

# The Impact of Changes in International Marriage Markets on Status-exchange among International Marriages

Evidence from Japanese Vital Statistics

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# Research question: Consequences of the decommodification of intimate relationships

- International marriages as a consequence of unequal power relations
    - “Individually-hypogamy” but “globally hypergamy” for marriage migrant women (Constable 2005; Elwart 2020; Nagayoshi et al. 2023; Niedomysl et al. 2010; Wang and Chang 2002)
  - Mechanism: the commodification of intimate relationships
    - “The way in which intimacy or intimate relations can be treated, understood, or thought of as if they have entered the market” (Constable 2009: 50)
- Underscores unequal gender/cross-national relationships

Does the de-commodification of intimate relationships alleviate unequal relationships between native men and immigrant women?

# Roles of intermediary agencies

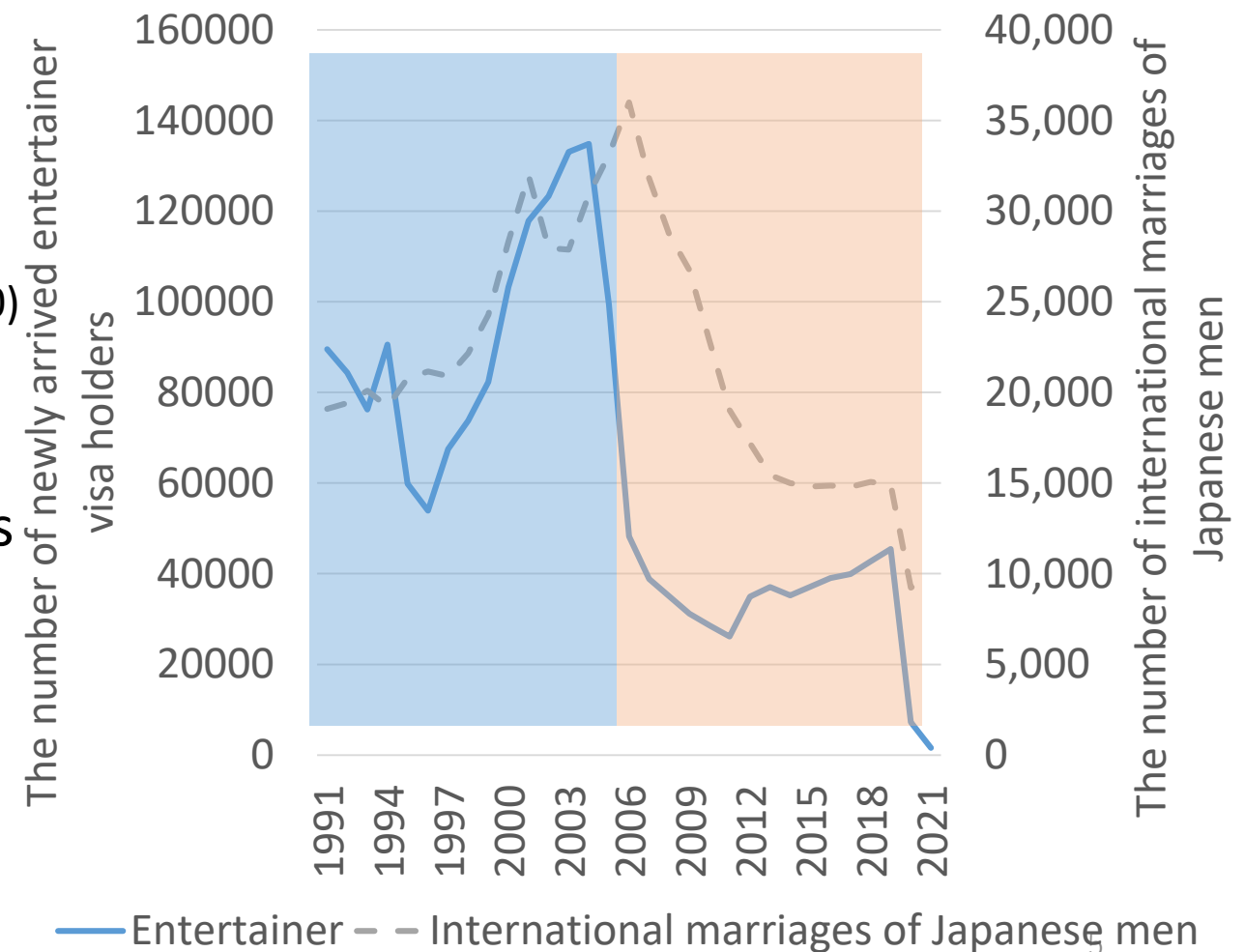
- **Supply side** (Nakamatsu 2002, 2003; Wang and Chang 2002; Ono 2022)
  - Recruiting potential immigrants through networks and handling the administrative procedure for migration
- Increasing supply of foreign women who are 'desirable' in the marriage market
- **Demand side** (Kelsky 2001; Nakamatsu 2002, 2003; McKay 2003; Constable 2005)
  - Emphasizing an image of a potential partner that reflects unequal gender/cross-national relationships (e.g., submissive Asian women, rich native men who can promise you a modern, middle-class life)
- Increasing the value of each side's advantage in the marriage market

# Why Japan?

- Experience of commodification/ decommodification of intimate relationships
  - Entertainer visa
    - No limit to the number of issues
    - Providing young and unskilled women with opportunities to work in Japan  
(Takahata 2020)
    - The period of stay is generally 3-6 months (renewable)
- A place to meet Japanese men
- Marriage as a way to stabilize their stay

# Commodification and de-commodification of intimate relationships

- 1989: the entertainment visa was established
- The mid-2000s: the government intervention (Ishikawa 2014; Takahata 2020)
  - Stricter screening of the entertainer visa
  - Crackdown on illicit intermediaries who promote sham marriages



Source) Statistics on Legal Migrants, Vital Statistics (each year)

# Data

- The 1992-2021 Japanese Vital Statistics
  - Collected nearly all registered marriages
  - Including information on age, marital status, and nationality of both husband and wife
  - Every year
- The 1990-2010 Population Census
  - Conducted every five years
- Limit the data to Japanese-Japanese/international marriages
- Limit the data to couples with Japanese husband

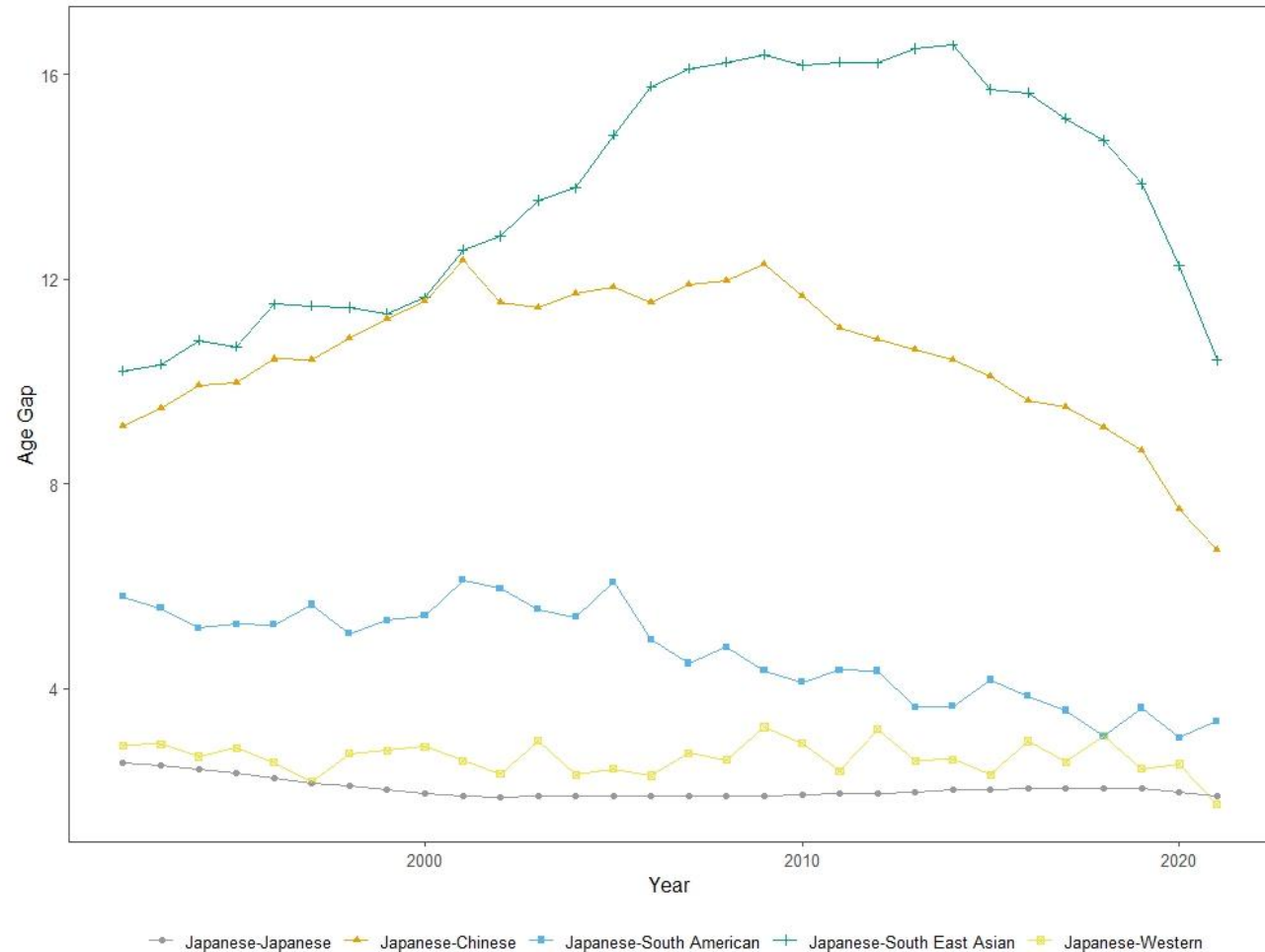
# Variables

- Status in the marriage market
  - Age
    - As an indicator of attractiveness in the marriage market exchange for an immigrant woman
    - Definition of age hypergamy: 3 years+ (conventional definition), 6 years+, 9 years+ (typical age gap among marriage migrants)
  - Five nationality groups
    - Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos and Thais (Southeast Asia), Brazilians and Peruvians (Latin American), US and UK
- Year of marriages
  - 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020

# Methods

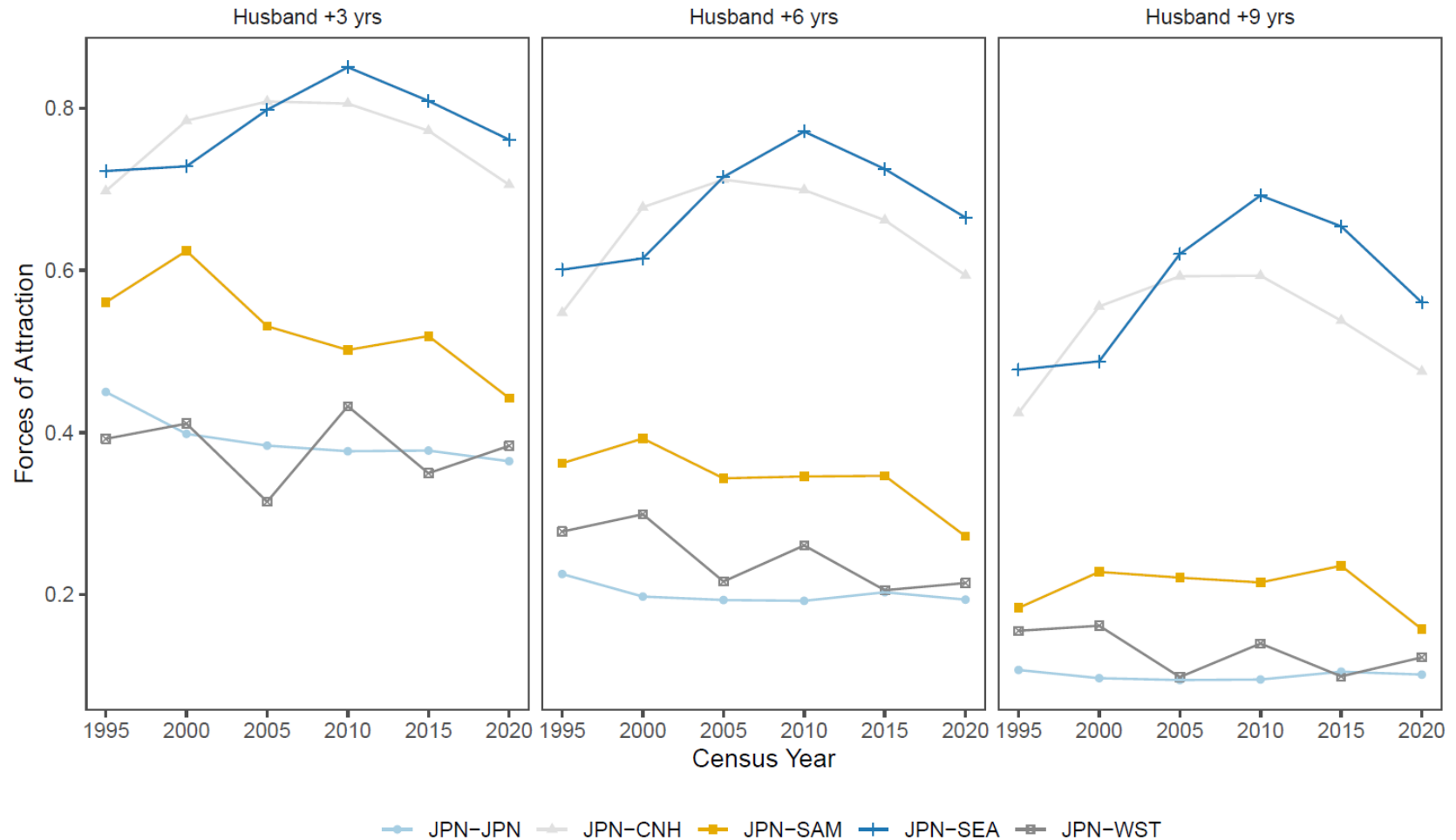
1. Changes in the age gap between husband and wife by wife's nationality from 1992 to 2021
2. Forces of Attraction (FoA)
  - The propensities of spouse pairings net of compositional changes in the pool of individuals
  - Estimates provided by harmonic mean model (e.g., Mu and Xie, 2014)
3. Counterfactual estimates
  - Quantify the extent to which changes in marriage market composition with respect to age have contributed to changing status-exchange marriage
  - Quantify the extent to which changes in FoA have contributed to changing status-exchange marriage

# Result: Changes in the age gap between husband and wife by wife's nationality groups



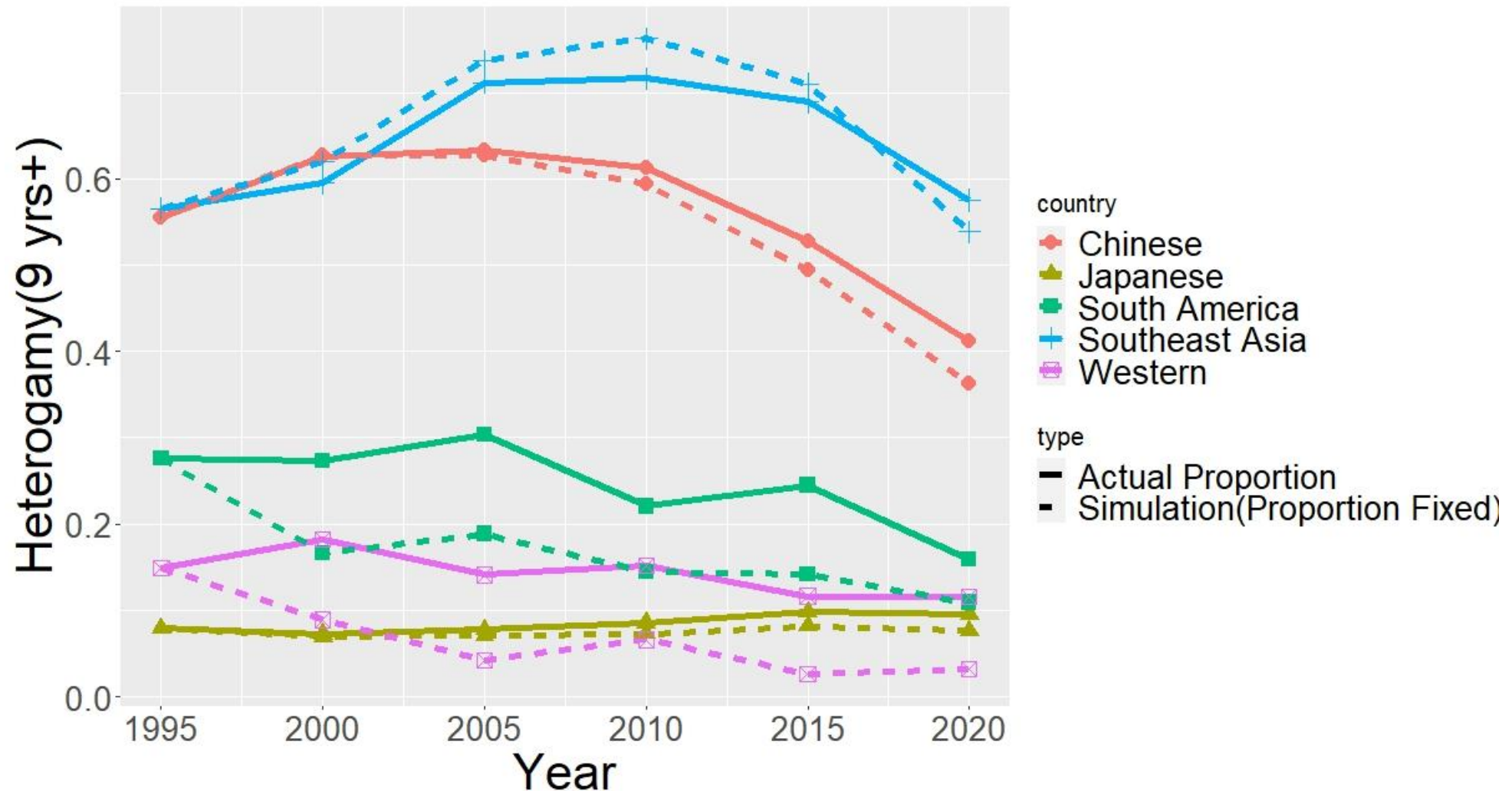
# Result

## Trends of FoA

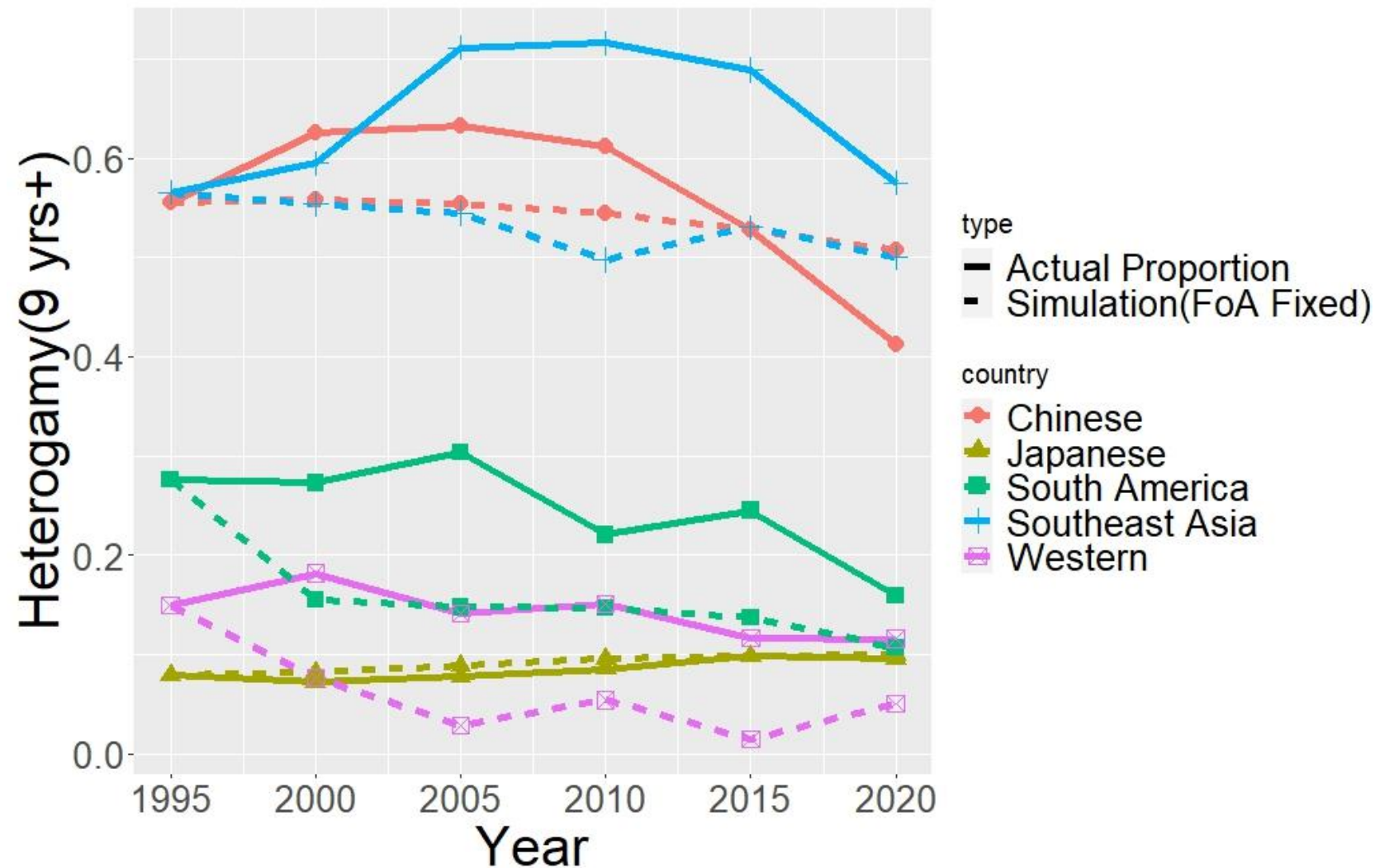


Source: Census, Vital Statistics

# Counterfactual results: Composition fixed to the 1995 Census



# Counterfactual results: FoA fixed to 1995



# Summary of results

- 1995 to mid-2010s: increasing likelihood of status-exchange marriages between Japanese and Southeast Asian and Chinese women
  - Changes in FoA play a bigger role, while changes in supply side factors do little
  - If there was no change in FoA regarding women's age and men's citizenship, the likelihood of status-exchange were much lower
- Mid-2010s: Lagged effects of decommodification?
  - FoA has declined in the mid 2010s
- No significant change in status-exchange patterns for other international marriages

# Discussion and next steps

- Effects of commodification and decommodification of intimate relationship
  - Commodification of international marriages works to make immigrant women vulnerable and promote status-exchange marriages
  - Decommodification transforms unequal power relations
  - Alternative interpretation: diversification of migration pathways
    - The increase in student and technical interns, which may reduce economic incentives to marry with Japanese natives
- Limitation
  - No information of socioeconomic status (occupation, education)
- Next step: Calculation of status exchange index (Xie and Dong 2021)

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