

Conflict Management in Intercultural Marriage Between Chinese Female and Japanese Male: A Pilot Study

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Introduction

With the rapid development of internationalization and globalization, the number of intercultural marriages in Japan has kept increasing in the past decade. According to the statistics by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 2013, as the following table (Table 1) shows, among all the intercultural marriages of Japanese male nationals to foreign females, the rate of Japanese nationals married to Chinese females has increased surprisingly from 18% in 1990 up to 45% in 2013. Although the rate of Koreans and Filipinos had remained rather high in the past 23 years, in total the number has been gradually decreasing. In clear contrast to that, of all intercultural marriages between Japanese men and non-Japanese women, 40.5% were with Chinese, the number has increased significantly, doubled the rate in 1990.

Table 1
Numbers of Japanese Men-Foreign Women Marriages by Nationality of Spouse 1990-2013

Year	Total	Nationality of Wife			
		Korean	Chinese	The Filipinos	Others
1990	20026	8940(44.6)	3614(18)	...	7472(37.4)
1991	19096	6969(36.5)	3871(20.3)	...	8256(33.2)
1992	19423	5537(28.5)	4638(23.9)	5771(29.7)	3477(17.9)
1993	20092	5068(25.2)	4691(23.3)	6394(31.8)	3939(19.7)
1994	19216	4851(25.2)	4587(23.9)	5999(31.2)	3779(19.7)
1995	20787	4521(21.7)	5174(24.9)	7188(34.6)	3904(18.8)
1996	21162	4461(21.1)	6264(29.6)	6645(31.4)	3792(17.9)
1997	20902	4504(21.5)	6630(31.7)	6035(28.9)	3733(17.9)
1998	22159	5143(23.2)	7036(31.8)	6111(27.6)	3869(17.4)
1999	24272	5798(23.9)	7810(32.2)	6414(26.4)	4250(17.5)
2000	28326	6214(21.9)	9884(34.9)	7519(26.5)	4709(16.7)
2001	31972	6188(19.4)	13936(43.6)	7160(22.4)	4688(14.6)
2002	27957	5353(19.1)	10750(38.5)	7630(27.3)	4224(15.1)
2003	27881	5318(19.1)	10242(36.7)	7794(28)	4527(16.2)
2004	30907	5730(18.5)	11915(38.6)	8397(27.2)	4865(15.7)

2005	33116	6066(18.3)	11644(35.2)	10242(30.9)	5164(15.6)
2006	35993	6041(16.8)	12131(33.7)	12150(33.8)	5671(15.7)
2007	31807	5606(17.6)	11926(37.5)	9217(29)	5058(15.9)
2008	28720	4558(15.9)	12218(42.5)	7290(25.4)	7462(16.2)
2009	26747	4113(15.4)	12733(47.6)	5755(21.5)	4146(15.5)
2010	22843	3664(16)	10162(44.5)	5212(22.8)	3805(16.7)
2011	19022	3098(16.3)	8104(42.6)	4290(22.6)	3530(18.5)
2012	17198	3004(17.5)	7166(41.7)	3517(20.5)	3511(20.3)
2013	15442	2734(17.7)	6253(40.5)	3118(20.2)	3337(21.6)

Source: Statistics & Information Department, Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2013.

China and Japan, both as Asian countries have been categorized as being “collectivistic” in contrast to the “individualistic” Euro-American countries (Hofstede, 1983). Japan is commonly perceived as a homogeneous culture where there is only one race and people speak the same language (Nitta, 1988). Instead of comparing various cultures on the macro-level, there is a need to explore the possible similarities and/or differences within the “collectivistic” cultures. Given the above fact that intercultural marriage between Chinese and Japanese keeps increasing, issues such as what challenges the couples of these two cultures have to face, what influences do these challenges have on the couple’s daily life, what are the perceptions they have regarding conflict need to be further and more deeply explored. This study will focus on conflict issues between the Chinese wife and the Japanese spouse, and how the perceptions of conflict affect the Chinese wife’s facework, in other words, conflict management styles.

Literature Review

A. Face & Face-Negotiation Theory

As Brown and Levinson (1978) assumed in their Politeness Theory, face is universal, all competent adult members of a society have (and know each other to have) “face”—the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself or herself. Brown and Levinson distinguished between two components of face which they called negative face and positive face. Negative face refers to a person’s desire for autonomy and claim to territories. Negative facework is the negotiation process between two people over the claim to freedom and autonomy and the degree of threat or respect given to those wants. It emphasizes the need for dissociation. On the contrary, positive face is the desire for approval and the desire to be appreciated and accepted by others. Positive facework is the negotiation process concerning the threat or respect given to one’s need for acceptance and

approval. It entails the degree of threat or respect each gives to one another's need for inclusion and approval. It emphasizes the need for association.

According to Ting-Toomey's Face-Negotiation Theory (1988), "face" is viewed as a symbolic resource that members in all cultures strive to maintain. Face is a metaphor for people's public image, the way people want others to see them and treat them. It serves as a powerful explanatory concept for everyday communication behavior. Facework refers to specific verbal and nonverbal messages that help to maintain and restore face loss, and to uphold and honor face gain. Ting-Toomey emphasizes three face concerns in her Face-Negotiation Theory: self-face, other-face and mutual-face. Self-face refers to the concern for one's own image, other-face is the concern for another's image, and mutual-face is concern for both parties' images and/or the "image" of the relationship (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

Ting-Toomey bases Face-Negotiation Theory on the distinction between collectivism and individualism. She combined Hofstede's (1980) notion of individualism-collectivism and Hall's (1976) notion of low-context and high-context with facework negotiation assumptions to formulate 12 propositions that explain and describe different conflict resolutions and facework strategies enacted by different cultures. Hofstede explained that individualistic cultures are concerned with self-face maintenance whereas collectivistic cultures are concerned with both self-face and other-face maintenance. Individualistic cultures value autonomy, choices, and negative-face need; on the contrary, collectivistic cultures value interdependence, reciprocal obligations, and positive-face need. Hall used the Low- and High-Context as a variable. The Low-Context Culture (LCC) values individual value orientation, line logic, direct verbal interaction, and individualistic nonverbal style. Meanings are overtly displayed through direct communication forms. Face-negotiation is an overt communication process based on an immediate cost-reward-comparison model. (Immediate reciprocity of face-giving and face-saving is important to the success of face-negotiation moves). The High-Context Culture (HCC) values group value orientation, spiral logic, indirect verbal interaction, and contextual nonverbal style. Meanings are implicitly embedded at different levels of the sociocultural context. Face-negotiation is an accumulative, long-term process, eventual reciprocity of face-honoring and face-compensating is important for the maintenance of both social and personal relationship developments.

Face and facework are regarded as universal phenomena and people of every culture are always negotiating face. While facework is culturally universal, critical differences across cultures have been examined. In 1993, Cupach & Imahori

compared the incidence and management in U.S. American and Japanese cultures. The result showed that US Americans are more likely than Japanese to employ remedial responses of humor, accounts, and aggression, and Japanese are more likely than US Americans to employ remedial responses of apology and remediation. The study also supported the researchers' prediction that regarding cross-cultural comparisons of coping strategies Japanese used apology-related and Remediation-related strategies significantly more than did US Americans. On the other hand, US Americans used strategies of account, humor, and aggression more than did the Japanese respondents.

Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) tested part of Ting-Toomey's (1988) theory with subjects from Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States. Results indicated that, with most of the collectivistic countries studies, other-face maintenance predominated whereas both self- and other-face maintenance were prevalent in individualistic cultures. However, results also indicated that the Japanese used self-face maintenance strategies to a greater extent than did the U. S. respondents.

Cocroft & Ting-Toomey (1994) tested facework in Japan and the United States. They examined the relationship between cultural variability and facework strategies. Responses to the individualism-collectivism items, strategy items, and face concern items were factor analyzed. Japanese respondents reported more collectivistic tendencies and more individualistic tendencies than U. S. respondents. North Americans reported using more antisocial, self-presentation, self-attribution, and hint strategies than Japanese respondents. Japanese respondents reported using more indirect facework strategies than North American respondent. Males reported using more antisocial, order, and self-presentation strategies than females.

The original Face-Negotiation Theory(1988) used the individualism-collectivism and the low- and high-context as the starting points. However, while "face" is a transcultural concept that governs the active negotiation processes in all cultures, the nuances and subtleties that attach to different facets of facework management would vary from one culture to the next. The dimensions of individualism-collectivism and low-context and high-context have been used as a starting point to aid in the theorizing process of conflict face-negotiation. When broad dimensions such as individualism-collectivism or high- versus low-context are invoked to account for cultural differences, it is not clear exactly how or why these differences occur. Although useful in evaluating whether cross-cultural differences exist, they are far less helpful in explaining why culture has an effect.

In 2001, Ting-Toomey and colleague John Oetzel discovered that "self-

construal is a better predictor of conflict styles than ethnic/cultural background.” Ting-Toomey claimed that the relationship between culture-level analysis and conflict behavior is mediated by individual-level factors. One such factor is self-construal or the distinction between independent and interdependent self-construal. Independent self-construal tends to be more self-face oriented than other-face oriented. It has been linked to behaviors such as competing/dominating conflict style. Interdependent self-construal values other-face and mutual-face concerns. It has been linked to behaviors such as avoiding conflict styles.

Another dimension power distance was also introduced. Hofstede (1991) defines power distance as the extent to which the less powerful member of institutions accept that power is distributed unequally. Power refers to the extent of influence and the degree of compliance between two or more parties in negotiating their differences. In small power distance cultures (e.g. Austria, New Zealand) people tend to value equal power distributions, equal rights, symmetrical relations and equitable rewards and costs based on personal performance. Their defending and asserting one’s personal rights are reflective of self-face esteeming behaviors. Individuals are concerned with horizontal facework interaction. In large power distance cultures (e.g. Malaysia, Arab countries) people tend to accept unequal power distributions, hierarchical roles, asymmetrical relations and rewards and sanctions based on rank, role, status, age and perhaps even gender identity. Paying one’s role optimally and carrying out one’s ascribed duties responsibly and asymmetrically, constitute appropriate facework interaction. Individuals are concerned with vertical facework interaction. A third-party mediator is usually involved to manage the conflict.

In 2001, Ting-Toomey and John Oetzel revised the traditional Five-Style Conflict Grid pointing out the bias that those styles have surfaced in work situations in Western countries, and therefore added three other conflict styles that American individualistic-based scholarship has missed. They are emotional expression, passive aggression, and third-party help. Ting-Toomey pointed out that the practice of third-party help in collectivistic culture is different from individualistic culture. Most people with an independent self-construal think first of getting a lawyer.

Ting-Toomey’s Face-Negotiation Theory provides a framework for people to understand conflict management styles not only from cultural dimensions but also based on individual levels.

B. Conflict

Conflict is a pervasive phenomenon that penetrates all forms of social and

personal relationships in all cultures and is viewed as a *face-negotiation process* in which the “faces” or the situated identities of the conflict parties are being threatened and called into question. It is viewed as a problematic situation that demands active facework management from the two interdependent conflict parties. It is inevitable in our daily life and “a form of intense interpersonal and /or intrapersonal dissonance (tension or antagonism) between two or more interdependent parties based on incompatible goals, needs, desires, values, beliefs/ or attitudes” (Ting Toomey 1985). With the increasing contact among various cultures, intercultural communication has become a common social phenomenon around the world. When two different cultures meet, conflict inevitably occurs. Intercultural conflict is defined as “the experience of emotional frustration in conjunction with perceived incompatibility of values, norms, face orientations, goals, scarce resources, processes, and/or outcomes between a minimum of two parties from two different cultural communities in an interactive situation” (Ting-Toomey and Oetzel, 2001). Oetzel et.al. (Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Yokochi, Masumoto, & Takai, 2000 in press) conducted a study on facework behaviors during interpersonal conflicts and found 13 different types of facework behavior during conflicts with best friends or relative strangers. They are aggression, apologize, avoid, compromise, consider the other, defend self, express feelings, give in, involve a third party, pretend, private discussion, remain calm and talk about the problem. Based on these types the following categories were revealed: dominating facework (aggression, defend self), avoiding facework (avoid, give in, involve a third party, and pretend), and integrating facework (apologize, compromise, consider the other, private discussion, remain calm, and talk about the problem).

C. Research questions

When compared to the west such as the U. S., the east is claimed to have/show significant differences from the West. However, within the eastern cultures such as China and Japan, similarities and/or differences have not been academically explored systematically in the field of communication. In the same way, China as a high-context culture has been challenged by some researchers. Leung (1988)’s study showed that the interpersonal relationships in Chinese society are vertical in-group, horizontal in-group, and horizontal out-group, and Chinese are much more likely to pursue conflict with out-group members. Chinese are more group-orientated in conflict situations than Americans. Chinese scored significantly higher than Americans on face and seniority. Zhong Mei (2006) mentioned how the “one-child policy” influenced the Chinese communication. Jia

& Jia (2006) talked about “the emerging and construction of individualistic identity in modern China”. All indicates that that the traditional Chinese conflict management styles have been going through some changes. Therefore this study aims to investigate the following questions:

1. What conflict issues does the Chinese female have in her marital relationship with the Japanese spouse?
2. How does the female perceive the conflicts with her Japanese partner?
3. In what way does the perception affect her face and her conflict management strategies with the other party?

Methods

A. Participants

The participant was selected randomly from a list of candidates. The list was made based on the number of people the researcher knows. While choosing the participant, the researcher paid special attention to several aspects. First, it should be someone who has married to Japanese and lived in Japan for more than 10 years, long enough to know the host culture more thoroughly; secondly, due to the “one-child policy” in China started in 1979, the interviewee should be someone who was born before the “one-child policy”, as some researchers such as Zhong (2006) mentioned that the “one-child policy” had an influence on the Chinese communication. Therefore, from the list one participant has been selected and an interview was conducted. The basic information of the interview and the participant is summarized as follows:

1. Length of interview: approximately 2 hours
2. Number of participants: 1
3. Participant’s age: 43
4. Participant’s hometown: Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, P. R. China.
5. Participant’s education and working information:

The participant majored in Japanese Language in one university in southern China. After she graduated from the four-year university, she worked in a library as a librarian for 2 years. Then she changed her job to administration and interpretation in a big joint venture company (between Japan & China) in Guangzhou China for another 2.5 years.

6. Reasons of participant’s coming to Japan:

After the participant had worked in China for about 4.5 years, she decided to pursue higher education in Japanese Education. Thus she quit her job and came to Japan to study Education in the year 1998. When she got her Master’s degree in

Education, she went back to Guangzhou to look for a job as she planned. Unable to feel satisfied with the job provided, she came back to Japan again and continued her Master's course in Japanese Education for 2 years and then another 3 years in the same major for the Ph. D program.

7. How the participant got to know her husband:

When the participant was in her second year of Master's course in Japanese Education, one Chinese friend introduced her current husband who was then a high school teacher to her. After about 8 or 9 months of dating and getting to know each other, they decided to get married. When they got married, she was at the age of 32, her husband 46.

8. Participant's basic family information:

The participant has been married to her Japanese husband for over 10 years by now and has a girl of 9 and a boy of 7 years old. Her husband is a high school teacher and she works as a part - time Japanese teacher in a Japanese language school.

B. Procedure

An in-depth interview was conducted in the participant's house upon her request. Instead of planned questionnaires the researcher started the interview in a more casual chatting style so that the interviewee could feel more relaxed and free to talk. All the basic information was collected in the flow of the conversation including the participant's age, reasons of coming to Japan, years of residing in Japan and years of marriage, and so on.

After getting all the basic information, the researcher asked about her marriage life in Japan. The participant was given complete freedom to talk about her life. When there was something she wanted to talk more specifically, the researcher encouraged her to explain further or to give some specific examples. Questions like "How did you feel at that time?", "Why did you have that feeling?", "How did you manage it?" were followed to clarify the situations.

C. Data Analysis

All the recording has been transcribed. In the transcription of the interview, various situations when the participant perceived there was a conflict were marked and the key words were noted. How she felt in the conflict and how she managed the conflict in all the situations were noted on a separate piece of paper. Then all situations were compared, grouped, and analyzed.

Results

The result has revealed some common yet significant conflict issues when the participant felt a face loss or conflict. Based on the interview, the following situations have been summarized with regard to the following main aspects: the husband's home visiting, financial control, housework, living habits and being the eldest son's wife.

1. The husband's home visiting

The participant mentioned that since her husband's parents lived in a different place which is a rather far countryside within the same prefecture, even after they got married, the husband still had the habit of going back to visit his parents once a week. At the beginning of their marriage, the participant went back together with him several times, but she didn't feel it was necessary to go back every week, especially when her kids were so small and it was not convenient to take little kids along. Besides that, she had been busy raising the kids, even if she took the kids with her to her husband's hometown, the parents-in-law could not help look after the kids since they were too old. So she felt that after married, a woman should focus on her own new family.

Now since her parents-in-law passed away already and her mother-in-law's sister is over 70, her husband still keeps going back once a week paying visits to his aunt. From the participant's point of view, there is really no need to go back once a week. So she has been trying to convince her husband that he doesn't need to go back that often, and he should spend more time with his own family. As a result both of them compromised and he agreed to pay a visit to his aunt once every two weeks. As she explained, "I really can't force him to change his mind as he is so stubborn, so what can we do? We both have to compromise. I want to be happy. Since I cannot change him, why should I get myself frustrated?"

2. Financial control

In the interview, the participant talked about the couples of her age in China. One common point of the people she knows is that all the wives are in charge of the finance of the family. Usually when a couple in China gets married, the husband will give his bank account to the wife and she will be in full charge. In Japan too in many families the wife is in control of the finance. So the participant was expecting the same when she got married. But unfortunately her husband didn't want her to be in charge. Although she "fought" for this right several times, she couldn't change the situation. So she learned to give up, and let him be

responsible for the financial issues. She receives some amount from her husband every month for the daily expenses. She explained, “he just didn’t want to give it to me, so what can I do? Although I don’t work and have no income, I have to choose to trust him in managing the financial situations.”

3. Housework

The participant talked about sharing the housework in the interview. She said that her husband hardly does any housework or take care of the kids. At first he didn’t do any, she had to manage everything even when her two kids were very small. So far her husband has never cleaned the toilet or folded clothes even once. Now since the kids are elementary school students, she started to work as a part-time Japanese teacher and comes back home late sometimes, her husband has to learn to help with some housework. So now she is trying to encourage him to do some more by praising him. Regarding this she further explained that most Japanese women she knows about her age are actually facing the same or similar situations. She doesn’t really feel very tired or stressful about the housework share because, in the first place, she cannot change her husband since he is already over 50 and it is just impossible to change someone who has lived in one culture for such a long time, instead, it is much easier to encourage and train the kids to help with housework; and secondly, maybe because she herself majored in Japanese language and education she has been influenced by the language and culture a great deal that she didn’t really feel any problem doing all the housework and taking care of the kids.

4. Verbal expressiveness

The participants mentioned one problem between her and her husband when it comes to the verbal expressiveness. She said that when she had different opinions or was not happy with something, she chose to express it verbally and try to negotiate with her husband. At the beginning of their marital life when there were conflicts, she would talk loudly to him, but instead of talking back and speaking out what he thought, her husband always chose to be quiet and didn’t say or do anything. She thinks that when there is a different point of view, one should speak out what he/she thinks instead of keeping everything in mind. At the beginning it seemed hard for her husband because as she explained, “Japanese men don’t know how to express themselves well”. But then when her husband got better to know her, he chose to speak his mind out to her as well.

5. Being the eldest son's wife

In Japan, being tyounan (the eldest son) is a big thing, and being the tyounan's wife is even more serious. As the participant explained, the eldest son is loaded with very important missions of the whole family, he has lots of obligations, among which, taking care of the parents. Since the eldest son should work to support the family, the work then would naturally be passed onto the wife. She had the same experience as well. She explained that when her mother-in-law was sick, and her daughter was about 2, her son just 6 months old, her husband's aunt (the younger sister of her mother-in-law's) called her and asked her to come back with her whole family in order to take care of her mother-in-law. Since her husband was busy with work every day, what's more, he didn't do any housework or help with the child care, she herself was struggling every day. As she said, in China, because of the one-child policy, the 4+2+1 mode is very common. 1 refers to the only child, 2 means the parents, and 4 the grandparents on both sides. 6 people are taking care of one child, the parents are not really busy and have to do all the housework. Now she was here in Japan, alone, nobody to rely on, she had to take care of 2 young children and also do all the housework, it was just impossible for her to take care of the mother-in-law. So she refused on the phone, explained her situation, and said it was already too much for her and she couldn't take more. Although from the aunt's point of view, it may be very hard to understand since this tradition has been going on for years, the participant tried to negotiate with her husband and finally solved the problem by sending the mother-in-law in the Raojin home (senior citizen's house).

Discussion

The present study has sought to explore some conflict issues in the daily life of intercultural marriages between Chinese female and Japanese male. It has also aimed to investigate the perceptions the Chinese female holds toward the conflicts and how these perceptions have influenced the conflict management with the other party. Three main key questions have been associated in the interview as follows: 1. What conflict issues does the Chinese female have to face in the marital relationship with the Japanese spouse? 2. How does the female perceive the conflicts with the Japanese partner? 3. In what way does the perception affect her face and her conflict management strategies with the other party? The findings reported in the previous section can be summarized into the following:

1. Perceptions of Conflict

Chinese view family and close friends as in-groups, and therefore reported high interdependency with each other. They illustrated the encounter of the relationship as having “yuan”, which is explained as fate or destiny. The participant stressed that it was herself who made the decision to marry her Japanese husband, and they had “yuan”, therefore she should cherish this relationship and try to get on well with her husband and her family and be happy. This is consistent with the conclusion that interdependent self-construal values other-face and mutual-face concerns. When the participant perceives there is a conflict situation, she would try to negotiate and her perception of the interdependency would lead her to give in in situations when she doesn't like the conflict.

As Zhang (2009) explained the way Chinese look at “conflict”, “all conflict is part of the lessons of life, like rain and sunshine”. At the beginning of the interview when the researcher asked if there is any conflict in her marriage, without thinking she said “of course”. She further explained that “because we are international marriage, of course there is conflict.” One interesting point the participant emphasized is that most of the conflict was not really directly due to the cultural differences, but because of differences of individual personalities. To the participant, it was the “yuan” that has brought them together, so she really cherishes this relationship regardless of their different cultural backgrounds.

2. Facework in Conflict

As mentioned, the participant thinks that conflict is evitable in everyday life, and conflict cannot be avoided. She concluded her marital life as follows, “so far I feel that I have always been making compromise. Actually I have compromised a lot. But you know, I have chosen this life, and I want to be happy with my life, so I have to learn to give in and think positively.” This should explain why in conflict situations with out-groups such as her husband's aunt, her self-face is taking the dominant place; whereas with her husband as in-group, she chose to give in to mutual face or other-face.

Based on the perception, the participant said that her partner is the one who is going to be with her all this life, and we never know how long we will be able to spend our time together, so instead of insisting on her own face needs, she doesn't feel resistant to compromise or give up to her husband's decision.

Another important factor is that the participant has been learning Japanese language and culture, she is very fluent in Japanese, and the Japanese culture has naturally penetrated in her life and her awareness. She is strongly aware of this.

Like many other intercultural marriages in which language seems to be the largest barrier, she has no least difficulty expressing her feelings. So with this background, she concluded that cultural differences may not be the main reason for the conflict, but individual personalities.

Limitations and Future Implications

As this is just a pilot study on conflict management in intercultural marriage between Chinese and Japanese, this case may not be a typical example for the intercultural marriage between Chinese and Japanese. In the last decades, many Chinese chose to go abroad for further study, those students who are good at English chose to go to English-spoken countries whereas others chose to come to Japan or Korea. Presumably people who majored in English have comparatively higher consciousness of being treated equally and expect less power distance which may be different in Japan. The case of this participant may be a very good example of how culture affects people's communication and why she is so assimilated and holds no negative emotions to the Japanese culture.

Further studies should focus on more in-depth interviews with more couples. While selecting the participants, their education and work background should be taken into consideration. On top of that, since the "one-child policy" has a great influence on the patterns of interpersonal communication of Chinese, the intercultural marriage between Japanese and Chinese who were born as the only child in the family is also worthwhile. Besides the "one-child policy", the demographic elements should not be ignored. Due to the big gap between the rich and the poor in China, those who are from the poor regions of China and married to Japanese may have quite different ways of viewing conflicts and handle it differently from the ones from comparatively rich areas. Not just limited to the pattern of Chinese wife and Japanese husband, further studies can also examine the opposite pattern of Japanese wife and Chinese husband.

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