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The (In)Stability of International Marriages in Japan*

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Abstract

International marriages and their divorce rates in Japan have increased; however, empirical evidence regarding the underlying factors remains limited. This study examines divorce trends among international couples in Japan by comparing the divorce rates of Japanese–Japanese couples to those of Japanese–non-Japanese couples using data from the Population Census and Vital Statistics for 1995–2020. Binomial logistic regression for grouped data reveals significantly higher divorce rates for international couples than for Japanese–Japanese couples, although this gap has narrowed over time. Approximately 20% of this difference is explained by the wife's age and the age gap between spouses. Using characteristics of non-Japanese spouses' home countries, we find that larger within-couple disparities in age and GDP increase the risk of divorce, whereas greater distance in cultural and gender norms contributes to marital stability. These findings suggest that the complex interplay of cultural, economic, and institutional factors shapes divorce risk in international marriages.

Keywords: international marriage, divorce rate, gender norm, cultural distance, bargaining power

JEL Classification: J12, D13

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1. Introduction

The number of foreign residents in Japan has been increasing, and the share of international marriages has also grown. According to our calculations, over the past 25 years, marriages between Japanese men and foreign women have remained the dominant combination in Japan. However, in recent years, marriages between foreign men and Japanese women have also been increasing, and the nationalities involved have become more diverse. Understanding the patterns of their marriages, divorces, and births is essential for examining their long-term impact on the country's demographic dynamics. The formation and dissolution of international marriages are not solely determined by individual characteristics but also profoundly shaped by social support structures. The relatively high divorce rates observed among international couples may indicate diverse barriers, such as cultural and linguistic differences, value mismatches, and socioeconomic factors. Nevertheless, empirical research on these relationships in Japan remains limited, and the underlying factors are not well understood.

Research on divorce risk in international marriages has expanded within household and population economics, focusing on how spousal differences, household bargaining structures, and gender role specialization shape marital stability. Empirical studies show that similarities in nationality, religion, and education tend to enhance stability (Kalmijn et al., 2005; Schultz-Nielsen & Bonke, 2016), whereas cultural and normative gaps often increase the risk of divorce. Dribe and Lundh (2012) found that immigrant men married to native-born women in Sweden face particularly high dissolution rates, and Smith et al. (2012) observed strong cultural friction among first-generation immigrant couples. Further evidence links intra-household dynamics and gender norms to marital outcomes: Lee et al. (2022) demonstrated that unequal decision-making power affects Korean couples' mental health, and Milewski and Kulu (2014) reported that mismatched gender role expectations increase the likelihood of divorce. These empirical developments highlight the complex interplay of cultural, economic, and institutional factors that shape the relationship between spousal differences and divorce risk in international marriages. Nevertheless, most existing research focuses on Western contexts. Empirical evidence from East Asian countries such as Japan remains limited, particularly regarding differences by age composition, national origin, and cultural background in shaping divorce risk.

This study aims to provide insights into the relatively high divorce rates observed in international marriages in Japan. First, we descriptively examine trends in the number and share of international marriages and nationality combinations. Subsequently, as a baseline analysis, we assess the relationships between age and nationality combinations and divorce

risk. Furthermore, we extend the model by incorporating country-level variables related to GDP, gender norms, and cultural distance to explore how spousal bargaining power and cultural background may interact to influence marital stability. We attempt to contribute to the literature by empirically examining divorce patterns among Japanese–foreign couples using data from the Population Census and Vital Statistics of Japan between 1995 and 2020.

In the current analysis, it is not possible to link two types of individual-level datasets at the person level. Therefore, this study adopts an approach that uses aggregated data to capture, by nationality, the proportion of couples who divorced within two years following each observation year among all couples present in that year. When group-level heterogeneity is of primary interest, a binomial logistic regression model based on aggregated units is an appropriate estimation strategy.

The estimation results show that larger age gaps between spouses and greater differences in GDP between their countries of origin are associated with higher divorce rates. Simultaneously, greater cultural distance and differences in gender norms between spouses are linked to increased marital stability. These findings reveal the complexity of marital dynamics, which cannot be fully captured by a singular framework that assumes similarity always fosters stability. Divorce rates for international marriages are noteworthy because they affect the well-being of couples and their children. Accordingly, this study contributes to a deeper academic understanding of the mechanisms underlying marital dissolution in Japan.

2. Data

2.1 Number of Married Couples from the Population Census

The Population Census of Japan, a quinquennial undertaking by the Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), stands as the nation's most fundamental and comprehensive statistical survey. Initiated in 1920, this census systematically enumerates all individuals and households residing within Japan for three months or longer. It yields granular data encompassing population size, demographic composition, employment status, household structures, housing conditions, and various other socioeconomic indicators. The census reports the status as of October 1st. For this study, we draw upon data detailing the number of married couples, their ages, and nationalities. The analysis encompasses six distinct time points, at five-year intervals, from 1995 to 2020. This particular period was chosen because it represents the timeframe during which nationality data is consistently categorized into ten distinct classifications.

2.2 Number of Divorces from the Vital Statistics

The Vital Statistics of Japan, conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), is an ongoing statistical survey that provides comprehensive nationwide data on births, deaths, stillbirths, marriages, and divorces. This administrative dataset, mandated by the Family Register Act of 1898, is compiled annually based primarily on information from family and resident registration systems. It offers detailed insights into demographic shifts, family structures, and mortality causes by aggregating the number of civil filings submitted by municipalities throughout each year.

For this study, we utilize information from divorce records, specifically annual counts, age, and nationality. International marriages between two foreign nationals are excluded from our analysis. This exclusion is necessary because such couples, whose marriages or divorces may not require legal recognition under Japanese law, might not file official notifications in Japan and, consequently, would not be included in this dataset. Therefore, our analysis is confined to marriages between a Japanese national and a foreign national.

2.3 Country Specific Variables

Our analysis incorporates several country-level variables, specifically GDP per capita, the Gender Social Norms Index, and cultural distance, to clarify the structural determinants of divorce among international couples in Japan.

GDP_diff

GDP difference (*GDP_diff*) is calculated as the difference in per capita GDP (constant 2015 USD) from the Census year between the countries of origin of both spouses using data from the World Bank. The unit is 10,000 USD. A positive *GDP_diff* indicates that the husband's country of origin has a higher economic level than that of wife, whereas a negative *GDP_diff* indicates that the wife's country of origin has a higher economic level than that of husband.

GSNI_diff

The Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) is calculated using the Gender Social Norms Index 2020/2023. The GSNI quantifies biases against people's attitudes on women's roles along four key dimensions: political, educational, economic, and physical integrity. Higher values indicate stronger gender norms. Specifically, we use the average values for each country from 2005 to 2022, which is the period for which data are available. We treat these values as time-invariant, country-specific variables, based on the assumption that temporal changes in gender norms in the countries of origin would not significantly influence the

divorce rates of international couples in Japan. The data were standardized for each Census year. The difference in GSNI (*GSNI_diff*) is calculated by subtracting the value of the wife's country of origin from that of the husband's country of origin. A positive value for this difference indicates that the husband's country of origin has stronger gender norms than that of the wife, whereas a negative value indicates that the wife's country of origin has stronger gender norms than that of the husband.

Cultural Distance

We use data on cultural distance (*CultDist*) collected from GeopoliticalDistance.org. This measure is defined for any pair of countries as the average expected disagreement between two individuals randomly drawn from those countries in their responses to questions from the World Values Survey. This variable takes a value of 1 when the answers differ and 0 when they are identical. In our study, the data are standardized for each Census year and used as a variable, with larger values representing greater *CultDist*.

2.4 Other Control Variables

Our analysis controls for *Wife's Age*. In the dataset, which wives are aged between 16 and 50 years, and husbands are aged 18 years or older. The age difference group (*Age Difference*) is defined based on the age gap between spouses, calculated as the husband's age minus the wife's age. The reference category is 0, indicating couples of the same age. *Year* indicates the census year. The intermarriage dummy variable (*Intermarriage_D*) is a binary indicator that takes the value of 1 for international marriages and 0 for marriages between two Japanese nationals.

3. Descriptive Statistics

3.1 Number of Married Couples

In 2020, there were approximately 275 thousand married couples in Japan, with those in which one spouse was a foreign national, accounting for approximately 2.3% of all couples (Figure 1). This proportion has steadily increased since 1995. International marriages involving foreign wives are more than those involving foreign husbands in Japan (Figure 2). However, since approximately 2010, the number of couples comprising a Japanese man and a foreign woman has declined. We also examine trends in the number of married couples across six broader categories of nationality combinations. The left panel of Figure 3 focuses on pairings between Japanese men and foreign women. Until 2010, marriages between Japanese men and Filipino women were the most common form of international marriage. However,

the number of such marriages has decreased since 2015, with marriages between Japanese men and Chinese women recently becoming the most prevalent in Japan. Marriages between Japanese men and women from Korea or other developing countries (Thailand, Brazil, and Peru) have shown a slight downward trend in recent years. Marriages between Japanese men and women from other developed countries (the United States and the United Kingdom) have remained the least common, with no notable change in trends. The right panel of Figure 3 illustrates marriages between foreign men and Japanese women. Except for South Korea, this group shows an overall upward trend. Although the number of marriages between Japanese women and South Korean men has declined slightly in recent years, it remains relatively high. A marked upward trend is observed in marriages with men from countries grouped as "others" (excluding China, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Brazil, Peru, the United States, and the United Kingdom), suggesting a diversification in international marriage patterns.

Figures 4 and 5 present the distribution of age differences between spouses (measured as the husband's age minus the wife's age) by nationality combination. Among Japanese couples (Figure 4), marriages in which the husband is older are predominant; however, such pairings declined significantly between 1995 and 2020. Among Japanese men married to foreign women (left panel of Figure 5), large age gaps—specifically older Japanese men marrying younger foreign women—are especially frequent in pairings with Filipina women in 2020. In marriages between foreign men and Japanese women (right panel of Figure 5), the distribution of age differences tends to form an M-shaped curve, suggesting a pattern distinct from that observed for couples comprising Japanese men and foreign women.

3.2 Divorce Rates

In this study, the divorce rate (DR) is defined as the number of divorces (D) occurring within two years following each census year divided by the number of married couples (M) recorded in the corresponding census year, as follows:

$$DR_t = \frac{D_{t+1}+D_{t+2}}{M_t} \quad \cdots(\mathrm{i})$$

where $D_{t+1,}\, D_{t+2}$ represent the number of divorces in years t+1 and t+2, respectively, and M_t denotes the number of married couples as of Census year t. Specifically, the divorce rate for 2020 is calculated as the total number of divorces occurring in 2021 and 2022, divided by the number of married couples in 2020. We compute the number of divorces and number of couples for each combination to compare the levels and trends of divorce rates across spousal nationality combinations.

Vital Statistics include both marriage and divorce records, and divorce rates are often calculated as the ratio of the number of divorces to the number of marriages within the same

year. However, this approach is highly sensitive to annual fluctuations in the number of marriages because it compares events from different cohorts. In contrast, this study adopts a more demographically stable measure by estimating the probability of divorce occurring in the two years following each observation year among the population at risk (i.e., the number of married couples present in a given year).

Figure 6 compares divorce rate trends between Japanese couples and international marriages. Among Japanese couples, the divorce rate has remained low and stable at approximately 0.03% on average. In contrast, although the divorce rate for international marriages has recently declined, it has remined consistently higher than that for Japanese couples. As shown in Figure 7, prior to 2010, divorce rates were higher among Japanese men married to foreign women. However, since 2010, the divorce rate has increased slightly among foreign men married to Japanese women, surpassing that of the former group. Among couples with foreign wives (left panel of Figure 8), divorce rates were relatively high for Chinese women in 2020 but have declined substantially over time. Conversely, for couples in which the husband is foreign (right panel of Figure 8), Filipino men and those from "other developed countries" (the United States and the United Kingdom) have consistently exhibited high divorce rates.

Figure 9 presents the divorce rates by the wife's age group. In general, divorce rates decline as the wife's age increases. Across all age groups, international marriages tend to have higher divorce rates than marriages between two Japanese nationals. However, in 2020, the divorce rate among Japanese couples with wives aged 20 years or younger exceeded that of their international counterparts. Figure 10 shows divorce rates according to the spousal age gap. In general, larger age differences between spouses are associated with higher divorce rates. International marriages displayed a pronounced U-shaped pattern in 1995; however, this trend has recently diminished. Finally, Figure 11 compares the age differences between spouses by country in 1995 and 2020. In 1995, among marriages with foreign wives, the divorce rate was particularly high for unions with Korean or Chinese women who were more than ten years younger than their Japanese husbands (left panel of Figure 11). In the case of foreign husbands, in 1995, the divorce rate was higher for marriages with Filipino husbands who were more than ten years younger than their Japanese wives. However, in 2020, divorce rates show no clear differences based on age gap (right panel of Figure 11). In both figures, divorce rates have declined over time, and although couples with an age difference of more than ten years tend to have higher divorce rates, this tendency had weakened considerably by 2020.

4. Empirical Strategy

4.1 Preliminary Model

Our goal in the regression analysis is to assess the association between couples' characteristics and divorce risk. Standard regression models, such as the linear probability and logit models, are not applicable in our setting because we utilize data on the number of couples and number of divorces from different sources; hence, we cannot use the individual-level regression approach. We first conduct a preliminary analysis to relate international marriage to the divorce rate using the following grouped logistic regression model:

$$Logit\left(\frac{(D_{i,t+1}+D_{i,t+2})}{M_{it}-(D_{i,t+1}+D_{i,t+2})}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Intermarriage_i + \beta_2{}'X_{it} + \sum \beta_3 Year_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad \cdots(\text{ii})$$

where i indicates the nationality group, and t denotes the year. The dependent variable is the log-odds of divorce, defined as the natural logarithm of the ratio of the number of divorces to the number of non-divorced couples in each cell. *Intermarriage* is a dummy variable that equals 1 for international marriages and 0 otherwise. *X* includes basic demographic control variables, such as the wife's age and age difference between spouses, defined as the husband's age minus the wife's age. *Year* denotes the census year, observed at six time points at five-year intervals from 1995 to 2020.

4.2 Baseline Model

$$Logit\left(\frac{(D_{i,t+1}+D_{i,t+2})}{M_{it}-(D_{i,t+1}+D_{i,t+2})}\right) = \gamma_0 + \sum \gamma_1 Natpair_i + \gamma_2{}'X_{it} + \sum \gamma_3 Year_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad \cdots(\text{iii})$$

Based on this preliminary model, we estimate the effects on the divorce rate by the combination of spouses' nationalities. *NatPair* is a set of dummy variables indicating spousal nationality combinations, including Japan, Korea, China, the Philippines, Thailand, the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Peru (with Japanese–Japanese couples as the reference group).

4.3 Supplementary Model

$$Logit\left(\frac{(D_{i,t+1}+D_{i,t+2})}{M_{it}-(D_{i,t+1}+D_{i,t+2})}\right) = \delta_0 + \delta_1{}'CountryVars_{it} + \delta_2{}'X_{it} + \sum \delta_3 Year_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad \cdots(\text{iv})$$

We further extend the model and conduct supplementary analyses incorporating country-level variables that capture structural differences between spouses' countries of origin. *CountryVars* denotes a vector of country-level variables representing differences in socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, including the GDP per capita gap, GSNI difference, and cultural distance. These variables aim to capture deeper socioeconomic and

cultural asymmetries beyond those reflected by categorical nationality indicators.

5. Results

5.1 Preliminary Estimation Results

Table 1 presents the preliminary estimation results, including the regression coefficients and marginal effects of the grouped logistic regression model. Column (4) indicates that the divorce rate among international couples is significantly higher by approximately 13.6 percentage points than that among Japanese couples. Approximately one-fifth of this difference can be explained by the wife's age and the age gap between spouses. In general, the results indicate that the divorce rate tends to be higher as the age gap increases and the wife is younger.

5.2 Baseline Estimation Results

Table 2 presents the baseline estimation results, focusing on combinations of spouses' nationalities. Compared with Japanese–Japanese couples, all international marriage combinations exhibit positive coefficients, indicating a higher likelihood of divorce. Among the combinations with relatively high numbers of marriages are Japanese husbands with Chinese (0.108), Korean (0.110), or Filipina (0.072) wives, as well as Korean husbands with Japanese wives (0.059). These results suggest that the divorce rates for these pairings are 5.9 to 11.0 percentage points higher than those of Japanese–Japanese couples. The largest marginal effects are observed for couples consisting of an American husband and a Japanese wife (0.187), a Japanese husband and a British wife (0.171), and a Thai husband and a Japanese wife (0.166). However, these pairings account for only a small proportion of all international marriages in Japan. The effects of the wife's age and spousal age gap are generally consistent with the preliminary analysis results.

5.2 Supplementary Estimation Results

Table 3 presents the regression model incorporating county-specific variables. For variables including quadratic terms, the extreme values (turning points) are calculated[1], and

[1] The coefficient of the squared term for the GDP difference is positive, with the minimum and maximum values of the data being -3.2 and 3.2, and the turning point at -0.53 (Table 3, Estimation (6)). A positive GDP difference indicates that the husband's country of origin has a higher GDP. The coefficient of the squared term for the GSNI difference was negative, For the difference, the turning point was -0.02, and the minimum and maximum

the shapes of the curves are examined (Figure 12). The results indicate that both the linear and squared terms of the GDP difference are positive, suggesting that the greater the economic disparity between each spouse's country of origin, the higher the likelihood of divorce. These findings are consistent with the homogamy hypothesis, which posits that similarity between spouses promotes marital stability.

In the results using the GSNI difference, both the linear and squared terms are negative, indicating that a larger difference in gender norms between spouses' countries of origin is associated with lower divorce rates. A negative association is observed between cultural distance (CultDist) and divorce, suggesting a link between greater cultural distance between spouses and lower divorce rates. These results may support the Efficient Specialization Hypothesis, which, grounded in the rational choice framework of traditional economics, posits that marriage tends to be stable when the gender-based division of labor is organized efficiently according to comparative advantage (Becker, 1981). The effects of the other covariates are largely consistent with the baseline estimates in Table 2.

6. Conclusion

This study uses data from the Population Census and Vital Statistics between 1995 and 2020 to investigate divorce trends and determinants among international couples in Japan. Descriptive statistics show that the proportion of international marriages in Japan has increased, including among older age groups where it was previously low. Japanese men tend to marry younger foreign women, particularly those from China and other developing countries, whereas marriages between foreign men and Japanese women exhibit an M-shaped distribution in terms of age difference. Divorce rates are generally higher among international couples than among Japanese couples, although Japanese couples show a higher divorce rate when the wife is under 20 years of age. Larger age gaps between spouses are associated with higher divorce rates. Age gaps and divorce rates showed a pronounced U-shaped relationship among international couples in 1995; however, this pattern has recently weakened.

Estimates from a grouped logistic regression model yield several key findings. (1) All combinations of international couples exhibit significantly higher divorce rates than Japanese–Japanese couples. The combination with the highest divorce rate has a rate 18.7 percentage points higher than that of two Japanese couples. However, this gap has narrowed over time. (2) Regarding age differences, couples in which the husband is 1–9 years older than the wife show lower divorce rates, whereas couples in which the wife is older or the husband is older

values of the data were -1.3 and 1.3, respectively.

by more than 10 years have significantly higher divorce rates. The probability of divorce also decreases with the wife's age. (3) Greater GDP differences between spouses' countries of origin are associated with higher divorce rates, supporting the homogamy hypothesis, which posits that similarity contributes to marital stability. (4) Regarding gender norms, greater GSNI differences are associated with lower divorce rates. This finding suggests that marriages may be more stable when traditional gender roles create mutual dependence. (5) Cultural distance is negatively associated with divorce, indicating that greater cultural differences between spouses are linked to a lower probability of divorce. These findings suggest that the traditional Efficient Specialization Hypothesis contributes to marital stability. The country-specific variables used in this study, such as differences in gender norms, capture characteristics of spouses' countries of origin rather than the individual characteristics of foreign spouses themselves. Individuals who migrate to Japan and enter international marriages may represent a select group with distinct characteristics compared to the general population of their home countries.

While this study remains largely descriptive, future research should aim to better identify the causal mechanisms underlying international marriage and divorce. It is essential to assess the validity and robustness of the indicators used to capture the cultural, attitudinal, and institutional factors must be assessed. Incorporating additional variables, such as employment status, marriage duration, presence of children, and residential characteristics, will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of divorce dynamics. These efforts are expected to yield broader insights into not only divorce but also into international marriage, fertility, and regional variations in demographic behavior.

Acknowledgments

This study is conducted as a part of the Project "The Economic Analysis of the problem of an aging population and declining birthrate in China and Japan in the COVID-19 pandemic" undertaken at the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry (RIETI). The draft of this paper was presented at the DP seminar of the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry (RIETI). We wish to thank Fukao Kyoji, Tomiura Eiichi, Tsuru Kotaro, Sekizawa Yoichi, Ikari Hiroshi, and the participants at the RIETI Seminar (July. 2025), for their helpful comments and suggestions. We also thank the RIETI staff for their kind help and cooperation. Any errors are our own. There are no conflicts of interest.

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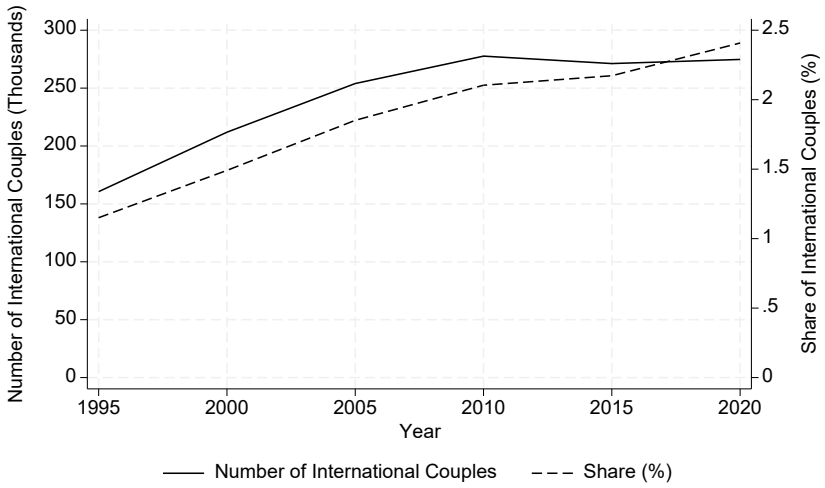
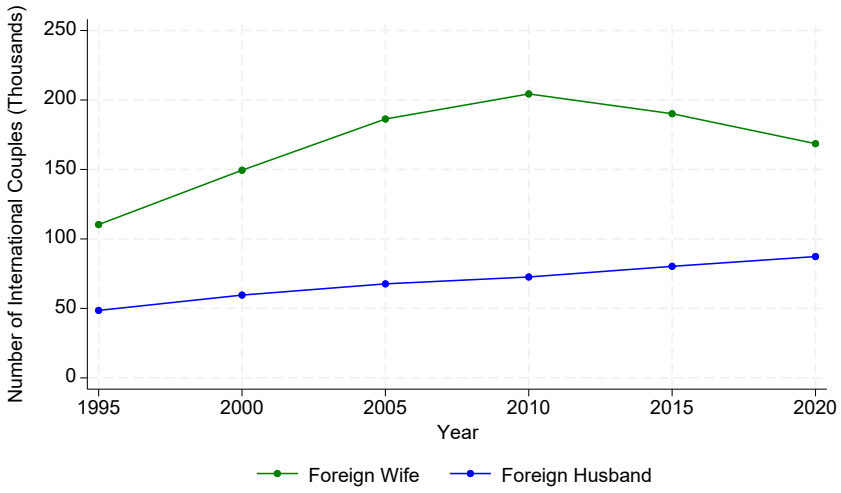
Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Trends in the Number and Share of International Marriages



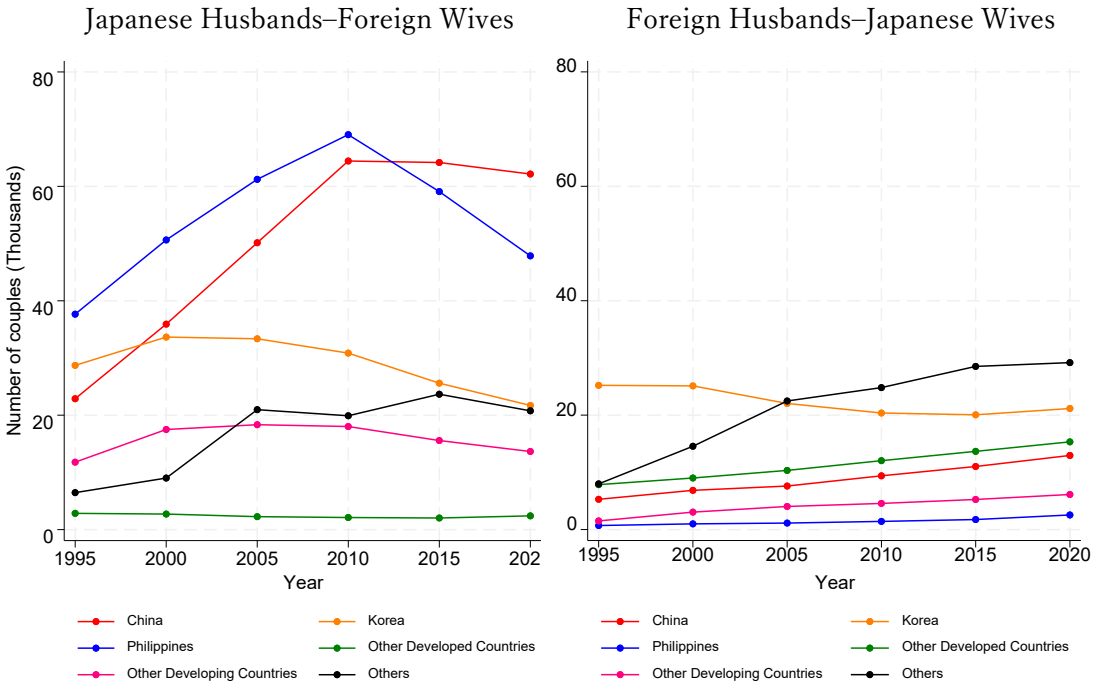
Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC).
Notes: 1) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 2) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 2. Trends in the Number of Couples by Gender-Foreign Status



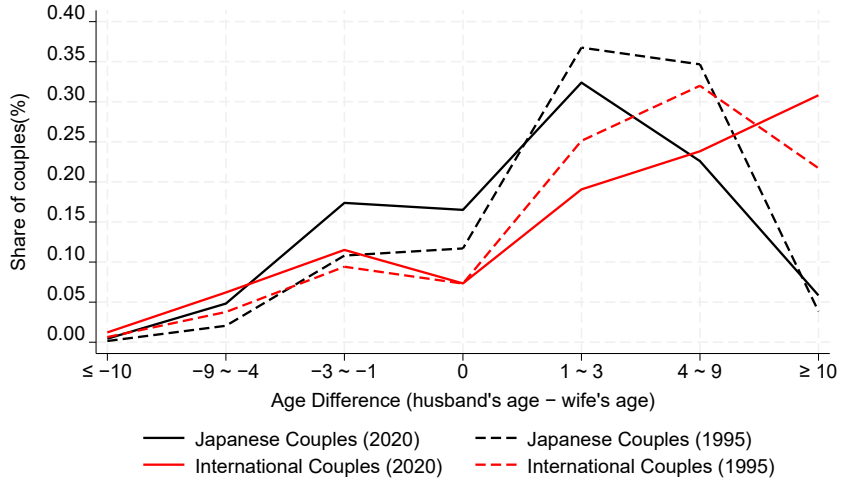
Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC).
Notes: 1) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 2) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 3. The Number of Japanese-Foreign Couples



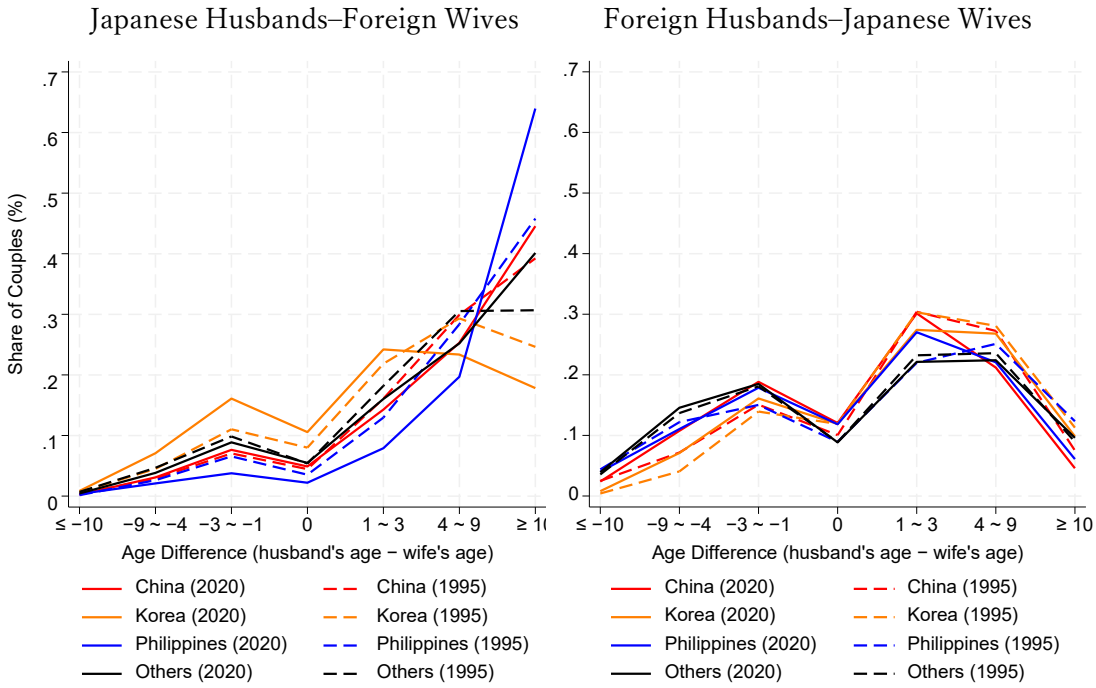
Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC).
Notes: 1) Other developing countries include Thailand, Brazil, and Peru. Other developed countries include the United States and the United Kingdom. 2) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 3) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 4. The Number of Couples by Spousal Age Gap
(Japanese vs. International, 1995 vs. 2020)



Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC).
Notes: 1) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 2)International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 5. The Number of Couples by Nationality and Age Gap (1995 vs. 2020)

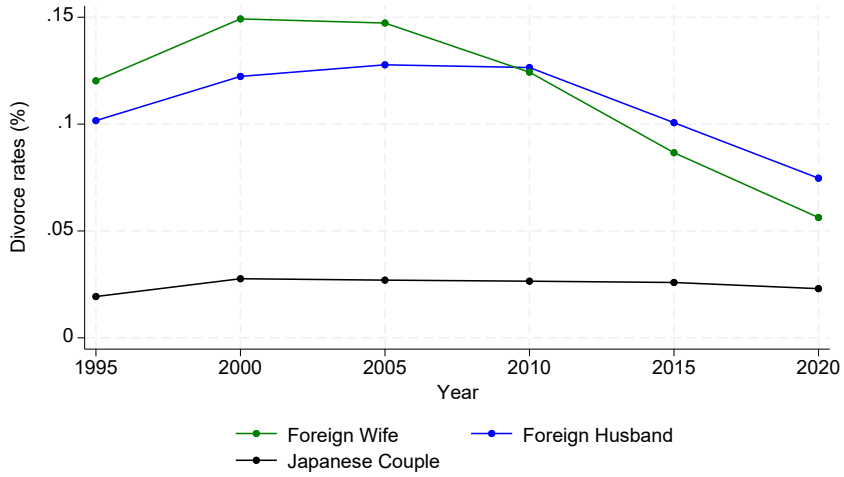


Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC).
Notes: 1)) Other developing countries include Thailand, Brazil, and Peru. Other developed countries include the United States and the United Kingdom. 2) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 3) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 6. Trends in the Divorce Rates (Japanese vs. International)

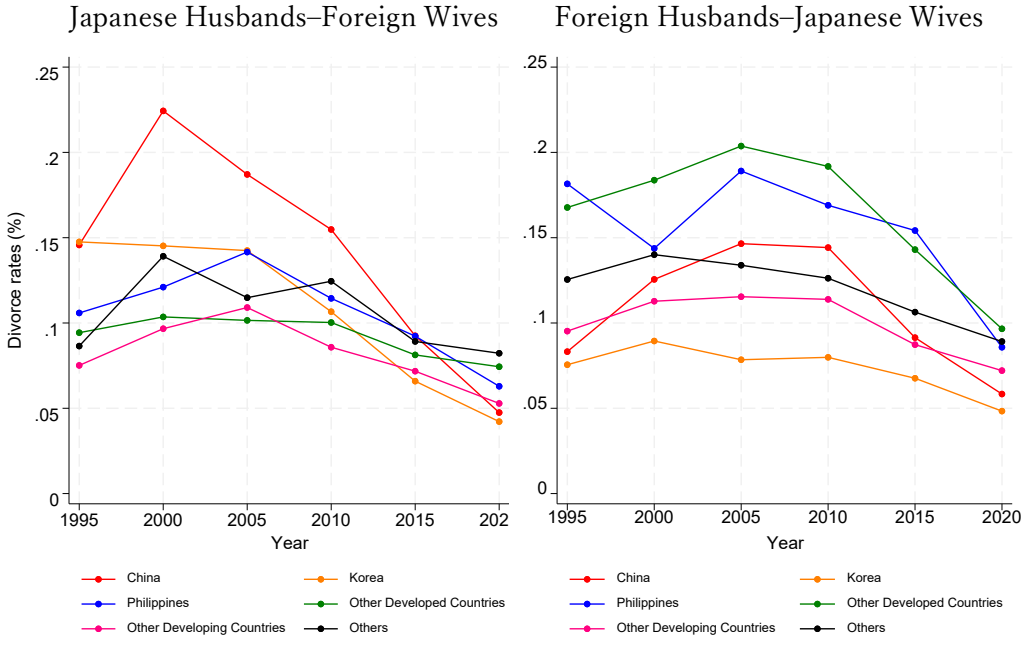
Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC) and Vital Statistics (MHLW).
Notes: 1) Divorce rates are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 3) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 7. Trends in the Divorce Rates by Gender



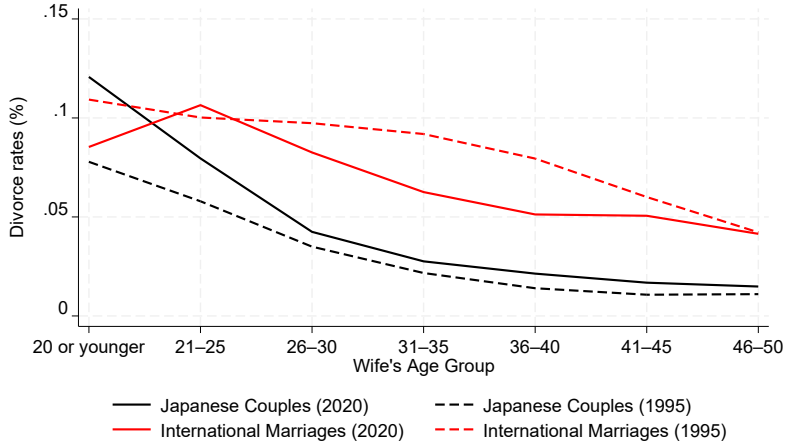
Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC) and Vital Statistics (MHLW).
Notes: 1) Divorce rates are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 3) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 8. Trends in Divorce Rates of Japanese-Foreign Couples by Nationality



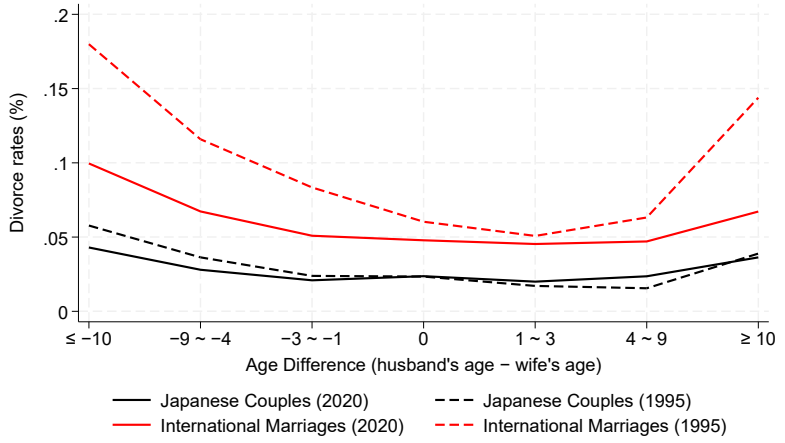
Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC) and Vital Statistics (MHLW).
Notes: 1) Divorce rates are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 3) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 9. Divorce Rates by Wife's Age Group (Japanese vs. International, 1995 vs. 2020)



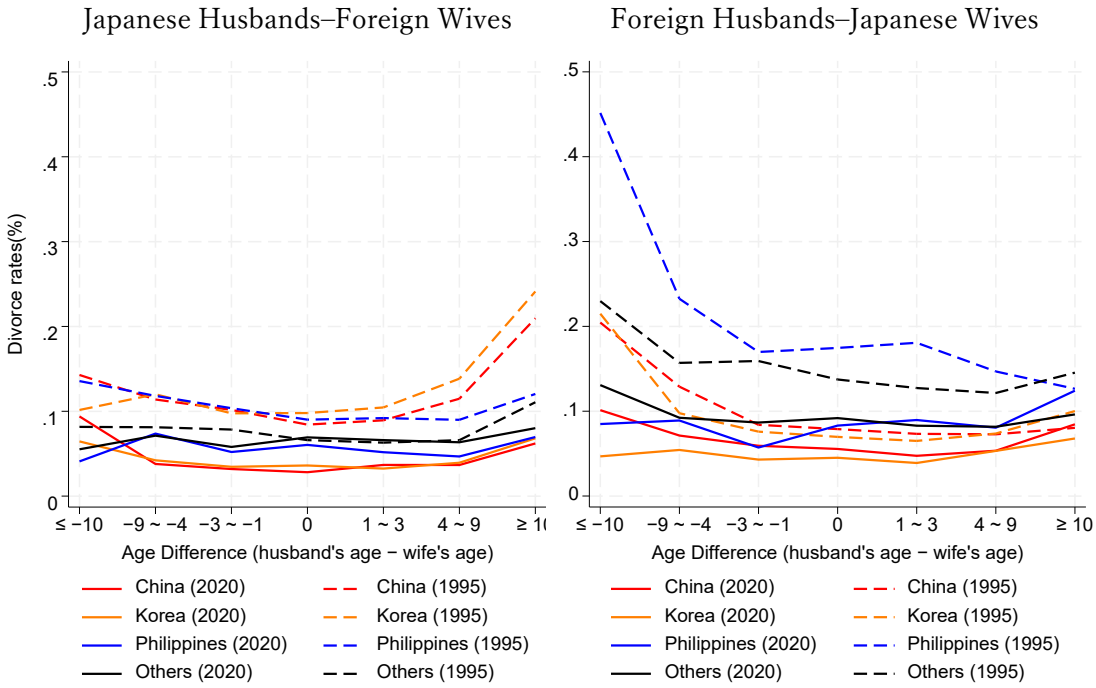
Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC) and Vital Statistics (MHLW).
Notes: 1) Divorce rates are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 3) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 10. Divorce Rates by Spousal Age Gap (Japanese vs. International, 1995 vs. 2020)



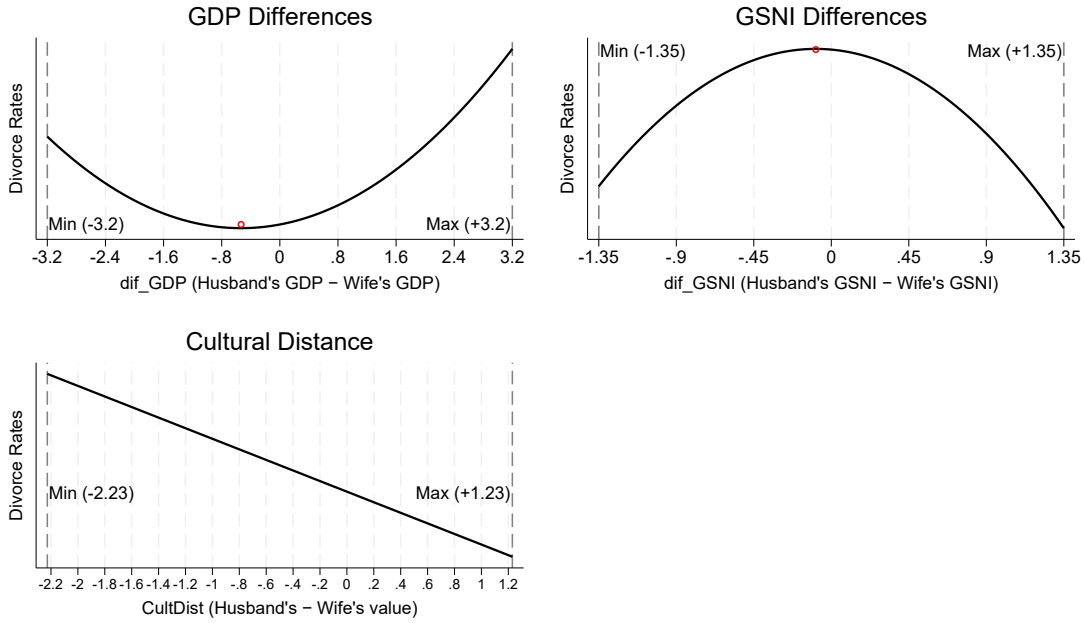
Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC) and Vital Statistics (MHLW).
Notes: 1) Divorce rates are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 3) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 11. Divorce Rates by Nationality and Age Gap (1995 vs. 2020)



Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC) and Vital Statistics (MHLW).
Notes: 1) Divorce rates are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) Other developing countries include the Philippines, Thailand, Brazil, and Peru. Other developed countries include the United States and the United Kingdom. 3) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 4) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Figure 12. Relationships between Cross-Country Differences and Divorce Rates



Source: Created by the authors based on the Population Census (MIC), Vital Statistics (MHLW), and data from the World Bank (GDP), the UNDP Gender Social Norms Index 2020/2023 (GSNI), and Geopoliticaldistance.org (CultDist).
Notes: 1) Divorce rates are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) GDP denotes per capita GDP (in USD) divided by 10,000. 3) “Min” and “Max” indicate the actual range of observed data. 4)The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 5) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Table 1. Logistic Regression Estimates for Divorce Rates: International Marriage Dummy

	(1)						(2)						(3)						(4)					
	Coefficient			Marginal Effects			Coefficient			Marginal Effects			Coefficient			Marginal Effects			Coefficient			Marginal Effects		
	β	Std. err.	P value	dy/dx	Std. err.	P value	β	Std. err.	P value	dy/dx	Std. err.	P value	β	Std. err.	P value	dy/dx	Std. err.	P value	β	Std. err.	P value	dy/dx	Std. err.	P value
Intermarriage_D	1.615	0.003	***	0.152	0.001	***	1.529	0.003	***	0.153	0.001	***	1.508	0.003	***	0.150	0.001	***	1.333	0.003	***	0.136	0.001	***
Wife's Age							-0.329	0.000	***	-0.033	0.000	***	-0.333	0.000	***	-0.033	0.000	***	-0.335	0.000	***	-0.034	0.000	***
Age Difference																								
≤−10																			1.156	0.009	***	0.155	0.002	***
−9 to −4																			0.501	0.003	***	0.054	0.000	***
−3 to −1																			0.013	0.002	***	0.001	0.000	***
1 to 3																			-0.177	0.002	***	-0.015	0.000	***
4 to 9																			-0.130	0.002	***	-0.011	0.000	***
≤10																			0.384	0.003	***	0.040	0.000	***
Year																								
2000													0.368	0.002	***	0.034	0.000	***	0.357	0.002	***	0.034	0.000	***
2005													0.362	0.002	***	0.033	0.000	***	0.339	0.002	***	0.032	0.000	***
2010													0.372	0.002	***	0.034	0.000	***	0.335	0.002	***	0.032	0.000	***
2015													0.378	0.002	***	0.035	0.000	***	0.334	0.002	***	0.032	0.000	***
2020													0.271	0.003	***	0.024	0.000	***	0.223	0.003	***	0.020	0.000	***
Constant.	-3.674	0.001	***				-2.105	0.002	***				-2.375	0.003	***				-2.300	0.003	***			
Pseudo R2	0.0092						0.0345						0.0366						0.0408					
LR chi2	202259.23						757554.91						802121.02						895664.52					
Number of obs	91,315,029						91,315,029						91,315,029						91,315,029					

Source: Created by the authors based on the Population Census (MIC) and Vital Statistics (MHLW).

Notes: 1) *Divorce rates* are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) The number of married couples is taken from six census years (1995–2020, at five-year intervals), whereas the number of divorces corresponds to the total observed in the two years following each census. 3) *Intermarriage_D* is a binary indicator equal to 1 for international marriages and 0 for marriages between two Japanese nationals. *Age Difference* is defined as the husband's age minus the wife's age, with 0 (same age) serving as the reference category. *Year* denotes the census year. *** indicates statistical significance at the 1% level. 4) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 5) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Estimates for Divorce Rates: Nationality Combinations

	(5)					
	Coefficient			Marginal Effects		
	β	Std. err.	P value	dy/dx	Std. err.	P value
Nationality						
JPN-KOR	1.499	0.008	***	0.110	0.001	***
JPN-CHN	1.479	0.006	***	0.108	0.001	***
JPN-PHL	1.141	0.006	***	0.072	0.001	***
JPN-THA	1.148	0.013	***	0.072	0.001	***
JPN-USA	1.456	0.033	***	0.105	0.004	***
JPN-GBR	1.939	0.066	***	0.171	0.010	***
JPN-BRA	0.659	0.031	***	0.033	0.002	***
JPN-PER	1.304	0.052	***	0.088	0.006	***
JPN-Others	1.135	0.011	***	0.071	0.001	***
KOR-JPN	0.999	0.011	***	0.059	0.001	***
CHN-JPN	1.335	0.014	***	0.091	0.002	***
PHL-JPN	1.627	0.032	***	0.126	0.004	***
THA-JPN	1.904	0.050	***	0.166	0.008	***
USA-JPN	2.039	0.012	***	0.187	0.002	***
GBR-JPN	1.274	0.028	***	0.085	0.003	***
BRA-JPN	0.944	0.031	***	0.054	0.003	***
PER-JPN	1.455	0.044	***	0.105	0.005	***
Others-JPN	1.390	0.009	***	0.097	0.001	***
Wife's Age	-0.333	0.000	***	-0.035	0.000	***
Age Difference						
≤−10	1.141	0.009	***	0.155	0.002	***
−9 to −4	0.494	0.003	***	0.055	0.000	***
−3 to −1	0.012	0.002	***	0.001	0.000	***
1 to 3	-0.177	0.002	***	-0.016	0.000	***
4 to 9	-0.129	0.002	***	-0.012	0.000	***
≤10	0.390	0.003	***	0.042	0.000	***
Year						
2000	0.357	0.002	***	0.035	0.000	***
2005	0.339	0.002	***	0.033	0.000	***
2010	0.335	0.002	***	0.033	0.000	***
2015	0.330	0.002	***	0.032	0.000	***
2020	0.218	0.003	***	0.021	0.000	***
Constant.	-2.305	0.003	***			
Pseudo R2	0.0424					
LR chi2(30)	938945					
Number of obs	91,542,555					

Source: Created by the authors based on the Population Census (MIC) and Vital Statistics (MHLW).

Notes: 1) *Divorce rates* are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) The number of married couples is taken from six census years (1995–2020, at five-year intervals), whereas the number of divorces corresponds to the total observed in the two years following each census. 3) Nationality pairings (husband's nationality–wife's nationality) are coded using Japanese–Japanese couples as the reference category. 4) *Age Difference* is defined as the husband's age minus the wife's age, with 0 (same age) serving as the reference category. *Year* denotes the census year. *** indicates statistical significance at the 1% level. 5) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 6) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

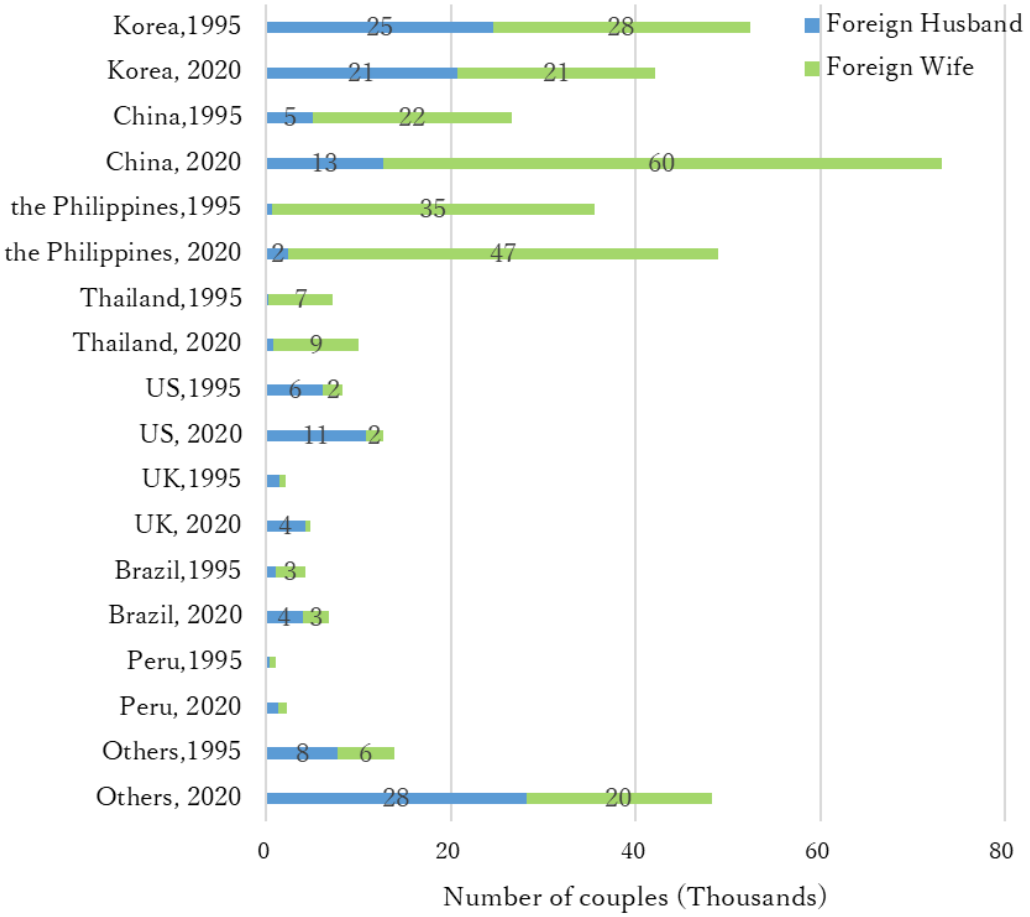
Table 3. Logistic Regression Estimates for Divorce Rate: Country Specific Variables

	(6)					
	Coefficient			Marginal Effects		
	δ	Std. err.	P value	dy/dx	Std. err.	P value
GDP-diff	0.007	0.006	***	0.001	0.001	***
GDP-diff squared	0.066	0.002	***	0.007	0.000	***
GSNI_diff	-0.127	0.013	***	-0.014	0.001	***
GSNI_diff squared	-0.708	0.011	***	-0.077	0.001	***
CultDist	-0.018	0.006	***	-0.002	0.001	***
Intermarriage_D	1.649	0.010	***	0.179	0.001	***
Wife's Age	-0.334	0.000	***	-0.036	0.000	***
Age Difference						
≤−10	1.131	0.009	***	0.153	0.002	***
−9 to −4	0.499	0.003	***	0.056	0.000	***
−3 to −1	0.013	0.002	***	0.001	0.000	***
1 to 3	-0.176	0.002	***	-0.016	0.000	***
4 to 9	-0.129	0.002	***	-0.012	0.000	***
≤10	0.390	0.003	***	0.042	0.000	***
Year						
2000	0.357	0.002	***	0.037	0.000	***
2005	0.339	0.002	***	0.034	0.000	***
2010	0.338	0.002	***	0.034	0.000	***
2015	0.335	0.003	***	0.034	0.000	***
2020	0.227	0.003	***	0.022	0.000	***
Constant.	-2.340	0.014	***			
Pseudo R2	0.0409					
LR chi2(26)	897251.89					
Number of obs	91,332,125					

Source: Created by the authors based on the Population Census (MIC), Vital Statistics (MHLW), and data from the World Bank (GDP), the UNDP Gender Social Norms Index 2020/2023 (GSNI), and Geopoliticaldistance.org (*CultDist*).
Notes: 1) Divorce rates are defined as the ratio of divorces within two years after each census year to the number of married couples in that census. 2) The number of married couples is taken from six census years (1995–2020, at five-year intervals), whereas the number of divorces refers to the total recorded in the two years following each census. 3) *GDP_diff* is the difference in per capita GDP between the husband's and wife's countries. GDP denotes per capita GDP (in USD) divided by 10,000. *GSNI_diff* represents the difference in GSNI between the husband's and wife's countries of origin, where higher values indicate stronger gender norms in the husband's country relative to the wife's country. *CultDist* measures the cultural distance between the foreign spouse's country and Japan, with higher values indicating greater distance. *Intermarriage_D* is a binary indicator equal to 1 for international marriages and 0 for marriages between two Japanese nationals. *Age Difference* is defined as the husband's age minus the wife's age, with 0 (same age) serving as the reference category. Additionally, *Year* denotes the census year. *** indicates significance at the 1% level. 4) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 5) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

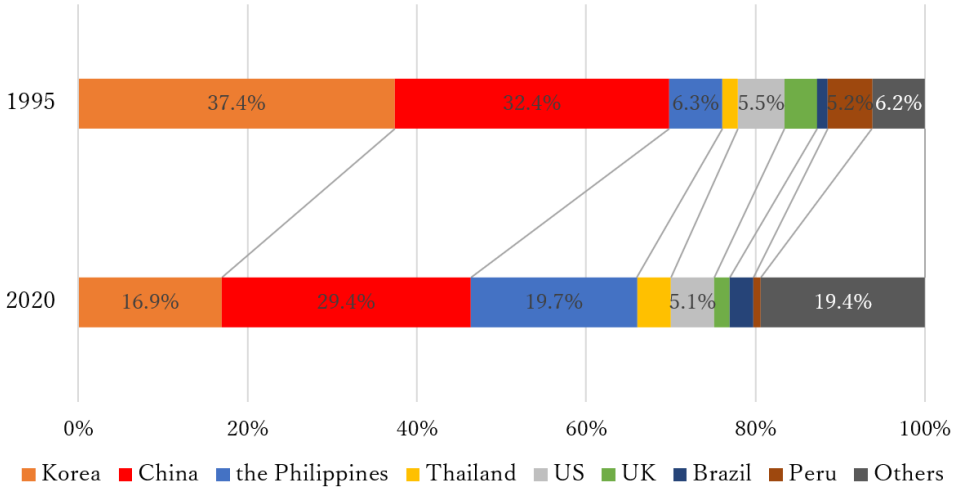
Appendices

A-1. The Number of International Couples by Nationality



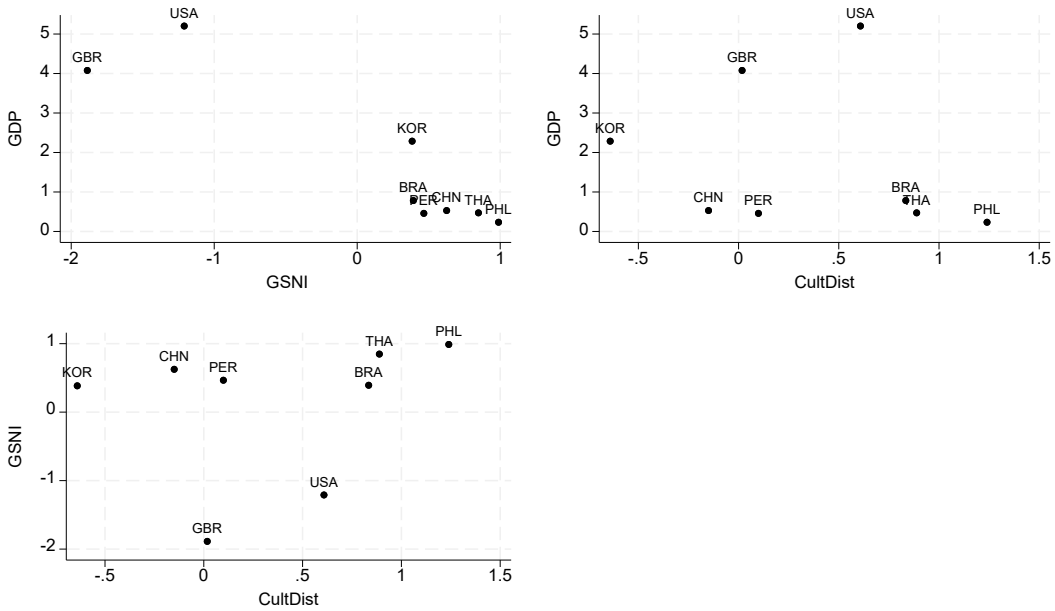
Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC).
Notes: 1) The figure compares the number of married couples by nationality in 1995 and 2020. 2) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 3) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

A-2. The Number of International Couples by Nationality



Source: Based on the Population Census (MIC).
Notes: 1) The figure compares the share of each nationality as a percentage of the total number of international marriages in 1995 and 2020. 2)The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older. 3) International marriages between two non-Japanese spouses are excluded.

A-3. Scatter Plots of Country-specific Data



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the World Bank (GDP), the UNDP Gender Social Norms Index 2020/2023 (GSNI), and Geopoliticaldistance.org (CultDist).
Notes: 1) The figures present a scatter plot of eight countries: Korea, China, the Philippines, Thailand, the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Peru. 2) GDP denotes per capita GDP (in USD) divided by 10,000. GSNI and CultDist are standardized values based on the original data.

A-4. Summary Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Number of Couples	4,949	18,501	116,453	1	1,711,684
Number of Divorces	4,949	483	2,537	0	40,052
Divorce Rates	4,949	0.11	0.15	0	3
Husband's Nationallty	4,949	3.37	3.08	1	10
Wife's Nationallty	4,949	3.34	3.06	1	10
Intermarriage_D	4,408	0.94	0.24	0	1
Wife's Age	4,949	4.29	1.90	1	7
Age Differences	4,949	4.25	1.91	1	7
GDP-diff	4,408	0.22	23.07	-32.05	32.05
GSNI_diff	4,408	0.00	0.23	-0.32	0.32
CultDist	4,408	0.12	0.83	-2.23	1.24
Year	4,949	2007	9	1995	2020

Source: Compiled by the author based on the Population Census (MIC), Vital Statistics (MHLW), and country-specific data from the World Bank (GDP), the Gender Social Norms Index 2020/2023 by UNDP (GSNI), and GeopoliticalDistance.org (CultDist).
Notes:
Notes: 1) Divorce rates are defined as the ratio of divorces that occurred within two years after each census year to the number of married couples reported in the corresponding census. 2) The number of married couples is taken from six census years (1995–2020, at five-year intervals), whereas the number of divorces corresponds to the total observed in the two years following each census. 3) The husband's and wife's nationalities are categorical variables taking values from 1 to 10, corresponding to Japan, Korea, China, the Philippines, Thailand, the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Peru, and others. International marriages between two Japanese nationals and those between two foreign nationals are excluded. 4) *GDP_diff* is calculated as the difference in per capita GDP between the husband's and wife's countries of origin, using data from the World Bank. GDP denotes per capita GDP (in USD) divided by 10,000. *GSNI_diff* represents the difference in GSNI between the husband's and wife's countries of origin, where higher values indicate stronger gender norms in the husband's country relative to the wife's country. *CultDist* measures the cultural distance between the foreign spouse's country and Japan, with higher values indicating greater distance. *Intermarriage_D* is a binary indicator equal to 1 for international marriages and 0 for marriages between two Japanese nationals. *Age Difference* is defined as the husband's age minus the wife's age, with 0 (same age) serving as the reference category. *Year* denotes the census year. *** indicates statistical significance at the 1% level. 5) The sample is restricted to couples in which the wife is aged 16–50 years and the husband is aged 18 years or older.

A-5. Country-specific Average Data

	GDP	GSNI	CultDist
JPN	3.29	-0.61	-2.12
KOR	2.29	0.38	-0.84
CHN	2.29	0.63	-0.27
PHL	0.23	0.99	1.06
THA	0.47	0.85	0.71
USA	5.20	-1.21	0.52
GBR	4.08	-1.89	-0.03
BRA	0.78	0.39	0.85
PER	0.46	0.47	0.12

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the World Bank (GDP), the UNDP Gender Social Norms Index 2020/2023 (GSNI), and GeopoliticalDistance.org (CultDist).
Notes: The values represent country-specific averages of each variable over six periods (1995–2020, in five-year intervals). GDP denotes per capita GDP (in USD) divided by 10,000. GSNI and CultDist are standardized values based on the raw data.

A-6. Correlation of Country-specific Data

	GDP	GSNI	CultDist
GDP	1		
GSNI	-0.898	1	
CultDist	-0.344	0.283	1

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the World Bank (GDP), the UNDP Gender Social Norms Index 2020/2023 (GSNI), and GeopoliticalDistance.org (CultDist).
Note: GDP denotes per capita GDP (in USD) divided by 10,000. GSNI and CultDist are standardized values based on raw data.