *bento* (lunch boxes) for their children to eat at schools. In order to interest and encourage children to have a wide range of eating habits, a cute *bento*³ or *kyaraben* (decorated lunch box) has become popular among mothers of kindergarten school children. Thai wives also like the idea of making one, but seldom do it because they lack time. Only two said that they learned how to create a cute *bento* by watching the techniques on YouTube. They prepare nutritious food for their children based on the themes of balanced nutrition and a character for each holiday. In Japanese society, it is believed that making a *bento* will create a warm and memorable relationship between mother and child. Thus, in some schools on the last day of making a *bento*, mothers will be asked to write a Japanese letter by themselves to tell how they feel when they make a *bento* for

³ *Kyaraben* (キャラ弁) is used to call the homemade lunch box which . Do you mean *bento* is a shortened form of the word, *Kyaraben* (キャラ弁) is decorated in form of people, characters from popular media, animals, and plants, etc.

their children (Figures 3). Here are some photos of the *bento* that Thai wives made and posted on social media (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1 Cute *bento* made by Thai wives (2022)



Figure 2 *Bento* made by a Thai wife on the occasion of “Halloween” (2022)



Figure 3 A Japanese letter written by a Thai wife (2022)

Some Thai wives noted that their main duties involve their children. They pay more attention to their children than to their husbands. Some of them do not have to prepare lunch or dinner for their husbands, who typically come home late from work. The role of wives in this context, therefore, depends on the agreement between husbands and wives and the specific circumstances.

Thai wives take care of children before and after school. They let their children play outside, such as at a playground with friends, or they take their children to have special lessons. Around 5 to 6 p.m., they have dinner with their children at home. After dinner and the children's bath, they check their children's homework in order to keep up with the lessons and sometimes teach them how to do the homework, too. The children go to bed around 9 p.m. and then the wives will have free time to relax after long periods of childcare. It can be seen that most Thai wives allocate at least eight and a half hours a day to take care of their children on weekdays.

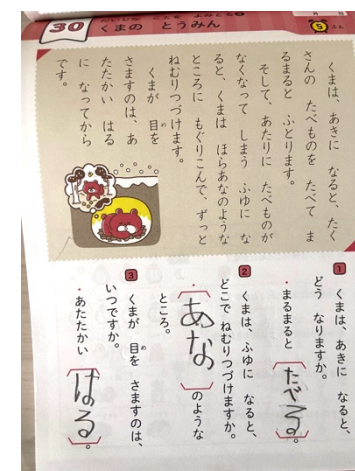


Figure 4 Homework in which a Thai wife taught her child to write in Japanese (2022)

On weekends, the Thai wives in the study typically spend their

time with their families on various activities. Two of the wives who have children reported that they dedicate 100 percent of their weekend time to their families. They frequently go on outings, such as visiting public parks or children's playgrounds, going camping, or eating out. One out of three Thai wives with children choose to stay home on weekends to do family activities together, such as gardening. Their husbands are able to help take care of the children full time. Thai wives with no children prefer to spend time with their husbands on weekends, in activities such as going to the gym, going to the sauna, helping with their husbands' work, or going out to dinner.

When asked about their husbands' expectations of Thai wives, the wives in this study shared the view that their husbands wanted them to be able to contact and complete errands with government organizations on their own, if necessary. Initially, the husbands would accompany their wives to government offices, but later, when the wives became more proficient in handling these tasks, the husbands would have them do the errands on their own. Similarly, regarding tasks related to their children, all husbands expect their Thai wives to be able to participate in parent-teacher meetings at their children's schools. As most of the activities are held on weekdays, now four Thai wives in the study are able to attend these meetings on their own without their husbands' assistance.

Japanese husbands have different expectations of their Thai wives when it comes to taking care of them and the children. For the husbands themselves, they do not expect their wives to prepare *bento* lunches for them, but they do expect the wives to go grocery shopping and prepare dinner. For their children, the husbands expect their wives to prepare the children's *bento*, help the children with their homework, and pick the children up from school. However, it is interesting to note that most Japanese husbands in the study do not expect their Thai wives to spend time with Japanese friends or work part-time jobs. This suggests that most Japanese husbands still hold onto traditional Japanese values, which dictate that women should focus on household affairs and child

rearing, rather than working outside the home.

According to the Thai wives, the main challenges in their married lives are not caused by the expectations of their Japanese husbands, but by the demands of child rearing on their own. Their husbands' long working hours and the distance from their in-laws' homes create a situation in which the Thai wives are effectively single parents. With their own parents in Thailand unable to provide any help and hiring nannies being too expensive, the Thai wives generally shoulder the entire burden of childcare, which can be exhausting and stressful.

In Japan, we live as single families without the support of in-laws or our own parents for childcare. Hiring a nanny at home is almost impossible in urban society due to the high cost of living and other expenses. However, in Thailand, having a nanny is quite common and affordable for most people (J2 [Pseudonym], 2022).

Moreover, in Japan, there are some limitations on raw materials and food-buying sources, which is quite different from Thailand, where markets and shops can be found everywhere. As a result, cooking is not as necessary in Thailand. Thai wives who have become full-time housewives in Japan, however, face challenges as they have to adjust to new roles as wife and mother. Two informants shared their experiences.

In Thailand, food, including take-out food, is cheap, so wives do not need to cook. However, in Japan, eating out is expensive, so we need to cook at home. A housewife should be able to cook to some extent (J2 [Pseudonym], 2022).

One problem is cooking and saving money. In Thailand, the cost of living is not as high as in Japan. Eating out when we feel too tired to cook is common. In Japan, eating out is expensive, so we need to save money by cooking at home. Hiring a nanny or a maid is also difficult (J10 [Pseudonym], 2022).

Family building situations between Thai wives and Japanese

husbands is diverse, both in terms of lifestyles and the roles that they perform according to social expectations of wives and mothers. Although Thai wives receive support from their husbands in childcare, housework, and finances, the image of the traditional Japanese wife, which is based on Japanese values and requires the wife to do household chores, raise children, and take care of her husband, remains influential. These factors have had some impact on the work-life balance of Thai wives in Japan.

Work-life Balance of Thai Women Married to Japanese Men

The study results can be classified into three dimensions: work, family, and personal life. These dimensions are distinguished from one another based on the work-life balance of these women before marriage and after marriage and moving to Japan. A detailed presentation is outlined in the sections below.

1. Work-life balance before marriage

The study revealed that Thai wives had three distinct patterns of work-life balance, with different prioritizations of work, personal life, and family. Seven of the wives prioritized work over other aspects of their lives by dedicating 50-70 percent of their time to work because they were in their prime working age and aimed to be financially secure so that they would be able to take care of their parents.

I worked in customer relations. All of my activities were outside and I hung out with my colleagues (J1 [Pseudonym], 2022).

We were in the working age, so we needed to mainly focus on work (J7 [Pseudonym], 2022).

Regarding personal life prioritization, the ratio was similar to that of work prioritization, but higher than the ratio of family prioritization. Two Thai wives shared their view that before marriage, they tended to focus more on their personal lives by spending a lot of time with friends.

For me, there was a similar ratio between my personal life and my work, and a smaller ratio to family. I mostly spent time with

friends who were my colleagues (J3 [Pseudonym], 2022).

I had to travel upcountry for work, so I had more time to spend on my personal life, rather than with my family (J2 [Pseudonym], 2022).

As for the family, only one Thai wife in the study gave primary attention to this dimension, as after her graduation, she intended to live and spend time with her family. Moreover, as the eldest daughter, she was expected to take on the role of family caregiver, which included caring for her parents and younger siblings.

I was the eldest child and I had always intended to work to support my parents after I graduated. Mostly I spent time taking care of my younger sisters (J5 [Pseudonym], 2022)

It can be concluded that before marriage, most Thai women prioritized their work over their personal lives and families. This is evidenced by the work-life balance ratios rated by the ten informants. Nine of the informants focused more on their work and personal lives, while only one informant prioritized the family.

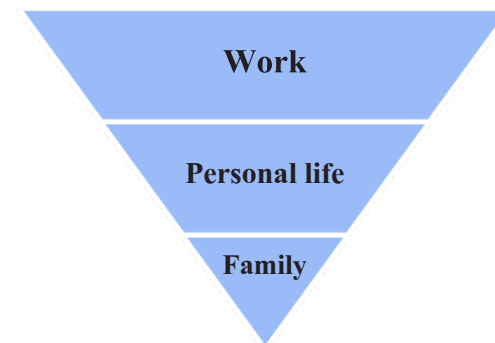


Figure 5 Work-life balance of Thai wives *before* their marriage

2. Work-life balance after marriage

When interviewed, Thai wives reported that their work-life

balance after marriage had changed significantly, particularly after having children. Nine out of the ten wives reported that they had become full-time mothers, whose main duties were to take care of their children and household affairs. This represented a significant change from their pre-marital roles, in which they worked, earned their own income, and spent time outside the home. After marriage, their duties also included other daily life activities, such as cooking, cleaning, and performing other household chores for the comfort and convenience of their husbands and children. The work-life balance of Thai wives after marriage was clearly shown to be focused on family. The wives prioritized their families, estimating that this component occupied approximately 50-80 percent of their lives.

After getting married, I allocated half of my time mainly to my husband and children and the rest to my parents and personal life. This is because having children and being a full-time mom changed my life. Most of my time is spent with my kids (J5 [Pseudonym], 2022).

I have very little time for my personal life because my kids are still very young. The family comes first. And the Japanese way of taking care of one's husband is also important. We need to prepare food for the next day, and iron and fold clothes to be ready for use (J8 [Pseudonym], 2022).

The Thai wives without children reported that they focused on work over personal life and family life. This is because they do not have to shift their role to become full-time housewives. Their time can be spent completely on work. When compared to the time before marriage, the Thai wives still prioritized work in the same ratio, but they adjusted the balance with families and lessened the focus on their personal lives.

My work-life balance has not changed much after marriage. I still work the same amount, and my time is mainly for work, and then for family, and personal life in that order (J7 [Pseudonym], 2022).

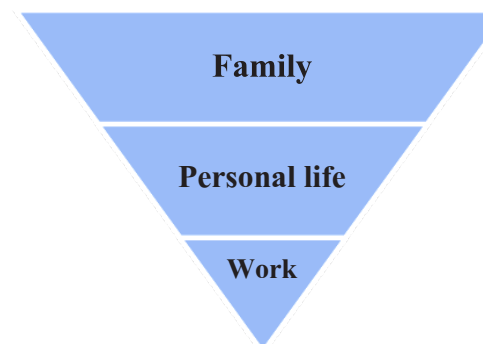


Figure 6 Work-life balance of Thai wives *after* their marriage

Changes of Work-Life Balance Patterns

The study's findings show that the work-life balance patterns of five out of the ten Thai wives have changed; however, they still strive to maintain a balance between work, personal life, and family.

I think my life is quite balanced, even though I spend most of my time with the family. I don't feel like I lack a personal life; it's flexible and it varies with the circumstances (J9 [Pseudonym], 2022).

Some aspects [of my life] have changed, such as my ability to go out and socialize with people. I have also missed out on some things, such as being able to hang out with friends as much as I used to when I had no kids. But overall, it's not bad (J3 [Pseudonym], 2022).

I think my work-life balance is quite good because I am happy now (J8 [Pseudonym], 2022).

I believe that I am happy because I have time for everything that's important to me (J10 [Pseudonym], 2022).

Nevertheless, the study also found that five of the wives reported having a poor work-life balance. They did not have enough personal time, as they spent most of their time with their families doing household chores, caring for their children and husbands, and other activities.

In addition, the inability to allocate time for work to earn an income was a major limitation that contributed to poor work-life balance for Thai wives after marriage.

I feel like I don't have a good work-life balance, especially in my personal life. It's difficult. I now have two children and I'm the only one who takes care of them. I don't have time to exercise like I used to (J5 [Pseudonym], 2022).

My work and life are not well balanced. Most of my time is dedicated to my family, as I no longer work. My personal life and my family life are almost the same thing (J3 [Pseudonym], 2022).

It can be concluded that the overall work-life balance of these women has changed. The major change was that they clearly shifted their focus to the family dimension, while the ratios of personal life and work dimensions have decreased. Five of the Thai wives were able to adjust well and manage their time to care for their husbands and children while living happily in Japanese society with a good work-life balance. However, the remaining 50 percent faced some problems, such as caring for two children on their own, caring for members of the extended families with whom they live, and cooking on their own. These problems have led to less quality personal time and sometimes a feeling of being less relaxed.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate the work-life balance of Thai women who married Japanese men and migrated to Japan. Ten Thai women between the ages of 30 and 44, were interviewed, all of whom had at least a bachelor's degree and were from Northeast Thailand. Before marriage, these women had had full-time jobs and performed important roles in their workplaces, resulting in their work-life balance being heavily weighted towards the work dimension. The results also showed that the Thai wives met their Japanese husbands through three channels: online applications, being introduced by friends, and in-person

meetings. For reasons of love and the desire to build a family together in Japan, as well as to plan for the future of their children, the couples decided to get married and migrate to Japan. This led to changes in their roles and work-life balance, especially after the birth of their children, as they became full-time housewives who took on the main family responsibilities of caring for their children and the household. Their general duties include preparing meals for their children, taking and picking up the children from school, participating in school activities such as parents-teachers' meetings, and dealing with children's documents from both schools and hospitals. The results of this study show similar findings to those of previous studies by Ito Kimio (2019) and Horie (1996), which found that the roles of women and wives in Japanese society are to be good housewives who are responsible for household chores and child rearing. The results are similar to the work of Wuwongse (1994), according to which the role of mother in Japan is highly valued in terms of children's development and being a role model for their children. Japanese people, traditionally and today, believe that a mother should give love and time to their children. A mother is the most suitable person who takes complete care of their children and teaches them knowledge and manners so they will be good citizens. This fundamental belief has had a strong impact Japan's development as a country.

The above findings indicate that the values of gender roles in Japanese society are deeply rooted and also have a direct impact on Thai wives who migrate to Japan. The majority of Thai wives who moved to live in Japan had to change their lifestyle from career women to housewives. However, as they studied and mastered the Japanese language, they gradually perceived the cultural values and gender norms and adjusted to deal with the roles and perceptions of "housewives" in Japan society. They demonstrated that being a housewife is *not "just a housewife"* who takes care of the household and childcare day by day (Lapanun et al., 2024), but who also the person who keeps track of the finances and makes important decisions related to the children's health and education.

Among the key aspects of work-life balance suggested by Merrill and Merrill (2003), Thai wives possess three: family, financial, and the wisdom to be able to balance all areas no matter what the circumstances are.

Regarding the family aspect, Thai wives of Japanese husbands spend every day with their family members especially on weekends and always plan to do family activities with their husband and children. They manage the entire budget for the family, so they are mainly the ones who purchase things and do the financial accounts of the household. Moreover, two of the Thai wives continue to send money back to Thailand every year, as they still maintain the cultural practice of daughters supporting their parents (see Jampaklay et al., 2022; Chumnannak and Somkaun, 2023; Kaewwongyai, Lapanun, and Suppatkul, 2021; Rungmanee, 2021), which their Japanese husbands understand and uphold. While these women have tried their best to study Japanese and develop their skills in communicating with the people around them, they do not have a balance in their lives. Their husbands prefer them to be the family's primary care takers and feel that there is no need for them to work. The wives also have no personal time to meet friends or go for entertainment as they did when they were in Thailand. They are solely responsible for childcare as their husbands work long hours and come home late. In Japanese society, mothers are expected to raise their children by themselves. This limits their ability to achieve a good work-life balance, particularly in the dimensions of personal life and work. Some Thai women, therefore, have found themselves in a dilemma of prioritizing their roles, whether as mothers, wives, or women who need quality personal time. Because of the distance from the network of Thai friends, they seldom have Thai food with Thai friends or participate in events with Thai networks. Thus, as shown in Thinkham and Thongyou (2009), Northeastern Thai wives reproduce Thai culture in Japan by cooking Thai-Isan food, participating in community events, and making merit at Thai temples.

As for the financial aspect, the study indicates that the Thai wives had undergone a significant process of adjustment in their work-

life balance. Prior to marriage, all of them worked full-time jobs as typical working women and were actively in charge of family care. However, after marriage, most of them quit their jobs because their husbands expected them to take care of them and their children. The husbands also expected their wives not to work at all, which clearly altered the ratios of the wives' work-life balance from focusing on the work dimension to prioritizing the family dimension. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of previous studies by Boonsong (2004) and Sasagawa et al. (2015), which found that in Japanese society, women are expected to resign from their jobs once they get married. However, the study also found some differences from Sasagawa et al. (2015), which revealed that when a Japanese wife works outside the house, her husband is less likely to help with household chores or will suggest that she resign from her job. By contrast, this study found that Japanese husbands married with Thai wives are more likely to help with household chores and take care of the children during the weekends so that his wife can have some time to rest.

According to the Prime Minister's Office of Japan (2024), Japan has a policy of providing financial support, expanding child allowances, and reducing the financial burden incurred through childbirth and in higher education in order to prevent the decline of the birthrate. In this study, all of the Thai wives insisted that Japan has created an environment favorable to child rearing. They receive a child allowance of 10,000 or 15,000 yen monthly which allows them to focus on parental investment in their children, such as buying material goods for the children, participating in family events and extracurricular activities, and time investment such as interaction with children. They felt very impressed that there are many educational facilities supporting their children's education, such as museums, libraries, etc. Thai wives felt that they had made a good decision to live their lives and raise their children in Japan as the environment for child rearing is supported. Nevertheless, the wives found that they had changed by raising children on their own which sometimes made them feel tired. Although their Japanese

husbands try to help them take care of the children and let them relax on weekends, they found that childcare responsibility falls entirely on them on weekdays. Since Thai wives are effectively single parents, they wish that their husbands' working hours would be reduced, allowing them to come home earlier and have time to interact with their children. This supports the past research of Adachi (2018) which found that even among Japanese youth, achieving a good work-life balance is not easy. Adachi noted that the gender role of husbands' long work hours prevents them from participating in family responsibilities. This study recommends that the encouragement of husbands to reduce their work hours should be promoted in order to create work-life balance for both husbands and wives.

As for the fifth aspect of attaining work-life balance, the remarks by the Thai wives indicate that even as circumstances changed, such as having a child which required a full-time commitment, most of them were able to develop the wisdom to balance all areas of their lives.

The study results also suggests that the Thai wives' Japanese language skills are a major factor that allowed to them adjust to their new role as housewives. The fact that Thai wives had studied Japanese and passed the N1-N3 levels of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) meant that they did not have difficulty living in Japan. They were able to communicate effectively for daily life and continue doing activities by themselves while developing their language proficiency at the same time. They did not need their husbands to help with language translation. This finding is consistent with Harada (2013), which stated that passing the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) before moving to Japan is the foundation for language learning development before living in Japan. Their language ability would be improved, resulting in better self-confidence and the ability to fit in happily with Japanese society.

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex dynamics of work-life balance experienced by Thai women married to Japanese men, revealing a

significant shift from professional careers to traditional homemaking roles post-marriage. The interviews with ten Thai wives illustrate the cultural adaptations they had to undergo, navigating the expectations of Japanese society while managing the intricate responsibilities of motherhood and household management. The study focuses on five key aspects of work-life balance: work, family, time, and finances, and the wisdom to be able to keep the first four aspects in a state of equilibrium. While these women initially enjoyed professional independence, their transition to full-time housewives reflects their need to adjust to deeply ingrained gender norms within Japan that prioritize family care over personal ambition.

The findings underscore the dual challenges faced by these wives: while they benefit from financial support and a nurturing environment for child-rearing in Japan, they often bear the brunt of childcare and household duties, particularly during their husbands' long working hours. The study results suggest that Japanese language skills were one of the major factors that allowed Thai wives to adjust to their new role as housewives. This linguistic proficiency not only facilitates daily interactions, but also empowers these women to engage more fully in their communities, thereby enhancing their overall quality of life and sense of belonging in Japan.

Despite their pride in their roles as caretakers and their efforts to integrate into Japanese culture, the participants expressed a desire for greater involvement from their husbands in family life and a hope to return to the workforce when their children are older. This study calls for a reevaluation of traditional gender roles, advocating for policies that encourage shared parenting and work-life balances for both partners. By fostering a more supportive environment, not only can the quality of life for Thai wives improve, but the overall family dynamics can also benefit, leading to healthier, more engaged familial relationships.

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