Migration and identity: Japan’s changing relationship with otherness

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ABSTRACT

Japan is currently facing a demographic shift that will alter the nation’s social, cultural, and economic institutions significantly in the years to come. Due to a declining and aging population, foreigners have steadily comprised a greater portion of Japan’s population and workforce for the past three decades. Although foreigners currently comprise only 2% of Japan’s population, some experts predict an increase to between 8% and 27% by 2050.

If even the most conservative of these estimates are true, this would raise serious questions about Japan’s future. Historically, Japan has relegated cultural and ethnic difference to the social margins, leaving little room for the integration of cultural Others. This has produced problematic relationships between Japan and its minority communities. Foreign and cultural Others have been denied rights and recognition within Japanese society and their presence has been largely overlooked. These recent demographic changes, however, are producing novel interactions between foreigners and Japanese in schools, restaurants, retail establishments and other public spaces. Yet, the current research on Japan has not updated our knowledge of Japan with a critical look into the recent shift and its effects.

This dissertation examines the parameters of Japan’s diversification and explores its broader social impacts. Specifically, it uses the novel contexts through which Japanese and non-Japanese people are coming into contact as a backdrop for examining questions about how Japanese-foreigner relations, Japan’s identity (internally and externally), and the ways foreigners are being positioned within contemporary Japanese society. In doing so, this thesis explores topics such as the newfound ways that Japanese and non-Japanese workers are coming into contact with one another, the role of language in facilitating multicultural encounters, and how biracial people destabilize conventional idea about Japanese identity and compel critical
reconsiderations of it. This research incorporates data from over thirty formal interviews, and many more informal interviews from diverse voices, to expound upon the conceptual and material ramifications of Japan’s demographic changes and pose implications for the trajectory of Japan in the near future.

In exploring these questions, this dissertation also draws upon theories of race, ethnicity, space, place, and communication to understand these demographic changes and their impacts. This work examines contemporary theories about the intersection of race and ethnicity, and how they relate to a non-Western and quickly changing sociocultural milieu. It also examines the ways that contemporary migration patterns destabilize and reconfigure notions of spatiality, which are closely linked to identity constructions. It further considers theories about intercultural communication and language learning to show how communicative and linguistic processes facilitate the novel encounters that are unfolding between Japanese and non-Japanese people.

The primary finding from this research is that Japan’s demographic changes are compelling new forms of sociality and interpersonal dynamics between Japanese and foreigners that heretofore have not been observed. The novel characteristics of these encounters are creating a new social milieu within in which Japanese and foreigners are crossing paths more frequently in everyday life. This is leading to more critical inquiries about Japan’s future and the role of non-Japanese people within that future. This work gives voice to the actors on the ground who are living out these changes firsthand and presents their experiences, ideas, and aspirations of future Japan.
Japan is currently facing a demographic shift that will alter the nation’s social, cultural, and economic conditions significantly. Due to a declining and aging population, foreigners have steadily comprised a greater portion of Japan’s population and workforce for the past three decades. Although foreigners currently comprise only 2% of Japan’s population, experts suggest that this proportion will increase to between 8% and 27% by 2050. Such changes are creating situations in which Japanese and foreigners are engaging each other in heretofore never experienced ways, which is producing new forms of sociality that have wider effects.

This dissertation uses ethnographic methods to study these shifts and their implications for Japan. Specifically, this work explores how Japanese-foreigner dynamics are changing as a result of new kinds of encounters, how the presence of foreigners and biracial people are affecting constructions of Japan’s identity, and the ways foreign actors are negotiating challenges they experience in this context. In doing so, this work demonstrates and critically examines how race, ethnicity, spatiality, and communication factor into these novel forms of everyday sociality and shows their applicability and limitations in a non-Western context.

The novel characteristics of these encounters are creating a new social milieu within in which Japanese and foreigners are crossing paths more frequently. This is leading to more critical inquiries about the role of non-Japanese people within Japan’s future. This work gives voice to the actors on the ground who are living out these changes firsthand and presents their experiences, ideas, and aspirations of future Japan.
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CHAPTER 1
CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS: IDENTITY CATEGORIES AND CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION

Introduction

People outside of Japan associate the country with many different images and characteristics. For some people Japan’s identity is one of super-modern technologies, such as the bullet train, robots, or conveyer belt sushi. For others, it stands for images of their favorite animations, video games, or television dramas. Some associate Japan with world-class baseball players and soccer athletes, or perhaps more traditional sports, such as sumo or karate. Foodies may associate Japan with sushi, *takoyaki*, or an intricate and historic culinary culture. The number of things people associate with Japan are plentiful and are likely to be idiosyncratic to the individuals who are asked.

What is taken for granted when one thinks of things Japanese is that the people living in Japan are Japanese. This is taken for granted because dimensions of Japan’s diversity have not been sufficiently conveyed to foreign audiences. By and large, this has not been a serious problem. Foreigners could take many trips to Japan and remain totally unaware of ethnic groups and minority groups that scholars have been interested in for decades. Words like *Burakumin*, *zainichi*, *nikkeijin*, or *gaikokujin* usually mean nothing to the typical traveler or Japan enthusiast. One could go to Japan and believe that Japan was home to a homogenous group of people, and a few select English-teaching or corporate expats, and that was that. This, however, is slowly changing and if people come to Japan with associations of Japan being home to only “the Japanese,” they will be quickly taken aback as they walk through the streets of any of Tokyo’s liveliest neighborhoods. This revelation might come to them when they realize that the attendants
at the local convenience store are South Asian, that the clerk at their hotel is Thai, or that their waiter at the supposedly “authentic” izakaya restaurant is from Myanmar.

Japan is diversifying at an unprecedented pace, which creates an entirely novel phenomenon that the country will have to come to terms with. Just as foreigners who mistakenly associate Japan with only Japanese people, so too will the nation have to grapple with these changes on a macro-level. However, unlike the first time tourist who may be surprised to encounter foreign restaurant workers, the ramifications for Japan as a nation are much more profound. In fact, as the nation comes to terms with Japan’s rapidly changing conditions, questions about national identity, socio-cultural belonging, and interpersonal communication patterns emerge. And while the first time tourist can go back to their home country relatively unscathed by witnessing Japan’s diversity, the same cannot be said of Japan itself. The ramifications of this diversify can potentially impact notions of identity and belonging for generations to come and how Japan deals with these impending demographic changes are of crucial interest to scholars, residents of Japan, and public officials alike.

This dissertation will examine the parameters of Japan’s diversification and explore the impacts of diversification on Japanese society. Specifically, it will use the novel types of encounters that are happening in Japan, between Japanese and foreigners, as a lens through which we can better understand Japan’s changes. At the core of this investigation is the fact that Japan’s population is shrinking and aging, and as a result foreign workers are coming to comprise greater proportions of Japan’s population. As this occurs, foreigners are being put into direct contact with Japanese people and segments of Japanese society that have heretofore not experienced diversity or engaged with foreigners in a significant capacity. These newfound encounters produce new forms of sociality and interpersonal relations that warrant attention
because until now scholarly inquiries into Japanese-foreigner relations have been somewhat limited in scope. Most existing studies have focused on the problematic encounters between Japanese and foreigners and the ways that Japanese society has marginalized foreign difference. While this continues to occur, there are also a multitude of other social outcomes that emerge from these interpersonal encounters. Some recent studies have examined these alternative outcomes, but they have been limited to a few inquiries over the past decade. This research will provide deeper context to these encounters by presenting data from different elements of foreign and Japanese communities that help to conceptualize the outcomes of these encounters and what these outcomes mean for Japan.

In doing so, this dissertation will also explain the ramifications of these outcomes as they pertain to constructions of Japanese identity. Scholarly interest in the topic of Japanese identity dates back several decades and has produced important insights into the ways that Japanese identity has heretofore been constructed. Such studies have helped explain the function, construction, and malleability of Japanese identity in a historical context. However, considering that the changes Japan is experiencing are occurring so rapidly and dramatically, it is important to reconsider these notions of identity and how they will withstand these changes. Scholars have shown that Japanese identity has not been static over time but has instead reacted and adapted itself to internal and external changes. Japan is now arguably experiencing one of its most dramatic changes in history, so reexamination of this identity is urgent.

Previous research has indicated that Japanese identity is constructed out of a complicated amalgamation of different identity variables. These variables include notions of race, ethnicity, nationality, biology, genotype, language, culture, and geography, amongst many others. On the one hand, this identity and its contents are somewhat elusive and difficult to precisely define. Is
Japanese identity one that is racially based or nationally based? How do notions of language and cultural fluency conflate with race and nationality to construct a conceptual image of a Japanese person? These are not questions with clear answers, but they are important to consider when discussing Japanese identity. On the other hand, there is a serious materiality to Japanese identity that is operationalized in a conceptual and tangible form. As will be shown below, this especially manifests in the case of biracial people in Japan and their increasingly public roles within Japanese society. How the Japanese mainstream is making sense of these people as they emerge into the public spotlight provides important indications as to how Japanese identity as an abstract category will proceed in the twenty-first century. This dissertation will shed light on these questions and explain how Japanese identity is experiencing changes on macro and micro levels.

As this dissertation reexamines these previous studies on Japanese identity, theoretical concepts that have been used to explain the construction and function of Japanese identity will also be investigated. The context of contemporary Japan provides an excellent opportunity to critically examine some key ideas in Western academic theory. First, Japanese identity is constructed and intertwined with so many useful academic concepts, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, space, place, communication, and identity itself. This provides a unique opportunity to consider some important strands of scholarship that scholars regularly use to make sense of the contemporary world. By applying them to the context of Japan, we can ascertain a better understanding of their functionality and applicability in a renewed environment.

Second, contemporary Japan also helps to examine how and to what extent these western theories apply to a non-western setting. For example, academic writings on race and ethnicity remain highly relevant to North America, Europe, and Latin America, where race, class, ethnicity, immigration, and power intertwine on a daily basis. However, the applicability of these
concepts as they pertain to non-western environments remains debatable and open for discussion. The data below will shed light on these concepts as they pertain to a non-Western environment. While Japan’s problems are discernably different from those of North America or Europe, it is worthwhile to use these theories to explain the similarities and differences between these cultural and geographical settings.

Third, this dissertation combines these theories and uses them in a way to practically explain what is unfolding in Japan today. While there are certainly abstract and conceptual ramifications of Japan’s changes, the real impact of these at the everyday level are more profound than most people would expect. Thus, by using these theories, this research will seek to bridge the gap between the micro and the macro to show how these ideas about identity and interpersonal relations relate in this volatile climate and in a way that will affect Japan in years to come.

**Ethnographic Setting and Data Collection**

The data presented in this dissertation has been collected through the course of several years of research in Japan. This work began as an exploratory project in 2013, when I hoped to investigate the conditions surrounding Japan’s African populations. This original research sought to understand the conditions surrounding Africans living in Japan and in particular their labor market participation, their livelihood trajectories, and the ways they interacted with Japanese and other foreign populations. In doing, so I hoped to use racial and ethnic theories as a lens through which to understand this phenomenon. However, during the course of several exploratory research trips to Japan (numbering four in total from 2013 to 2014), I began to ask wider questions about the impacts that immigration was having on Japan. I quickly realized that many of the experiences and conditions that were present in Japan’s African communities were also
present in other migrant populations as well and that their encounters with Japanese society were equally important. This realization led me to draw back from the strict ethnography of Africans to consider how foreigner-Japanese relations are changing more broadly. I hoped to use qualitative data as a means to understand these changing dynamics and to postulate some of the ways that Japan is changing in relation to these ongoing demographic trends.

In 2015, I set off to Japan to conduct research. I was based in Matsuyama, where I worked for a private language school teaching English and translating and editing documents. In my free time, I was able to conduct interviews, travel to see key informants, and continue to examine the questions that I wanted to explore. I made several domestic research trips to conduct these interviews and participate in different events with foreign communities throughout Japan.

Since 2017, I have been based in Japan working at a Japanese university. I formally finished my data collection in 2017, but as any anthropologist knows, there is no fine line between research and life. Even after I “concluded” my data collection and began seriously writing this dissertation, I continue to encounter things in everyday life that make me question the findings of my research, ask new questions, and reconsider existing scholarship to greater degrees. Furthermore, as I continue to live and work in Japan, events continue to unfold that shape and reshape the relevance of the findings documented here. For example, in December 2018, the Japanese government announced an overhaul to the foreign trainee system, which has long been recognized as a backdoor for low skilled labor from developing countries and which Japanese employers and brokers have exploited for economic gain. The current relevance of these questions makes it hard to draw any tangible conclusions and the findings here will be considered evolving because of the particular state of change that Japan is currently engulfed in.
All in all, I conducted over thirty formal interviews with Japanese and foreigners living in Japan. However, some of the most intriguing bits of data presented below come from informal interviews that happened in serendipitous situations. For instance, when focusing on African communities in Japan, I spent many nights socializing with African bar workers and street touts (people who stand on street corners and in front of stores looking to solicit pedestrians) in popular nightlife neighborhoods in Tokyo and Osaka. While the data obtained from these encounters were not factored into the thirty interviews noted above, they were vital to shaping this dissertation into what it is now.

Additionally, I conducted research at various civic and religious institutions aimed at helping foreigners in Japan. These included churches, mosques, and student organizations. I also frequently visited popular places where foreigners congregated through established migrant support networks to see the ways that foreign communities operated firsthand.

Although this is not an ethnography of one or two particular communities, as is common in anthropological research, my multi-sited and multi-pronged approach offers insights that have been hitherto under observed and will shed light on some of the largely overlooked changes that Japan is experiencing. By incorporating a wider range of voices from different perspectives, this research looks to bridge the gap between micro and macro level foreign experiences in Japan in ways that provide more insights than a typical ethnography would produce.

**Japanese Identity Categories**

At the 2016 summer Olympic Games, a lead member of Japan’s national track and field team was Japan-born, half-Jamaican, half-Japanese 23-year-old Asuka Cambridge. Cambridge was born in Osaka to a Jamaican father and a Japanese mother and has become a national celebrity since his Olympic appearance. Later in August 2016, after the team’s 4x100 silver
medal performance, where they placed second only to an Usain Bolt-led Jamaican team, Cambridge appeared with his teammates on Japan’s annual 24-hour telethon to raise money for charity. On the program, he presented the audience with a pair of track cleats, one depicting the Japanese flag and the other depicting the Jamaican flag. He explained that these cleats represent his dual heritage as Jamaican and Japanese, while still being a member of the Japanese team.

What does the presence and popularity of Cambridge, and others like him, mean for constructions of ethno-national identity, which have for so long been rigidly defined in ways that formerly excluded or entirely subsumed such individuals? What does the image of Cambridge holding a Jamaican-flag cleat in one hand and a Japanese-flag cleat in the other signify about notions of belonging and cultural identity that is acceptable within Japan’s socio-cultural parameters?

In 2015, different questions of belonging arose when Ariana Miyamoto was named the winner of the “Miss Japan” contest. Many social commentators and members of the general public accused Miyamoto, who is born to a Japanese mother and African-American father, as not being “Japanese enough” to win the award. When subsequently interviewed, Miyamoto noted that Japanese people had asked her throughout her life what her ethnicity was and they questioned her when she answered that she was Japanese. In a BBC interview, Miyamoto explained, “I say I am ‘Japanese’ the reply would be ‘No, you can’t be.’ People will not believe that.” But she also noted that “if I say I am ‘ha-fu’ I people agree. There is no word like ha-fu outside Japan, but I think we need it here. In order for us mixed kids to live in Japan it is indispensable and I value it” (Wingfield-Hayes 2015). The fallout following Miyamoto’s

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1 *Ha-fu* is a colloquial term used to designate people who are biologically half-Japanese and half-something else. “Half” often denotes a physical appearance and cultural heritage very different from that of Japan.
selection and subsequent treatment by the public has set off a nation-wide discussion of what it means to be “Japanese” and how conspicuously biracial individuals fit into discourses and institutional arrangements related to national belonging.

Public discourse concerning the identities of a star athlete and beauty pageant winner raise serious questions about the current status of Japanese identity. What might a typical “Japanese” person look like in 2050, when foreign residents may account for 8-27% of Japan’s population (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008)? How does this question affect the cultural sensitivities of Japanese society? What criteria will be used to judge who is Japanese? How will the foreign and minority experience in Japan differ from how it does today or how it did in 1990? And how will that be different from what was understood to be the substance for being Japanese in 1995, 1945, or 1895, for example? And does the difference reflect changing understanding of what is asserted to be the Japanese identity?

This chapter addresses these questions by exploring three key areas: (1) Identity, (2) Presentation of Self, and (3) Race, Ethnicity, Nationality, and other related concepts. The third section is sub-divided into race, ethnicity, boundaries, nationality, space, and language, each of which discusses how these respective areas relate to identity formation. Such questions are especially pressing because Japan’s diversification has so far not occurred in a segregated fashion but rather in a context where foreigners are entering increasingly diverse geographic, professional, and cultural spheres of Japanese life. In many ways, the encounters that occur in these areas provide the material substance out of which ideas such as race, space, place, national belonging, and Otherness emerge.
Identity

Scholarly writing on identity has a deep history that spans across academic disciplines. Scholars have typically discussed identity in terms of “personal” and “collective” identities in order to understand how people assert themselves on individual and group levels (Burke 2003). Regardless of the particular identity type, scholars see identity as a process through which disparate experiences, events, and interactions converge to establish a sense of who a person is (Erikson 1968; Tajfel 1978). Individuals possess different types or layers of identity, which play different roles in their lives according to their particular context (Burke 2003; James 1890; Massey 1994; Umaña-Taylor et al. 2004). These different types of identities – such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, nationality, personal traits, sexual orientation, hobbies, professions, and many others – affect how people think of themselves in relation to others. There is also a growing interdisciplinary trend among scholars to consider the ways different types of identities converge within a person and in relation to their contextual environments (Butler 1990; Crenshaw 1995; Dwyer 1999; Norton 2000). Identities do not exist in isolation but instead in conjunction with an abundance of other types of identities and structural forces, with which they intersect. The researcher’s tasks are therefore to identify what types of identity are especially salient in a particular context and to provide tools for investigating them (Edwards 2009; Massey 1994; Norton 2000).

In its most basic sense, identity refers to “being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group’s perspective” (Stets and Burke 2000, 226). These efforts to establish a sense of commonality often occur through a process, whereby individual definitions of “sameness” and “difference” are conceptually distinguished and reified (Bucholtz and Hall 2006). Notions of similarity and difference are, on the one hand, conceptually
and practically differentiated to set individuals apart from others, while at the same time, differences – real or imaged – are adapted and made more tangible as they become popularized. There is usually considerable arbitrariness involved in this process, which often produces blurred, inaccurate, or paradoxical ways identity that different people conceptualize their identities. These ambiguities can often produce conflicting understandings of what “being at one” with the rest of the group entails. This is especially important in cases where understandings of identity are deployed in complex and multifaceted ways. For instance, asking people in Tokyo what it means to “be Japanese” will yield very different response from someone living in rural Japan or in Okinawa. In other words, despite talking about the same identity, senses of belonging and group identity differ depending on who exactly is explaining them.

At the same time, these differences and similarities can be exaggerated. Kiyoko Sueda notes that:

“when people strongly identify with their own group and have a strong solidarity with their in-group members, they tend to overestimate the shared characteristics of their own group and underestimate those of other groups. This underestimated value placed on the out-group leads to either negative stereotypes or prejudice” (Sueda 2014, 6; see also Guillaumin 1995; Turner and Giles 1981).

In other words, similarity or difference can be exaggerated in ways that complicate and obfuscate notions of belonging.

Identities are not static but change over time in response to social dynamics and changing interpersonal relations (Hall 1990; Haraway 1991). According to Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall: “identity inheres in actions, not in people. As the product of situated social action, identities may shift and recombine to meet new circumstances” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 376; see also Stets
and Burke Burke 2000). It is therefore important to recognize that certain mechanisms – such as language, culture, race, gender, social positionality, etc. – can change interpersonal notions of Self and Other.

Postmodernists have made important contributions to the study of identity and the ways interpersonal relations develop in relation to social identities. These works have emphasized the role and function of identity in everyday life and the ways different factors and social conditions influence identity development. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” explored how larger social forces and individual upbringings condition perceptions and dispositions (Bourdieu 1990). Social preferences and cultural predilections manifest through a persons’ “habitus,” which shapes how they categorically make sense of group differences. For example, people may take for granted their preferences, the ways they see the world, and the things they believe in, but Bourdieu argued that these are all products of the particular “habitus” in which a person is raised and a mechanism that perpetuates class differences over time.

These contributions emphasize how concepts of Self and Other are closely related to wider social conditions and structural mechanisms. In effect, such theories expanded the focus of interpersonal identities to consider a wider range of more complicated variables that influence how people perceive themselves in relation to others. Identity does not develop in a vacuum but is instead conditioned by social, political, and structural variables that carry implications for how persons conceive of themselves and their positionality vis-à-vis other members of society.

During the 1980s, a wave of postmodern racial scholarship gained popularity by building on these critical works from earlier decades. Most notably, scholars used these works to examine more critically how race, gender, and other factors influenced interpersonal relationships. Critical race theorists used these works to examine how racial power structures are perpetuated overtime
and how marginalized individuals aim to resist these structures and protest their existence (Crenshaw 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Essed and Goldberg 2001). Such studies shifted discussions of race to explore how inequalities and socio-political systems can be seen as the root of racial manifestations. By situating racial constructs as embedded in social and political mechanisms, these authors offered new understandings of how racialized identities are transmitted through time and leave dominant discourses unchallenged.

Relatedly, gender also functions as a practical and conceptual boundary that is spatially situated. Doreen Massey has shown that spaces are constructed out of social relations and that place is formed through interpersonal interactions, in which gender features a prominent role (Massey 1994; see also Butler 1990; Nelson and Seager 2004). Like other identity categories, gender too becomes a means of exclusion and of personal and collective identification in complex ways that subvert and challenge conventional understandings of personal relations (Butler 1990). Relationships and boundaries also change as a result of cultural flows (Massey 1994). Thus, spaces and places are highly gendered, are situated within larger structures of patriarchy, and are at the same time a means to challenge these broader ideological and institutional structures.

Caroline Essers and Yvonne Benschop’s study of Muslim women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands materializes these theoretical works in a lucid way. The authors use ethnographic observation to demonstrate how Muslim women used “creative boundary” work to establish idiosyncratic identities and reformulate understandings of the intersections of religion, ethnicity, and gender. They demonstrate how “Islamic identification intermeshes with gendered and ethnicized practices and experiences of inclusion and exclusion in entrepreneurial activities” (Essers and Benschop 2009, 404). They explain that “…boundary work in the context of migrant
Muslim businesswomen entails strategies in which Islam is used as a basis for distinction, stratification and demarcation to facilitate entrepreneurship” (Essers and Benschop 2009, 419). They ultimately accomplish this by “claiming the right to decide for themselves which religious rules apply to their working lives and which – in their eyes dogmatic – rules can be discarded” (Essers and Benschop 2009, 419). The complexities of gender, and its intersections with various other identity categories, provide important lenses through which social relations can be restructured and reconceptualized.

Identity is thus a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be neatly defined or categorically fixed (Norton 2000; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000; Rahier 1998). Rather, identity is influenced by a number of subjective variables, which are historically conditioned, closely bound to their idiosyncratic contexts, and subject to change (Hall 1997). Analyzing expressions of identity thus requires attention to such variables and the ways they influence individual experiences. Any inquiry into, for example, “Japanese identity,” and its relation to ongoing socio-demographic and macro-level changes, demands attention to a multitude of factors that could potentially affect how actors perceive themselves and construct images of themselves in relation to sociocultural Others. These factors include but are not limited to the cultural and historical constructions of Japanese identity, the ways Japanese and non-Japanese actors engage with this identity and assert their own identities within society, and how social processes influence the defining and redefining of categorical identities in novel and dynamic ways. Paying attention to these factors provides not only a glimpse into the manifestations of identity themselves but also the ways social processes reflexively define them.
Presentation of Self

Identity is closely intertwined with concepts of Self and Other, which delineate social belonging. Distinguishing members of groups is a social phenomenon that occurs through self-presentation in everyday encounters. Erving Goffman engaged extensively with issues of self-presentation and his work continues to be relevant for understanding how identity is asserted and received. Although Goffman’s work was published over half a century ago, and there has been much more recent work that has revealed important insights into identity and interpersonal dynamics, I would like to discuss his work here as some of Goffman’s arguments are particularly relevant for understanding Japan today.

Goffman used the metaphor of a theatrical play to explain the different ways people present themselves to others. Specifically, his metaphor of the “dramaturgical” stage is crucial in shaping selves between individuals. On this stage, “performers” do their best to portray a particular image of themselves to members of a specific “audience.” The interplay between “performer’s” “performance” and the “audience” members’ reactions takes shape as a dialectic process whereby constructions of Self and Other are reflexively reshaped. According to Goffman:

“When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or bring into play information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his trust worthiness, etc. Although some of this information seems to be sought almost as a means in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him.”
Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him” (Goffman 1956, 1; emphasis added).

Inquiring about who someone is thus serves a pragmatic purpose that seeks to obtain information about the person one is interacting with to better understand the parameters of the encounter. Determining who someone is in relation to one’s self drives underlying attempts to “know” the other party. Knowing that a person speaks a language or possess the cultural knowledge to behave as expected concretizes a specific image in the minds of those with whom they interact. This process can be described as “identification” or “self-categorization” through which “the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classification” (Stets and Burke 2000, 224). Such impressions and mental images lead others to conceptualize given individuals in certain ways and to engage them accordingly.

Goffman further explains that audience members evaluate performers by looking for “clues”:

“If unacquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him. They can also assume from past experience that only individuals of a particular kind are likely to be found in a given social setting. They can rely on what the individual says about himself or on documentary evidence he provides as to who and what he is” (Goffman 1956, 1).

The closer a performance is to the audience’s conceptual benchmark, the more likely the audience is to perceive of the performer favorably. However, if there are fewer commonalities,
one would expect the audience to provide a more hostile evaluation. Furthermore, not every audience member – either as a group or individually – evaluates performances equally. For example, someone who may not look Japanese but acts culturally Japanese would likely be treated more favorably than someone who looks Japanese but culturally does not act Japanese (see Tsuda 2003; see also Chapters 4 and 5).

Applying Goffman’s formula to Japan, it is safe to say that the criteria upon which performers are evaluated has been, throughout the nation’s postwar period and up until the end of the twentieth century, rather monolithic: one’s racial belonging (as Japanese), one’s language proficiency (in Japanese), and one’s native familiarity (with Japanese conventions), for example. However, in the twenty-first century, these criteria are becoming less clear and dramatically more fluid. Increasing demographic and ideological diversity in the age of globalization are reshaping how Japanese “audience” members evaluate others, as well as each other – as this dissertation would demonstrate in the following chapters.

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2 This dissertation is situated in the context of a Japanese society that emphasizes congruity in many ways. One of these ways is congruity of appearance, or “phenotypic” congruity. However, phenotype is a problematic and loaded way to discuss the issues related to race and ethnicity, and thus clarification is required. Japanese identity has been constructed upon (amongst other things) the idea that “Japanese” people look a particular way. While there is of course variation in the phenotypes that exist in Japan, many of these are rather subtle and often unrecognized. This dissertation engages with the importance of appearance (phenotype) as it relates to Japanese identity because. The anticipated change to the range of different phenotypes of “Japanese” people has the potential to diversify substantially in accord with the nation’s demographic changes. If Japan’s demographic changes unfold as they are expected to, this will lead to a massive influx of conspicuous foreigners coming to Japan, many of whom will settle and start families in Japan. This has the potential to drastically diversify the appearance of people who are culturally Japanese. Because there is a connection between being Japanese and looking a certain way, this diversification can possibly reshape the ways that Japanese society thinks about who is “Japanese.” While this has already occurred to some extent, the scale upon which phenotypic difference will be thrust into the national consciousness is especially noteworthy. Thus, while I adamantly reject the empirical existence of discrete phenotypes, it is impossible to consider the impacts these changes may have on Japan without considering the current role appearance plays in constructing Japanese identity, as well as how that might change in the near future.
In some other respects, Goffman’s approach, while providing a strong starting point, requires some flexibility when thinking about Japan. Goffman notes that “society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in a correspondingly appropriate way” (Goffman 1956, 13). This speculates that society members establish and refine what appropriate behaviors entail and how others should act based on these expectations. These behaviors remain validated only as long as the society remains relatively unchanged. Additionally, what constitutes a set of social characteristics that has a “moral right to expect” others’ positive or familiar evaluation is being subjected to an intense and rapid transformation in Japan today – if not necessarily in quantity but in quality. Let me return to the examples with which I opened this chapter.

Historically, Japanese society has conflated appearance, language, and culture in appraising performances within the Japanese context. However, due to the dramatic and intensifying changes caused by persistent immigration, the criteria for “performance” evaluations within Japan are changing as well. Specifically, language and cultural fluency are becoming more important than other variables such as physical appearance in defining who is and who is not “Japanese.”

Ever since the television set was introduced to the Japanese households in the late-1950s, mixed-race persons were always present but with mixed or sometimes perpendicularly opposed receptions. However, in many cases it was their differences that were marketed, which thereby enhanced their popularity. Their difference was readily consumable and could help reestablish identity boundaries problematically. In other times, they were simply consumed into the larger sphere of Japanese identity. For example, speaking of biracial baseball players, “Iron Man” Kinogasa Sachio in particular, William Kelly notes that such athletes:
could be – had to be – elided into the Japanese category, however uncomfortably, and these mixed Japanese heroes were kept on a very short ideological leash by their clubs and the media. In public, they were ‘Japanese,’ and this was done by insisting that whatever their blood-ethnic backgrounds they all shared the experience of coming up through baseball in the Japanese school system” (Kelly 2013, 1239).

Here, the presence of biracial persons in the Japanese public eye silenced their differences and presented them unproblematically and unquestionably as Japanese. This is a stark contrast to Cambridge, who appeared on a national platform portraying himself as both Japanese and Jamaican yet also representing the Japanese national track team and being for all intents and purposes Japanese.

However, as the “non-celebrity” cases of varying degrees of Japaneseness have continued increasing, visibly as well as statistically, “evaluations” of foreigners are in some cases being made more highly than those of Japanese people. In two recent studies, Leiba Faier (2011) and Mario Lopez (2012) have shown how in two different contexts Filipina women have been conceptualized as being “better Japanese” than Japanese themselves. This comes in a backdrop of demographic changes and a larger number of Japanese females eschewing traditional gender and professional roles at very localized levels. These changing attitudes do not come without complications, as Filipina women still suffer racism, discrimination, and barriers within Japanese society. However, the fact that they would be conceptualized positively, even in a limited capacity, evidences how performance criteria are changing in accordance with the times. The later ethnographic chapters will further explore this phenomenon. Some Japanese informants have told me that they believe foreigners in Japan, especially younger ones, possess a different, more positive work ethic and mentality, that they work harder, study better, and take life more
seriously than younger Japanese. Without overlooking the risks of generalization, one could argue that for more and more segments of Japanese life, the criteria for evaluating others change in close correlation to ongoing societal trends.

Goffman’s work thus provides a useful frame of reference to start but needs to be adjusted and critically overcome, given the extremely fluid situation that we find today in Japan in terms of the presentation of the Self. The chapters that follow address these points based on my ethnographic data.

Race, Ethnicity, Nationality, and Other Relevant Concepts

In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce categories that I will use for thinking about changing identity, Self, and their boundaries in Japan. Race, ethnicity, nationality and several other concepts help to capture the rapidly changing cultural relations today in Japan. It is useful to not think of these categories as mutually exclusive but rather as intertwined and informing one another.

Race

Race is an elusive concept that scholars use in different ways for different purposes when analyzing identity and interpersonal relations. It serves well at the outset to establish some working understanding of it, although it must be noted that any effort to define race can easily be met with contestations. Miyuki Yonezawa captures the essence of race quite well: “[race] signifies some innate marking of a person which segregates Self from Other. It implies an imagined or real biological difference to a person in a social context, which in turn creates a hierarchy” (Yonezawa 2004, 116). Richard Siddle further notes that “race is conceived of as a socially constructed notion of biological difference used by one group to categorize another in the context of unequal power relations” (Siddle 1996, 7). Such definitions capture the biological
component of racial dimensions; whether imagined or real, biology has become a component of racial thinking, whereas ethnicity deals more with differentiation along lines of culture, such as language, religion, or tradition.

Race has been an important topic for anthropologists since the late nineteenth century when scholars explored the ways race supposedly manifested through human populations and their intergroup relations. More recent scholarship has critiqued these earlier inquiries for their strong biological component, for being biased, and for lacking an empirical basis (Gould 1981; Smedley and Smedley 2005; Visweswaran 1998). In the early twentieth century, Franz Boas and his students drove a paradigm shift in how scholars conceptualized race, whereby the focus of race shifted from an emphasis on biological to cultural perspectives. Boas demonstrated that “race” is not a biological fact and that racial studies amongst immigrant groups in the United States produced varying results that challenged the typical racial paradigms of the time (Boas 1940). Boas’ students built on these ideas to demonstrate how cultural practices, not biological or innate difference, were better approaches to understanding human variation. His studies repudiated the racial scientific trends of his period to demonstrate that environment has a much greater impact on human variability than does an elusive concept of “race” (Boas 1899, 1912, 1928). Such studies subverted paradigms that argued for biological distinctions between races and forced researchers to consider the role of culture, rather than biology, in understanding human variation.

Scholars shifted their conceptualizations of race again in the 1980s, when the aforementioned critical race theories gained increasing influence. Here, scholars shifted the focus of race from exploring how cultural differences manifested through race to a postmodern and critical perspective that aimed to understand racial power dynamics: How do social systems
perpetuate racism and racial classifications, and how do actors subvert and challenge these hierarchies? Late twentieth century approaches understood race as inherently bound with suppression and contestation and as having nothing to do with biology.

In 1997, however, a pair of anthropologists began to challenge accepted approaches to race and argued that scholars should reconsider the interrelationship between race and biology. They proposed this idea not to empower old paradigms connecting race to biology, but rather to “communicate existing anthropological knowledge more effectively and develop a unified, scientifically and socially meaningful alternative approach, one that addresses complex sociocultural and biological processes at work in the construction of races” (Mukhopadhyay and Moses 1997, 521). The reasoning behind this was that there are tangible biological outcomes of race as a social construct, which manifest themselves in the form of health disparities, educational outcomes, genetic identifications, and in other ways (Dressler 2005; Goodman and Leatherman 1998; Hartigan 2013a, 2013b). Rather than aiming to rekindle racialist constructions of the past, these authors proposed a novel way of considering the ways that biology and culture inform and influence racial realities in the contemporary world.

Although well-intentioned, this effort has not been received without criticism. Some anthropologists have responded by arguing that this “biocultural” approach to race (as it is commonly referred to) detracts attention away from anti-racism efforts and social struggles against racial paradigms, which these critics believe should be the main focus of racial inquiries (Harrison 1998; Smedley and Smedley 2005). These authors argue for further development of a critical approach to race and to explore in further detail how race affects social relations and outcomes, how different variables can affect the ways racial groups construct identities and
position themselves, and how racial understandings are transfigured into novel racist practices in different temporal contexts (Crenshaw 1995; Tate 1997).

While these critiques are important for keeping the focus on the ways social understandings of race are reconfigured over time and in novel ways that perpetuate extant paradigms, they overlook any connection race may have in relation to biology. For example, how are biological ideas imbued into social and cultural concepts concerning race to establish identity? Japanese identity is itself is an amalgam of numerous different ideas meshed into one concrete categorization and variously motivated identity ideologues – starting from the Imperial ideologues to the current Prime Minister Abe – have used biological discourse to justify their nationalist and ultra-nationalist agenda. As such, notions of biological continuity are conflated with cultural practices to establish a conceptualization of Japanese identity that defines in-group membership in the basis of both biological and cultural criteria (Kondo 1986; Tsuda 2003; Yoshino 1992).

Although race is a social construct, biology plays a role in its construction. This role can be real, imagined, or some conflation of the two. Arash Abizadeh notes that “to deny the existence of race is, it seems, to deny the existence of a biological fact,” implying that although race and ethnicity are social constructions, their core substance comes from tangible biological differences that are inescapable in human variation (Abizadeh 2001, 23). Therefore, without taking race as a biological construct, it is nevertheless important to understand the ways biological concepts get discoursed into identity conceptions. In this regard, Boas was right to point out the imprecision and problems of using race as a biology rubric through which to understand variation. Boas' premise, however, overlooks two important points. The first is Abizadeh’s point, which emphasizes that human variation exists and the second is that this
variation can be written into social constructions of ethno-racial identities. While they may lack any empirical substance, racial categories factor into many contemporary understandings of identity, which establish belonging criteria on such imprecise and ambivalent foundations.

It is important that anthropologists guard against any possibility of inadvertently condoning any form of racism and racial prejudice. Nevertheless, it does not mean that we should forego discussion of biological aspects of race altogether. I believe that by combining biological and sociocultural factors that comprise the term “race,” or the understanding of this term in our academic as well as lay discourses today, we will be able to criticize prejudiced approach to race more effectively. Hartigan’s volume and other works (Dressler 2005; Goodman and Leatherman 1998) exemplify the potential benefits of such effort. And this combination helps to explain the particularities of the ways Japanese society constructs and operationalizes racial categories. Rather than using biology and genetics to explain racial differences or justify racism, one can constructively use differences conventionally defined as race to further our understanding of how racial categories affect human relations, which, in turn will serve to deepen our understanding of how biology is actually socially and culturally abused or misused. Therefore, when thinking about the racial elements of a particular form of identity or group-think, in my case Japanese, it is essential to realize that biological and genomic elements, and how they are both used in constructing an identity, individually or collectively.

In practice, “any conflict can be described by its participants as ‘racial,’ whether or not physical differences divide groups” (Horowitz 1985, 16), which obfuscates any objective efforts to make sense of these notions. This establishes two important points. First, conflicts that may have little to do with conventional understandings of race can become racialized by the actors involved, ascribing to themselves and to the other side arbitrary differences. Thus, something
that started as a class or cultural conflict can quickly turn into something racial in which differences of the Other are pronounced to reify identity boundaries. In Japan, this can be seen in the historic case of the Burakumin, who have been marginalized on the basis of caste/class but have since become “racialized.” Although they are by most all standards considered ethnically and racially Japanese, their different social class has led mainstream society to marginalize them and treat them as a distinct “race” despite their ethno-racial congruence. Second, physical differences can be exaggerated or even completely made up in order to perpetuate existing racial hierarchies and social orders. Similarly, racial differences can be ignored or overlooked to give the impression of a more unified identity. This ignorance has been the case for Japan in both colonial and contemporary contexts. Historically, colonialism was at times justified and explained on the basis of perceived “racial” differences that sought to establish rigid boundaries between Japanese and perceptually non-Japanese Others. Certain biracial persons, despite their alterity, can be subsumed into the Japanese categorical identity on the basis of their cultural and linguistic proximity to mainstream Japanese. In other words, racial definitions and understandings of categorical races are operationalized in context-dependent ways to ascribe difference and refine the underpinnings of various identities.

Ethnicity

Although scholars have often examined ethnicity in conjunction with race, many scholars use these terms imprecisely. Richard Jenkins states that ethnicity “is based…on the belief shared by its members that, however distantly, they are of common descent” (Jenkins 1997, 9). Eugeen Roosens adds that ethnic groups are “a form of social organization in which the participants make use of certain cultural traits from their past, a past which may or may not be verifiable
historically” (Roosens 1989, 12). Thus, in two prominent studies on the topic, ethnicity does two very different things: it creates belief on one hand, and it organizes social practices on the other.

There are at least two important ways ethnicity is distinguished from race or other categorical identities, at least hypothetically. First, ethnicity establishes identity based on common descent and shared cultural characteristics, a point which may or may not be true with race. Cultural differences (culture being broadly understood) account for differences in ethnic identities, which manifest in various ways. Shared traits typically define ethnic identity from within and ascribe to groups a sense of togetherness. These ethnic identities develop independently but operate in conjunction with racial identities in complicated and multifaceted ways.

Second, many scholars have understood race in terms of hierarchal categories, whereas ethnicity is seen as drawing vertical lines of distinction. In the context of Japan, a “racial” identity that strictly delineates Japanese from other ethnic categories is operationalized in a hierarchical fashion to distinguish foreigners in a variety of convoluted, ambiguous, and paradoxical ways. For instance, all non-Japanese can be considered “gaikokujin” or “foreigners.” Within this category of “gaikokujin” some are elided into the Japanese category fairly easily – those that can “pass” as Japanese. Japanese society tends to conceptualize Otherness on the basis of stereotypical images of these populations and/or through lived encounters – for example, Filipinos or Nigerians who work in the nightlife industry. Western foreigners are generally perceived as college-educated and assumed to be teachers or white-collar professionals. Africans and Southeast Asians are in a more precarious position. If one conceptualizes an African worker as a hustler in the nightlife industry or a Filipina as a hostess, the perception of these foreigners may be something negative. However, if they are a graduate student studying, say technology, at
a reputable university, then society may perceive of them more highly. Paradoxically, this is true, despite the former’s better handle of Japanese language and culture. Through the course of my research, students have professed fewer complaints of discrimination and mistreatment by Japanese than have their long-term resident counterparts, who have tended to occupy less prestigious professions. This demonstrates how categorical understandings of race are imposed from above, whereas ethnic identities generally take root within populations themselves. Ethnic differentiation is asserted amongst groups, whereas racial categories are less precise abstractions that are much more blurred and convoluted.

Academic inquiries into race and ethnicity as intertwined categories have privileged western accounts of, and assumptions about, these key concepts. Dikötter notes:

“it is less well known…that racial discourses also thrived in societies outside Europe and North America. It is generally assumed that racial prejudice can only be a ‘white’ phenomenon under which other people, lumped together under the heading ‘coloured,’ have to suffer. The narrow focus of historical research, which may partly be explained by a sense of guilt in post-colonial western societies and by a still dominant feeling of eurocentrism, has distorted our comprehension of racial problems in western societies”

(Dikötter 1992, vii).

Academic inquiries have often overlooked, or narrowly engaged with, categorical constructions of difference found in non-Western societies. Some scholars suggest that racial thinking as a phenomenon in itself is solely a product of western European identity ideologies (Smedley 1998). However, this distorts and downplays the fact that categorical distinctions based on many different variables have been used throughout history to define Self in relation to Other in societies across the world. This idea also leaves a lacuna of research concerning the ways that
categorical differences are understood in societies across the world. This is the topic of Dikötter’s books, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (1992) and *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan* (1997), which explore the highly racialized dimensions of identity in China and Japan in comparative historical contexts. While Dikötter notes the radical change that occurred in response to European racial ideology, racial conceptualizations existed at earlier times and were not solely products of outside intervention. For example, throughout Chinese history, both majority and minority groups alike have drawn on constructions of biological and cultural distinctions to form a sense of inter-group cohesion.³

Such sentiment outside the West is not limited to China, as throughout history group differences have had serious ramifications for how certain categorical identities construct their images of Others. Taking historical context back still further and into Europe and the near East, ancient civilizations recognized categorical and descriptive differences in individuals in both close proximity and far away. For example, ancient civilizations – Greece, Mesopotamia, Rome – maintained rather well-established definitions of certain groups that ultimately developed images in the minds of these empires. In short, group thinking and identifications do not merely materialize out of nothing, but instead demands some substance and some materiality onto which they are established and take shape.

Race and ethnicity continue to be important topics of inquiry. In their current forms, they offer scholars theoretical tools for understanding intergroup relations. Although distinctions between the two are often problematic, one can look to the ways they are operationalized at the

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³ Dikötter’s work is abound with examples of these constructions and their ramifications. While spatial ramifications and direct relevance limit the specific examples that can be provided here, his works provide many examples that clearly demonstrate a historical substance to Chinese and Japanese identities.
micro-level for deeper insights into how these terms operate in practice. Scholars must also consider the micro-level implications of these distinctions and how they can be of interest to scholars and researchers. In Japan, this distinction matters, but abstract notions of collective identity are juxtaposed to Other groups regardless of what those groups are, whether ethnic, racial, or national. For example, Japan and Japanese are defined vis-à-vis other groups and societies, which change depending on the context. Precise differentiations offer few new insights into the workings of this collectivity because it is so categorically defined.

**Boundaries**

Identity is a lived phenomenon and its boundaries are constantly being negotiated. In the now classic *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), Fredrik Barth suggested that it is more fruitful to examine the particular *boundaries* that various groups maintain, rather than simply look into what is inside that group, when examining identity. Thus, rather than considering only the “cultural stuff” of groups to characterize what makes them unique and defines their identity (Horowitz 1975, 113), it is also important to consider how groups interact with outside entities and the world surrounding them. According to Barth, clear boundaries “persist despite a flow of personnel across them” (Barth 1967, 10). Furthermore, “one finds that stable, persisting, and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries, and are frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic statuses” (Barth 1969, 9-10). This establishes that constructed collectivities can endure the test of time, even when Others permeate into them and dissolve out of them (Horowitz 1975, 1985). The cultural order of particular groups persists despite the existence of these boundaries and group boundaries often materialize as taken for granted entities within a given setting, which in effect leads to problematic and insufficient understandings of ethnic groups and their functionality (Barth 1969, 11).
Psychologist John Edwards notes that “specific identity markers may come and go, but so long as there exist some affiliative features – objective, subjective, or some combination of the two – the frontiers can be delineated” (Edwards 2009, 9). He further explains that:

“the reasoning here is that the cultures enclosed within boundaries may change – indeed, we should stress that they do change, since all groups are dynamic – but the continuation of boundaries themselves is more longstanding. This emphasis has the attraction of illuminating group maintenance across generations; for example, third- and fourth-generation immigrants in the United States are generally quite unlike their first-generation forebears, yet, to the extent to which they recognize links here (and, of course, differences from other groups), the concept and utility of group boundaries will continue to be significant” (Edwards 2009, 157).

Boundaries are thus noteworthy because they help identify how membership into a particular group is defined in disparate spatio-temporal contexts and allows us to understand the geographical and temporal continuity of a collective identity over time. Changes to the in-group’s perceptions and valuations of the outgroup’s will produce changes in the membership of its own definition (Dikötter 1992). Analyzing transformations that occur to a boundary can be insightful for understanding broader social changes occurring in a given context, as well as the ramifications that these transformations have on everyday encounters. Ethnic boundaries tangibly transform over time and do so in ways that can redefine ideas about collective belonging (James 2015; Horowitz 1975, 1985).

The group boundary is maintained by differentiating one’s group from others (Jenkins 2008), which in its turn reinforces the internal coherence of the group identity. Barth notes that the ethnic group
depends on the nature of a boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change...yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity and investigate the changing cultural form and content” (Barth 1969, 14).

Therefore, the boundary of a group can be understood as a reflexive cognitive and cultural apparatus that operates to delineate membership into a given collectivity: without “them” there is no “us” and the boundary allows collective understandings of “us” to persist.

The intergroup dynamics that are questioned when examining boundary formation and maintenance place emphasis on a more sociological focus of intergroup dynamics that force the researcher to consider the ways that groups define themselves in relation to others (Brubaker 2009; Horowitz 1985). Both the content and the boundary of ethnicity are thus important elements for explicating how groups define themselves, as well as what processes account for how groups position themselves in relation to one another in material and conceptual terms.

While Barth’s work on ethnic identity formation has not been immune to critique. His theory has been identified as simplistic, overgeneralized, and unable to account for different types of identities and multiplicities in identities that can exist in individuals (Glick-Schiller and Fouron 1990; Hummell 2014, see also Bhabha 1998; Cohen 1994). Later adaptations of Barth’s theory explained that the “boundary” itself may become increasingly blurred as various types of process take shape. For example, the growing literature on persons and identities during the age of “globalization” show how categorical membership into neatly defined groupings become highly problematized by the movements of transnational actors (Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Hannerz 1996; Papastergiadis 2000). Postmodern and Marxist scholars alike have critiqued Barth for not considering dimensions of power, capital, and various other
“systemic” elements that influence group identity formation and operation (Castells 1989; Harvey 1989). For example, Michel Foucault (2007) argued that power was a product of governmental control over its populations and to achieve such ends would establish a subconscious system of right and wrong that occupants within the state would be expected to adhere to. These controls differ dramatically and can be applied differentially in different geographical and cultural contexts.

Foucault wrote extensively on issues of power, the state, and control over populations. This work can in many ways be extended to understand how certain boundaries develop and operate. His concept of “biopower” shows the multitude of ways modern states exert control over their residents using various regulatory mechanisms (Foucault 1990, 139-142). These methods include the use of contemporary institutions, census bureaus, and regulatory laws. Such “technologies of power” are effective means of controlling large groups that allow nation-states to persist. In the context of Japan, one could argue that the exertion of “biopower” exists through several different state mechanisms, which extend throughout both the Japanese and non-Japanese population. These include the requirement that foreigners must carry their “foreign resident” card at all times, the fact that foreigners need a Japanese hōshōnin (guarantor) for jobs and housing access, and for Japanese and naturalized Japanese, incorporation into an official “household registry system.” Such devices control large swaths of the population through state regulation and demonstrate how social and political devices converge in the subjugation of physical bodies within a modern state.

Despite criticisms, Barth’s work is relevant for thinking about Japan because Japanese national, ethnic, and cultural identity is often formulated vis-à-vis Others by way of creating boundaries around it. The boundary of Japanese identity is one that is plastic and is capable of
incorporating new criteria and deleting old ones to construct images of Self at the collective level. I argue that this is what is occurring today as new meanings of Japanese emerge in accordance with new criteria to be considered as Japanese.

**Nationality**

In addition to race and ethnicity, nationality is another identity that is essential for understanding the development of Japanese identity. Nationality considers how personal identification intersects with the nation-state and spatialized geopolitical entities. In the case of Japan, “nation” has been essential to the development of Japan’s modern identity and thus a discussion is warranted concerning how that identification with the nation-state has informed everyday ideas about social belonging.

Benedict Anderson (1991) produced one of the most important scholarly works on nationalism, arguing that a nation is an imagined political community:

“and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign…It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion…The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations…It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” (Anderson 1991, 6).

Nations emerged and continue to operate in a highly artificial fashion. Despite this artificiality, nationalism and national identity operate in an essentialized manner, which ascribes a definitive character to said national identities. Anderson argued that although members of any given nation
will never personally meet most other members of their collective nation, they still feel attachments to their fellow nationals and to the nation-state itself. The concept proves to be versatile, as it is also applicable to language, religion, race, ethnicity and other identities. The idea that one is a member of some form of “imagined” collective entity yields considerable power when considering the various ways individuals construct, assert, and redefine identities. As will be shown in the ethnographic chapters, the concept of Japan as a particular “imagined” entity is important for ascertaining the function of Japan as an ethno-national entity in a contemporary form.

Nationalism is important in understanding the evolution of identity in Japan because it has produced an identity that is heartfelt and universally accepted throughout Japan today, albeit in differential ways. Starting with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, national identity was superimposed on the national body through linguistic, education, and assimilation policies that emphasized conformity, historic continuity, and loyalty to the emperor. Although inhabitants of northern Japan may share little in common with the inhabitants of southern Japan, the process of nation-building created one conceptually and physically unified entity. Therefore, as a technology for making national subjects, nationalism has played an essential role in unifying the Japanese population through the mechanism of the nation-state, which in effect developed a common and collective sense of belonging throughout the Japanese archipelago.

Presently, Japanese nationality law provides insights into the legal function of Japanese identity. Japanese nationality law is based on the premise of *jus sanguinis*, or citizenship by blood rather than by birth (Morris-Suzuki 1998; Nomura 2010). This law requires a person to be born of Japanese parentage in order to be considered a “Japanese” citizen, a law that carries sociocultural connotations for defining insiders and outsiders. This law essentially operates at the
most rudimentary level of establishing who is and who is not Japanese, legally and culturally, and should hypothetically to leave little ambiguities. This form of identification excludes consideration of culture, language, or any other factors. Nationality distinguishes who is or who is not Japanese.

Because Japanese identity blends elements of race, culture, nationality, and other variables, it is important to understand the implications of this blending. It is hard to identify precisely what a Japanese “racial” identity entails and it is even harder to understand how this “racial” identity differs from a Japanese “ethnic” identity. This can technically be done by adopting any given scholarly definition of race or ethnicity, but there would be many problems in doing so. Rogers Brubaker has discussed a recent theoretical paradigm that studies “ethnicity, race, and nationalism in broader and more integrated terms. This has generated a new field of study that is *comparative, global, cross-disciplinary, and multi-paradigmatic*, and that construes ethnicity, race, and nationhood as a *single integrated family of forms* of cultural understanding, social organization, and political contestation” (Brubaker 2009, 22, emphasis in original).

Brubaker suggests that we use multidisciplinary perspectives and examines their interconnectedness and joint influences over everyday people as opposed to being static and void of alteration. Brubaker notes:

> “Rather than seek to demarcate precisely their respective spheres, it may be more productive to focus on *identifying and explaining patterns of variation on these and other dimensions, without worrying too much about where exactly race stops and ethnicity begins*” (Brubaker, 2009, 27-28, emphasis added).

In Japan, race, ethnicity, and nationality are so intertwined that it is difficult to isolate one and exclude the other. For example, Western understandings of race would not define Japanese and
Koreans as different “races.” There may be (problematic and complex) cultural distinctions made between non-African-American blacks and African-Americans, but by sociocultural standards, both would be considered “black.” In Japan, however, many people do make such distinctions and by belonging to a different “racial” category conceptually excludes one from being Japanese from legal and social perspectives (Lie 2001a; Yoshino 1992). Full assimilation is necessary to be considered Japanese from a legal perspective and this entails a process of detaching one’s self from any other type of identification. To become “Japanese” thus demands full adoption of a mainstream identity. In cases of mixed children, such as Ariana Miyamoto or Asuka Cambridge, conceptual devices, such as the term ha-fu, must be used to make sense of these individuals categorically and to explain their precariousness of their social position within the nation-state and society. Their peculiarities do not conform to extant patterns of identification and they essentially become “Japanese” but with an asterisk. Conceptions of race, nation, ethnicity, and culture are so interrelated that conceptual paradigms must be adjusted to account for these differences.

I adopt such an approach here and, rather than making efforts to delineate precise boundaries between these concepts or identify how they differ from one another, seeks to explore

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4 It is interesting to draw attention to a recent article in TechCrunch about the largest ever venture capital fund led by a person of African-descent, Adeyemi Ajao, a Yoruba Nigerian. Ajao noted that it took him time to get used to America’s understanding of racial categories and their implications. Ajao stated that: “The U.S. is pretty different about those things…I was surprised when at Stanford I got an invitation to a dinner of the Black Business Student Association. I’m like, ‘why would there be a Black Business Student Association? That’s so weird?’ It took me a while, a good, good while, to be like OK, here there’s actually a really entrenched history of a clash and people being treated differently day-to-day.” (See Clark 2018 for the full interview). This highlights the problems that emerge when trying to neatly categorize people by “race” and to make broad generalizations.
their interrelated materiality and interactivity. Specifically, I ask how concepts of race, ethnicity, and nationality have been drawn upon to construct understandings of Japanese identity historically and contemporarily, 2) how the understandings of these concepts themselves have shifted in response to socio-demographic changes occurring in Japan, and 3) how these changes affect and reflect identity construction and interpersonal relations between Japanese and foreigners. These questions are at the heart of this dissertation.

**Place and Space**

The foregoing discussion on the role of the boundaries in identity formation leads us to thinking about space and place, or spatiality, in relation to identity. Some scholars have suggested that the social sciences and humanities have experienced a “spatial turn” over the past several decades, whereby geographically and spatially situated themes have taken up a larger amount of space in academic works (Feld and Basso 1996; Kahn 1996; Soja 1989, 2009; Warf and Arias 2009). Such works have shown that geography, locality, space, and place are important elements to the study of Japan and contemporary Japanese-foreigner relations for several reasons. First, Japanese identity not only conflates biology and culture but is also spatially situated and geographically grounded. Since many Japanese perceive of Japan as an ancestral homeland, the biological and cultural linkages that account for Japanese identity also take on a geographical element (Hudson 1999; Morris-Suzuki 1998; Watsuji 1961). While these biological and cultural characteristics are not geographically confined, they are nonetheless geographically rooted in the Japanese archipelago. How have geographically constructed understandings of identity altered in the process of Japanese engagements with foreign Others? This is a particularly important question and one that will be engaged through the subsequent ethnography.
Second, place and space enable social actors to make claims to place and space in unique and often conflicting ways, which mold social relations within a given location. Space and place are not merely abstract theoretical constructs but are also the sites in which lived experiences unfold at the level of everyday interactions (Appadurai 1988; Pratt and Handson 1994; Rodman 1992). Spatially situated acts, such as walking through a city or gathering in one location over another, are embedded with more significance than meets the eye. Beyond these observations often lie more complicated and convoluted layers of personal dynamics, which challenge hegemonic discourses, covertly make claims on territoriality, or cultural constructions of spaces and places (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Harvey 1989). This ascribes to space a creative dimension through which it becomes appropriated and intertwined with the lived experiences of those who occupy it. This in effect makes space and place highly idiosyncratic in nature and diverse in terms of the way social actors experience them (Malkki 1997; Massey 1984).

This point was first emphasized by feminist scholars who argued that “the experience of place is quite different for different groups, such as children, women, subordinated classes, minorities, etc.” (Agnew 2011, 91). Margaret Rodman notes that “for each inhabitant, a place has a unique reality, one in which meaning is shared with other people and places” (Rodman 1992, 643). A site of liberation for one group may simultaneously be the site of oppression for another. Claire Dwyer (1999) demonstrates this by showing how as British Muslim women move through space, the identities they adopt and the identities they are ascribed differ substantially. For example, a British Pakistani raised in East London will take on different identities as they move from London to the British countryside or from England to Pakistan. Depending on particular space, they may be a typical Londoner, a foreigner and urban dweller from the capital, or a British person out of tune with contemporary Lahore culture. Factors such as gender, religion,
ethnicity, and class greatly influence one’s position within space, as well as the nature of identities and the meanings they entail. This idiosyncratic nature of spaces and places thus forces the researcher to acknowledge the multifaceted ways particular geographies can be experienced.

Michel de Certeau’s notion of the “walker” demonstrates how conflicting claims to space unfold. De Certeau discussed how people in the modern world regularly subvert social tendencies in ways that counter social norms and engender new forms of sociality (de Certeau 1984). He used the example of an anonymous “walker” navigating a city to demonstrate the ways real people often use space for their own goals and in ways that subvert its intended use. In doing so, de Certeau demonstrated how actors interact with spatial entities in unique, idiosyncratic ways that are not predicted in advance. The tensions that emerge from the contestation and occupancy of such spaces carry considerable implications for the ways that particular spatialities are conceptualized and physically experienced (Secor 2004). This also shows how actors in space operate with agency and in ways that require critical attention.

Third, a closer consideration of space and place can elucidate the material changes happening to and within Japan. It is not enough to merely acknowledge the emergence of ethnic enclaves, foreign owned and operated spatial entities, or other non-Japanese zones of interaction within Japanese space; by putting focus on these locations that emerge in Japan, as well as their conceptual counterparts, one can better understand precisely how “space becomes place as actors imbue it with meaning” (Tuan 1977), how identities and understandings of self and Other are embodied through spatial practices (Basso 1996), and how different locations function as places of embedded meaning for discrete actors (Feld and Basso 1996; Holstein 2005; Pratt and Hanson 1988).
Although space and place are sometimes used without theoretical distinction, it is important to clarify the way I will use them. Both are understood as socially constructed entities that influence lived experiences, human relationships, and ways of conceptualizing the world. Space is considered more abstract than place and encompasses the broader range of structural forces that shape societies. Places are entities within an abstract set of space “where historically and culturally situated people create a locality of familiar heres and theres” (Gray 2003, 226). Yi-fu Tuan has explained, “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (Tuan 1977, 6). Allan Pred notes that place is the “appropriation and the transformation of space and nature that is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of society” (Pred 1986, 6). Miriam Kahn describes places as “complex constructions of social histories, personal and interpersonal experiences, and selective memory... they represent people, their actions, and their interactions and as such become malleable memorials for negotiating and renegotiating human relationship” (Kahn 1996, 167-168). In short, space is abstract and comprised of all lived experiences, while places are the specific locations within space where events occur. Places are comprised of the symbolic representations, material entities, and interpersonal dynamics that unfold within a given environment.

Past research has shown that scholars should not take space and place for granted or conceptualize them without scrutiny (Appadurai 1988; Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Malkki 1997; Rosaldo 1988; Rodman 1992). Regarding place, “as normally experienced, sense of place quite simply is, as natural and straightforward as our fondness for certain colors and culinary tastes, and the thought that it might be complicated, or even very interesting, seldom crosses our minds” (Basso 1996, xiii). Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo underscore the problem of seeing
peoples as being traditionally bound to specific locations and suggest that current conditions embody notions of “de/territorialization,” which “captures at once the lifting of cultural subjects and objects from fixed spatial locations and their relocalization in new cultural settings” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002, 12). This requires new ways of understanding and conceptualizing how spaces and places operate in these changing conditions. For example, taking Japan as a truly homogenous entity occupied only by Japanese persons is problematic in that it obscures social and demographic realities and important trends within the country. On the surface, this may not appear problematic. However, given how conceptualizations of Japanese identity, and interpersonal relations within Japan are changing, this can lead to significant misrepresentations of Japanese society today. This also reinforces why it is essential to not take spaces and places for granted and to consider more critically what they are comprised of and how actors within them construct meaning and assert agency.

Scholars must analyze spaces and places as active sites where meanings and identities are constructed in relation to social and historic processes. Rodman states that “places are not inert containers. They are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions” (Rodman 1992, 641). She further adds, “places have multiple meanings that are constructed spatially. The physical, emotional, and experiential realities places hold for their inhabitants at particular times need to be understood apart from their creation at the locales of ethnography” (Rodman 1992, 641). Rodman further professes that:

“an anthropologist, traveler, or anyone whose place has been transformed, for example, by a natural disaster or suburban development – in other words, anyone dislocated from his or her familiar place, or from the possibility of local identity – is keenly aware of the contrasts between the known and the unfamiliar” (Rodman 1992, 646-647).
Places, essentially any geographical or conceptual spatialized entity, must be understood as complex and multifaceted entities that ultimately are shaped by a variety of actors and intersecting processes.

Space and place are also deeply intertwined with personal identities. While there is a taken-for-granted quality to notions of place that inform identities, senses of identity can also be fashioned by the particular ways individuals and groups situate themselves within a broader social order (Dwyer 1999; Kahn 2011; Lunstrum 2009; Pred 1986; Tuan 1977, 1979). Feminist scholar Ruth Panelli explains that “processes of identification involve spatial relations, or how where we are will affect the identities we might chose to convey” (Panelli 2004, 134). Identities are thus located within physical and conceptual components of geographies that bind people to specific environments (Gray 2003). Keith Basso has defined this as a process of “place-making,” or “a way of constructing history itself, of fashioning novel versions of ‘what happened here’” (Basso 1996, 6). Acts such as naming places, constructing their histories, and “dwelling” within them define what it means to be a member of a given collective entity (Basso 1996, 52). Liisa Malkki suggests “people are often thought of, and think of themselves, as being rooted in place and as deriving their identity from that rootedness” (Malkki 1997, 56). They feel strong connections to “places” and their efforts to position themselves within society naturally involves imbuing meaning into segments of space so that they take on a symbolic importance. Thus, people maintain intimate connections to the places in which they dwell, labor, and conduct social interactions, which shape the way they envision themselves as part of communities.

Also germane to space, place, and processes of “place-making” is the way actors appropriate them and imbue into them pragmatic social meanings. James Holstein’s analysis of the planning and use of space in urban Brasília shows how city planners’ efforts to develop a
more modern city “attacked the street” and aimed to reorganize social and spatial relations within the city. Namely, city planners’ efforts to replace street corners with rotaries affected the ways residents understood their lives and relations to each other. After experiencing this transformation, Holstein’s informants lamented at what they interpreted to be a loss of “points of sociality,” which are described by Holstein as ‘the most important places of encounter and public activity…[the street corner functioned] as the place to go whenever [one] wanted to meet a friend, pass the time, find a neighbor, or hear the news. This corner was [his informant’s] neighborhood nexus, its outdoor living so to speak” (Holstein 2005, 250). The result of the “loss of the street” was that residents abhorred the fact that they were “forced to remain in their apartments” and “interiorize” their social interactions. This “interiorization of social life had the effect of restricting, and ultimately constricting, [one’s] social universe” (Holstein 2005, 251). This constitutes a ground-level act through which individual actors strive to “render places meaningful” by imbuing into them meaning and import that correlates directly to their lived experiences (Feld and Basso 1996, 7).

In Japan, this is especially important because the recent influx of foreigners has directly impacted hitherto assumed homogeneity of spatial configurations. Changing societal composition (culturally and demographically), diversifying lifestyles and cultural habits, growing feelings of precarity about the present and future, feelings of nostalgia for times past, and other social, political, and economic crossroads the nation is arriving at all converge towards something that is increasingly “unfamiliar” and less-“Japanese” than has previously existed or has been conceptualized (Allison 2013; Gerteis and George 2012). Gupta and Ferguson note that “it is not only the displaced who experience displacement” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 10), thus indicating that social processes are not unidirectional but rather engender responses from society
that force all members involved to adjust their conventional understandings. Space and time converge on experiences and ideas about Japan and Japanese identity in ways that throw into flux former ideologies and ways of thinking about Japan and one’s relation to it. Therefore, it is important to trace the ways that a changing and increasingly “unfamiliar” Japan is experienced materially and perceived conceptually. In this connection, it is clear that conceptions of space and place in Japan are understood and interpreted differently by Japanese and foreign actors. But what makes this difference? Is this related to familiarity or the opposite of it, since both the familiar and unfamiliar can connect space and place with identity formation. For non-Japanese, Japan’s unfamiliarity speaks to their outside status, while for Japanese, the mixing with non-Japanese population is making what has been familiar to them into something that is no longer so. How space and place are intertwined in the identity formation, as well as its boundaries, thus constitutes one of the important keys to understanding Japanese identity.

**Language and Intercultural Interaction**

Race, ethnicity, nationality, boundaries, space, and place all help understand identity and lived experiences. They inform how we make sense of the world around us. However, these concepts are abstract and by relying upon them alone, we risk moving too far from a materiality that is action and agent focused. How can one combine these concepts with empirical research when studying identity in Japan or in any context? One way of addressing this issue is to examine processes of language education and intercultural communication that are important for contextualizing the nature of the changing interpersonal relations unfolding in Japan today. They offer not only a lens through which the theoretical concepts discussed above can be observed, but they are also responsible for shaping the direct nature of encounters and the particular products
that they ender. Furthermore, language learning and intercultural communication are requisite for
the identity changes discussed below to unfold and manifest.

Sociolinguists, linguistic anthropologists, and second language theorists have suggested
that learning a foreign language involves some form of identity confliction. H.D. Brown notes
that “meaningful language acquisition involves some degree of identity conflict as language
learners take on a new identity with their newly acquired competence” (Brown 2000, 147).
Similarly, linguist Zhu Hua explains that “once a person begins to learn a new language and
culture, the new language and culture will have an impact on the learner’s first language and
culture as well. A new identity and set of values will develop alongside the development on
linguistic knowledge” (Hua 2013, 116). In other words, learning a new language is not merely a
unidirectional transfer of practical skills but rather involves a dynamic process whereby learners
discursively construct their identities according to a multitude of factors (Jackson 2009; Koven
2007). Learners’ acquired skills, competences, and perspectives permit them to interpret and
make sense of the world in ways they heretofore had not experienced (Cook 2002; Dewaele
2013; Todeva and Cenoz 2009).

Scholars have long considered language and culture to be essential components of
identity and notions of Self (Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Edwards 2009; Norton 2000; Gumperz
1982). Bucholtz and Hall suggest identity is so linked to language and culture that it is in fact a
product of them. They explain that identity is:

“not simply the source of culture but the outcome of culture…an outcome of cultural
sociopolitical relations of similarity and difference, authenticity and inauthenticity, and
legitimacy and illegitimacy” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 382).
These different types of identities – ones that can be based on race, ethnicity, appearance, gender, etc. – are outcomes of cultural and linguistic practices that are embedded within a wider sphere of social practice (Bourdieu 1990; Marcus 1999; Norton 2000). Language and culture intersect with identity in ways that provide easily accessible, though complicated, identity markers that play an important role in defining interpersonal relations.

Extending this notion further, postmodern scholars have recently examined more meticulously how identities and self-perceptions change in conjunction with language learning and the use of one’s acquired skills (Kanno and Norton 2003; Kinginger 2004; Lantolf and Pavlenko 2002; Norton 2000; Norton and Toohey 2011). These scholars argue that rather than understanding identities as fixed and stable, they are instead discursively (re)constructed through learners’ lived experiences. Self-identity “is not a static, preexisting entity but rather evolves through a dialectical relationship between different ways of interacting and speaking in the world” (Simon-Maeda 2011, 17). The language learning process is therefore believed to induce changes by way of acquiring new lexical, syntactical, and cultural systems used in everyday life. In short, learning a new language is closely tied up with the way one perceives of themselves and the direct encounters experienced by individual learners.

This occurs through the actual use of one’s acquired language skills in real life encounters (i.e. engaging in intercultural communication). Applied linguists and communications scholars in particular have examined how interpersonal interaction influences identity development over time (Kim 2001, 2008; Patel et al. 2011; Shin and Jackson 2003). Engaging in intercultural communication involves participation in novel forms of sociality, which can often be accompanied by a critical reflection of how one constructs their own sense of Self. Celeste Kinginger has explained these processes in detail and has concluded that learning and language
and set of cultural values “both constrain and enable (re)negotiation of identity,” which affect “identities and interpersonal relations” (Kinginger 2004, 220). This in effect carries ramifications for understanding how individuals interpret their lived experiences and construct understandings of cultural Others. Engaging in intercultural communication allows participating interactants to develop more dynamic understandings of self-identity, as well as become more oriented to the cultural Others with whom they are interacting.

An example can help demonstrate these processes more clearly. Kinginger (2004) has provided a detailed analysis of how a “non-traditional” adult learner of French, Alice, experienced multifaceted and dynamic changes to her identity as she studied the language. Alice studied French in the United States and then participated in a study abroad program in France. She initially began studying French because she was enticed by the opportunity to recreate herself as a French speaker and one that participates in what she perceived as a more sophisticated French culture. Her experience proved to be replete with highs and lows as she struggled to come to terms with her “French Self.” During this time, her identity experienced many incarnations, from which Kinginger notes “images of France and of herself as a student and speaker of French were repeatedly challenged” during her time abroad (Kinginger 2004, 232). The point here is that learning a language involves conscious and subconscious reflection of who one is and the conflicts that emerge out of this process provide the learner a platform through which identities can be renegotiated and reasserted (Dahl et al. 2007). This reflection also occurs in a particular sociocultural milieu. In short, Kinginger describes Alice’s study and use of French as a way of “reorienting herself in the world,” whereby she drew upon rich personal experiences in France to establish a novel and more critical understanding of her identity.
This example demonstrates a *processural* relationship between language learning and self-identity and shows how learners of a language actively participate in negotiating their understandings of identity. Identities develop over time and through engagements with a target language community. This means that identities are never a “finished product,” but rather are continually a work in progress and that identities are perpetually reconstructed in ways that consider the products of new experiences (Kim 2001).

To make sense of these idiosyncratic transformations, we can look to intercultural communication scholars for more dynamic models of the conceptual mechanisms behind these processes. Particularly, Y.Y. Kim (1994, 2001, 2008, 2015) has put forth an elaborate and comprehensive theory to make sense of these changes. Kim understands human beings as an “open system” capable of adapting and acclimating themselves to novel, if not strange, environments. She proposes that this occurs through a “stress-adaptation-growth dynamic” (Kim 2001, 2008, 2015), whereby upon exposure to various life stressors individuals begin to “acculturate” themselves to their new environs by “decul turating” certain elements of their cultural practices and adapting new ones (Kim 1994). Kim explains that “once strangers enter a new culture, the cross-cultural adaptation process is set in full motion. Strangers’ habitual patterns of cognition affective and behavioral responses undergo adaptive transformation” (Kim 2001, 58). She further elaborates that this occurs through a “dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to a new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environment, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (Kim 2001, 31). Communication with cultural Others (members of the host society) in varied contexts are at the very core of these changes (Kim 2001, 32-35).
In other words, learning a language, implementing acquired language skills, and being forced to engage with cultural Others bring into question the identities of all participants involved. These encounters work to challenge identities, reposition individuals within society, and reconstruct meanings of social belonging. Language and intercultural communication enable these questions and thus ask the analyst to consider the ways communicative encounters affect interpersonal relations. Investigating these outcomes will be the subject of the chapters that follow.

This dissertation will aim to tie these different strands of theory together to demonstrate the ways that Japanese identity and Japanese-foreigner relations are changing. Rather than seeing these different ideas as mutually exclusive, it is important to understand that they all blend together to delineate criteria of belonging and social expectations. This makes it difficult to determine where one such theoretical concept ends and another begins. Despite this complex blending of ideas, this also provides us with an intriguing means to examine the dynamic changes that Japan is now experiencing. Only by considering a multitude of different variables and factors can we begin to paint a picture of the changes that Japan is experiencing, as well as the implications these have for Japan’s social and cultural institutions.
CHAPTER 2
A CHANGING JAPAN

Behind the scenes of Japan’s high-powered economic growth during the postwar period there was a rapidly aging and shrinking population, labor shortages in the nation’s most important industries, and a growing presence of foreigners and cultural outsiders. Today, these processes are all converging and destabilizing existing notions of national identity and belonging. Japan’s changing demographics snuck up on the nation in the late 1970s. During this time, Japan’s population growth started to slow substantially. These changes can be felt today, as the nation’s elderly population is growing faster than its youth population. However, social and cultural matters – such as the bursting of Japan’s economic bubble in the 1990s, the subsequent “lost decade” marked by slow economic growth, waves of immigration, a major earthquake in 1995, and domestic terror attacks – have compounded the effects of these demographic changes and demanded that Japan establish a new identity in the postwar era (Leheny 2006).

The debates surrounding national identity took a new turn on March 11, 2011, when Japan was struck with the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in the nation’s history. While the quake itself caused relatively little damage, the massive tsunami that ensued resulted in nearly 16,000 deaths and over 2,000 missing in Japan’s Tohoku region. Following the quake, three of the reactors of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant melted down, spreading radiation across vast swaths of the adjacent area. This chain of events also caused radiation to spread as far as Tokyo and surrounding areas, the accumulation of radioactive wastewater that had to be poured into the Pacific, and the displacement hundreds of thousands of people. These events have come to be known as the “triple disaster” and some have called 3/11 Japan’s equivalent of the 9/11 attack experienced by the U.S. in 2001.
After these tragic events, the nation rallied together in support of the devastated areas. Support poured in from abroad as well and was galvanized on the home front. However, in the background, there was a resurgence of debates concerning what Japan’s identity should look like in the twenty-first century. Some scholars have described this Japan as being in a state of “precarity” or significant uncertainty (Allison 2013; Aldrich 2012; Gerteis and George 2012) and as moving from a “postwar” period to a “post-disaster”, marked by a more intensified uncertainty that equals or exceeds the “postwar” period and is also qualitatively different in the problems that it presents (Mikuriya 2011). In this state of increasing uncertainty, Japan looks to establish a new identity that reconciles the past four decades of instability and uncertainty.

As this search for an identity unfolds, historical perspectives offer insight into its possible trajectory. Japanese identity has not developed in a vacuum, but rather it has been influenced by a series of major events – domestically and abroad – and from imported and appropriated identity ideologies, political systems, and technologies. To understand what undergirds this search for an identity in increasingly complicated and uncertain times, it is important to understand how Japanese identity has evolved historically in juxtaposition to foreign and cultural difference. This chapter will discuss the development of Japanese identity by examining its construction in the prewar, postwar, and contemporary period. In doing so, it will explain how ideas about Japanese identity relate to concepts of race and ethnicity more generally to show the ambivalent status of contemporary Japanese identity and what possible ways this identity may develop henceforth.

**Prewar Japan**

By some reckoning, the consciousness of a coherent Japanese geopolitical entity can be traced back to the seventh century, when peoples on the Japanese archipelago began establishing
a distinct literary culture in juxtaposition to the Chinese and other East Asian peoples (Reischauer 1977; Robertson 2010). Scholars believe that a large wave of migrants from Japan’s southernmost island pushed out and mixed with the inhabitants of Japan’s main island around this time, forming in many ways the foundations of what would later become the Japanese nation (Hudson 1999; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; Denoon et al. 1996). However, it was not until the Meiji Restoration of 1868 that the Japanese nation-state endeavored to truly unify the nation under one modern national polity. Prior to this, Japan existed in segments and Japan’s inhabitants generally lacked any sort of nationalist collectivity. Instead, many Japanese remained loyal to their local domains, which were ruled by feudal lords (Jansen 2002; Lebra 1995; Roberts 1998). In an effort to unify the Japanese archipelago into one collectivity under the restored Imperial rule, Meiji officials referenced the Japanese population’s ties to Japan as an ancestral homeland and galvanized nationalist sentiments within the population (Fujitani 1996; Morris-Suzuki 1998). This galvanization would form the bedrock of what would later emerge as a modern and “imagined” Japanese national identity, in Anderson’s sense (Anderson 1991). Anderson argued that nationalism functions efficiently by building on perceived sentiments that members of nation-states supposedly share with one another. Centralized governments are often responsible for producing these sentiments, which they then cultivate within the general population to achieve and reinforce a sense of national unity.

Both internal and external forces caused the Meiji Restoration to unfold as it did. The most important external factor was Western encroachment that prompted a sense of crisis by presenting the Japanese state with a significant loss of sovereignty. Japan had been under an
edict of *sakoku*, or self-imposed isolation, from 1635 until 1853.\(^5\) In 1853, American Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan with his “black ships” and sought to forcibly open Japan to the rest of the world. Fearing conflict with the superior American warships, Japan ultimately ended its *sakoku* policy, which caused the government to realize that its isolation had led it to fall behind the European powers in terms of technology and scientific advancement (Gordon 2003; Jansen 2000; Pyle 1996). Responsively, Japan embarked on a rapid trajectory of modernization that often sought to replace traditional cultural elements with modern ones (Harootunian 2000; Pyle 1996).

The manifestation of the modern Japanese nation resulted from a shift in power from the *shōgun* (Japan’s military ruler) back to the Japanese emperor, whose role was mostly symbolic in nature. This was a metaphoric gesture in that it was used to establish a centralized and operational governing body much in the same way to those of Western governments (Fujitani 1996; Pyle 1996). Historian Carol Gluck notes that “it was not enough that the polity be centralized, the economy developed, social classes rearranged, international recognition striven for – the people must also be ‘influenced,’ their minds and hearts made one” (Gluck 1985, 3). At this time, Japan began adapting Western political systems and technological advances and a sense of concrete Japanese nationalism emerged. Japan used Western ideas to establish itself using the political apparatus of the nation-state itself and its ensuing nationalism. Unsurprisingly, situating itself in the context of European colonialism and imperial expansion, Japan too sought to expand its newfound nation and quickly annexed first the Okinawan islands, and then the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, and parts of Manchuria. Victories in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-

\(^5\) *Sakoku* was a period of self-imposed isolation that cut Japan off from the rest of the world. With some exceptions primarily in Nagasaki, most foreign trade was prohibited and the nation remained closed from much foreign influence.
Japanese Wars in 1895 and 1905 respectively, further added to the nationalist sentiments people felt towards their nation (Furuya 2002).

Japan’s imperial efforts sought to establish an empire throughout Asia, under which all subjects would be loyal to the Japanese emperor despite their different backgrounds. Assimilation became requisite and the Japanese empire intended to incorporate as best as possible its diverse colonial subjects. The newfound sense of national identity was not marked by staunch beliefs about homogeneity that correlated race with nation. John Lie explains that “because the creation of Japanese national identity was coeval with the formation of the Japanese empire, Japanese national identity did not imply monoethnicity” (Lie 2001a, 119). The earliest formations of Japanese national identity were not therefore based on homogeneity but rather on Japanese racial superiority. However, this collectivity was accessible, at least in the principal, to a wider range of peoples despite their subjugated status. Thus, in these earlier times, Japanese national identity sought to incorporate diverse populations, albeit in oppressive ways, into one concrete imperial entity. The polyethnicity of the early Japanese empire underscores the artificiality of contemporary ideas of identity and the myth of homogeneity (Lie 2001a, Chapter 3-4; Oguma 1995; Yoshino 1992). Thus, this identity was a discernably multiethnic one that sought to incorporate disparate populations under the rubric of one unified nation-state model.

This sense of a multiethnic empire contrasts staunchly with postwar nationalist ideologies, which were instead constructed upon very different criteria. Although both prewar and postwar ideas were constructed on similar foundations, the conceptual outcomes differed considerably. Before considering Japan’s postwar identity, it is first important to reflect on the ways Japanese identity uses ideas about race and ethnicity to establish itself.
By the early twentieth century, Japan had developed a vast colonial empire in the Asia-Pacific region. This empire spanned from the Sakhalin Islands in the north to the islands of Taiwan in the south. Japan’s territory continued to gradually expand as the Japanese army progressed deeper into Asia, as the conflicts in the Pacific unfolded. During World War II, Japan’s territorial reach included territories as far as Singapore, Micronesia, and Papua New Guinea. These imperial acts had serious ramifications for the places they controlled and global understandings of the Japanese nation.

At the local level, Japan gradually strengthened its control over local populations, doing whatever possible to mold the inhabitants of their colonized territories into subjects of the Japanese empire. These efforts included forced assimilation policies, which sought to strip local populations of their cultural and linguistic heritage. For example, on the Korean Peninsula, the Japanese imperial administration steadily tightened their grip over the Korean population by enforcing stringent policies, such as prohibiting the use of the Korean language and banning participation in Korean cultural traditions. These policies functioned in similar ways to the European colonial regimes that existed elsewhere in the world in that they sought to exploit the land of their colonized regions and deny the people’s they colonized of their culture.

On a global level, these colonial endeavors led the Western political powers to see Japan as a viable adversary. By establishing such an expansive empire, the Japanese state effectively repositioned itself within the global power dynamics of the day as a colonizing force and not one that would be subject to Western colonization. While scholars debate the actual positionality of Japan vis-à-vis the West in this period, it is hard to ignore the fact that Japan was building up an empire that brutally subjugated the people it colonized and used these colonies as means of economic and geopolitical advancement, much in the ways that the West was doing elsewhere.
Japan’s efforts to establish a colonial presence of their own must thus be understood within this wider context. Japan’s military victories over China and Russia, as well as their annexation by force over its immediate neighbors, established the Japanese state as a tangible global power that was not to be overlooked. This signaled to the West that Japan should be considered a world power and a country willing to defend itself against intrusion if necessary.

This colonial empire also led to the increased movements of people within the Japanese empire. There were large numbers of Japanese going to overseas colonies, as well as many colonized people coming to Japan. In the case of the latter, some people subjected to colonization were brought to Japan forcibly, while others migrated to seek economic opportunities. This led to an increase in the numbers of Koreans and Chinese living in Japan, who contributed to the formation of vibrant communities at Japan’s margins. These populations of early colonial migrants form what scholars today refer to as “oldcomer” or long-term resident minorities, who are often contrasted to newcomer foreigners that arrived in the late twentieth century.

Although there was an overarching idea that colonial subjects could be molded into model subjects of the emperor, Japan’s importation of Western ethnic and racial ideologies disavowed any efforts for these groups to be seen as equal to the Japanese. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Japanese academics and public officials adopted and appropriated Western racial science ideologies (Dikötter 1997; Russell 1995). Japan had sent many students abroad to study in Europe and the United States, where they were exposed firsthand to racial science and eugenics of the period. Japanese students who were exposed to these racialist ideas developed an array of opinions about them, some supporting them and some opposing them (Robertson 2010). At the time, Western eugenics was a thriving discipline in
which scientists sought to empirically establish the existence of biological races. They also aimed to classify races on the basis of their supposed superiority to one another and to establish a racial hierarchy in which certain European populations were at the top. The Japanese students exposed to these ideas brought them back to Japan, where they subsequently implemented them to develop a thriving culture of eugenics and racial science.

As western ideas about race entered Japan in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, Japanese scientists, government officials, and public commentators sought to interpose Japan into these emerging racial hierarchies. Doing so would require Japan to establish its own sense of racial identity in a global context and for Japanese scientists to embark on their own eugenic experiments. In this context, two words gained popularity in the Japanese lexicon that further defined the qualitative content of this identity: *jinshu* and *minzoku*. While there is often ambiguity in the actual use of these terms, both in practice and within academic analysis, *jinshu* is usually translated to something akin to race and *minzoku* translates to something equivalent to ethnicity. When read in Chinese characters, these words take on similar meanings. *Jinshu* is read as *renzhong* and *minzoku* as *minzu*, the latter term being used to designate the fifty-six groups recognized within China. Robertson notes that these words have played a significant role in the establishment of ethnic and race thinking in Japan:

“*minzoku* and *jinshu*…for the most part were used interchangeably, although *jinshu* remains the more clinical, social-scientific term and *minzoku* the more popular and populist term. When prefixed with names, such as Nippon and Yamato, the latter an ancient and nationalistic appellation for Japan, *minzoku* signified the conflation of

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6 “Nippon” means “Japan” and “Yamato” is a traditional name referring to the Japanese population.
phenotype, geography, culture, spirit, history, and nationhood. All of these semantic and
semiotic inventions were part of the ideological agenda of the Meiji Restoration and were
incorporated into the postwar (and current) constitution of 1947” (Robertson 2008, 432).

*Jinshu* and *minzoku* have since become embedded in the collective identification of the Japanese
population and have become historically synonymous with national identity. Additionally, while
some Japanese elites recognized the diverse origins of the Japanese, some suggested that the
manifestation of the Japanese state was

“a reflection of the inherited qualities and capabilities of its people. These inherent and
immutable national characteristics, which were the product, though not exclusively, of a
shared genetic base, were also the defining feature of the Yamato *minzoku*, or Japanese
race” (Weiner 1994, 19).

The use of terms like *jinshu* and *minzoku* has allowed for a very distinct and conceptually
superior collectivity to emerge that was founded on notions of racial exceptionality vis-à-vis
other world populations.

The importation and implementation of such ideas produced a newfound “racialized”
element to Japanese identity. In doing so, Japanese ideas about national identity overlapped with
ideas about race, culture, ethnicity, and blood invoking a sense of “imagined” national identity
and racial distinctiveness of the Japanese and conflating national identity and racial identity.

Historian Michael Weiner notes that “race and nation inhabited the same ideological
space…both race and nation were regarded as naturally recurring phenomenon” (Weiner 2009,
1-2).

The pre-war efforts to establish Japan as a world power, on the basis of Japanese racial
superiority, amount to a calculated cultivation and fostering of collective sentiments based on
ethnic and racial identification on behalf of government institutions and social elites. Government institutions and elites interlaced these sentiments with those of national belonging, whereby “Japanese” came to describe an individual of particular ethnic, racial, national, cultural, biological, and linguistic character. Although the terms corresponding to ideas about race and ethnicity were, and still are, applied inconsistently and lack precise definition, they nevertheless continue to inform Japanese ideas about Japanese identity. By drawing upon the racialized conceptions of identity, discourses that rigidly differentiate Japanese from non-Japanese can continue to marginalize foreigners and minority populations in Japan.

While there is no empirical validity to the claims about the “purity” of Japanese blood, discourses of genetic exceptionality and national belonging converged to assert a sense of Japanese collectivity on the global arena. Weiner notes that “during the empire-building decades (1880-1945), notions of ‘blood’ purity were invoked not only as a metaphor for shared heredity or ancestry, but also as the essential ‘stuff’ of race and national identity” (Weiner 2009, 9). Robertson further adds that “blood…[was] understood as an active agent responsible for catalyzing an ethos or a national-cultural identity” (Robertson 2012, 93). As Japan adopted western ideas of racial science and eugenics, ideas about how they applied to the Japanese context proliferated (Robertson 2010). In such adoptions:

“The public sphere in early twentieth-century Japan was shaped by the discourse of eugenics and was premised on a future-oriented vision of a racially pure nation-state peopled by sturdy and fertile citizens. These people were the so-called New Japanese (shin’ nipponjin) whose anthropometrically ideal bodies would serve as the caryatids of the expanding Japanese empire” (Robertson 2010, 430).
By adopting such an ideological positioning, the Japanese state could conceptually conceive of itself as on par or superior to Western expansion, while also conceptualize itself as superior to its colonized subjects.

This also helped make blood “the principle criterion of and for nationality and citizenship” (Robertson 2012, 107). There was an important social and cultural element to these understandings of blood, which mapped onto establishing identity discourses at the political level. Conventional discourses conceptualized blood as a key element of Japan’s uniqueness and an important way Japanese distinguished themselves from other groups. Yoshino explains that “the notion of Japanese blood presents the immutable difference of race, immutable conceptual boundary of Japanese blood” (Yoshino 1992, 25). He further adds that “the symbol of ‘Japanese blood’ evokes the stable sense of ‘us’ and ‘our’ identity by representing a complex set of meanings and emotive associations concerning Japanese identity” (Yoshino 1992, 26). Although there is no tangible empirical uniqueness to the idea of Japanese blood, it nevertheless became an important cultural construction to distinguish Japanese from others during this period (Robertson 2009, 2012; Yoshino 1992). The ramifications of this distinction are felt to this day, as Japanese society grapples with establishing understandings of national identity and the construction of Japanese blood in complicated ways.

As the contours of this identity developed and subsequently took shape, the Japanese polity continued to define itself vis-à-vis its subjugated non-Japanese populations. Japanese colonial advancements contributed to the redefinition of Japanese identity in new ways, as the subjected populations Japan engaged with provided a new set of criteria against which the Japanese could define themselves (Morris-Suzuki 1994; Weiner 2009). These subjected groups were constantly the victims of campaigns that sought to strip them of their identities (Rabson
2012; Siddle 1996; Weiner 1994) and in some cases even resulted in lethal violence that was carried out against them, as was the case in the anti-Korean violence that occurred after the 1923 Earthquake in Tokyo. The implications of a highly racially and ethnicized identity – one that was jointly tied to notions of blood, culture, language, and social belonging – created a sense of Japanese uniqueness and superiority that had direct ramifications for the colonial subjects they suppressed, as well as for future constructions of national belonging that would be established hereafter. However, as noted, pre-war ideas about racial purity coexisted with the reality of a multi-ethnic empire, which was to be fundamentally revised in the postwar period.

**Postwar Japan**

Japan announced its surrender in the Pacific War on August 15, 1945. This marked the end of Japan’s empire and thrusted the nation into a search for a new identity. Previous notions of identity that drew upon a united colonial empire with the Japanese people at the top were forced into reconfiguration as Japan was stripped of its colonial territories and demoralized by the defeat. Scholarly and popular works during this period helped shape understandings of postwar Japanese identity and through analyzing these writings we can establish a clearer understanding of its connection to national identity in its current form.

In 1945, American anthropologist Ruth Benedict published *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*. Funded by the U.S. government to better understand the Japanese enemy in wartime, Benedict drew upon archival sources, previous studies about Japan, and interviews with Japanese-Americans in attempt to explain the nature and content of Japanese identity (Benedict 1945). Benedict’s work was widely popular both within and outside of Japan (Befu 2001; Kent 1999; Lie 2001b; Ryang 2002). Western scholars readily consumed this work as a source of factual information about the Japanese character, while Japanese scholars and
citizens alike referenced it as alleged substantiation of Japan’s unique character. The temporal context of Benedict’s writing is particularly important for understanding its reception. Her book was translated and read in the wake of Japan’s wartime defeat – a particularly harsh era when the nation was searching for ways to recover its sense of identity and dignity. A Western scholar proclaiming that Japan was home to a unique and powerful culture provided the conceptual substance necessary for a constructive sense of identity to emerge. By seeking to academically construct a comprehensive understanding of Japan’s identity provided a platform upon which Japan could reconstruct a newfound image in light of defeat (Kent 1999). For many Japanese, this evidenced Japan’s exceptional character and was an idea that could be readily adapted in the context of a wartime defeat to reconstruct a national image. Although scholars and intellectuals have critiqued Chrysanthemum from numerous angles (Dale 1986; Lie 2001b), it has remained an important piece of literature in the evolution of contemporary Japanese identity.

Benedict’s work formed an essential pillar of the genre of writing referred to as nihonjinron literature. C. Douglas Lummus notes that “virtually the entire discourse of that branch of Japanese studies called nihonjinron has been carried out within the framework established by Benedict’s book” (Lummus 2007, 4). Nihonjinron “refer to the vast array of literature which thinking elites have produced to define the uniqueness of Japanese culture, society, and national character” (Yoshino 1992, 2). Kazufumi Manabe and Harumi Befu describe nihonjinron as “a body of discourse which purports to demonstrate Japan's cultural differences from other cultures and Japan's cultural uniqueness in the world and thus tries to establish Japan's cultural identity” (Manabe and Befu 1992, 89). Nihonjinron is essentially any academic or popular writing that theorizes the particular elements of the Japanese character. These writings were often “an attempt to pinpoint the essential nature of the Japanese people and their culture,
and, thus, they are often a medium for nationalist suggestions of a clearly defined and unique culture” (Kent 1999, 182). The purpose of these writings was to support notions of an identity that was unique to Japan itself. Thus, Japan’s population, government, history, geography, society, culture, language, and various other characteristics could be viewed as exceptional and exclusive property of Japan, which functioned to conceptually differentiate the Japanese from other world populations. Benedict’s training and anthropological approach sought to equate one culture with one personality, which resulted in the particularly limited way her work theorized Japanese culture.

One of the most fundamental and pervasive characteristics that came to define Japanese collectivity is the idea that Japan is an ethno-racially homogenous society and that it is absent of diversity – an idea that is commonly referred to as the “myth of homogeneity” or *tanitsu minzoku shinwa* (Befu 2001; Dale 1986; Morris-Suzuki 1998; Murphy-Shigematsu 1993; Oguma 1995). This ideology suggests that the Japanese population is and has always been comprised of one racially homogenous and historically continuous population bound by exceptional biological and cultural characteristics. These ideas of societal homogeneity were institutionally constructed and widely disseminated through education, media, and academia, which subsequently became a fundamental part of self-understanding of Japanese uniqueness and national identity amongst the population. This dissemination was so widespread that notions of homogeneity, uniqueness, and exclusivity came to be seen as important pillars of a modern identity. It was based on an inherently circular logic: the particularities of Japanese language and culture, the alleged ethn-racial distinctiveness of the nation’s population, and later Japan’s postwar “economic miracle,” would serve as evidence that substantiated the supposed uniqueness and exceptionality of Japan.
Thus, the myth of Japanese homogeneity, as part of *nihonjinron* writings and popular discourses, became an important part of the construction of Japanese identity.

An important dynamism empowered the *nihonjinron* ideologies of this time. The search for an identity converged with economic success and ideas of postwar nationhood to create a quasi-feedback loop in which essentialist ideas of belonging informed identity constructions in conjunction with the supposed outcomes of these ideas. For instance, the supposedly homogenous Japanese population (an important trope of post war *nihonjinron* discourse) produced “miraculous” economic results (supposedly because of their inherent qualities), which in turn produced more essentialist discourses. These two notions reinforced one another in ways that informed the trajectory of Japanese identity development. In other words, Benedict and other *nihonjinron* writers did not write in a vacuum, but rather their works were continually informing and being informed by ideas about national identity, which ultimately shaped how Japan (and the Japanese) saw itself in relation to outside populations.

To understand the substance of these nationalist discourses, it is useful to consider a few works from this period. Chie Nakane’s analysis, *Japanese Society*, sought to “offer a key to an understanding of Japanese society, and those features which are specific to it and which distinguish it from other complex societies” (Nakane 1970, Preface). Nakane’s argument highlights several supposedly unique Japanese features that she proposes substantiate this distinction, of which the “vertical structural principle” forms the most significant. She argues that “this structural tendency, developing in the course of the history of the Japanese people, has become one of the characteristics of Japanese culture” (Nakane 1970, 146). She also notes that “certain factors have encouraged this tendency,” such as “the homogenous configuration of Japanese society,” as well as locally adapted applications of Western democracy, and the
comparatively static evolution of the Japanese language, amongst others (Nakane 1970, 146-154). This search for uniqueness demonstrates how scholarly analyses during the early-postwar period approached Japanese society as a “unique” element that operated in different ways than the rest of the world.

Writing on the Japanese character psychologically, Takeo Doi (1984 [1971]) utilized the Japanese concept of *amae* to explain the “unique” emphasis on social dependence pervasive throughout Japanese cultural norms. *Amae* stresses collective belonging, group obligations, and filial affection, which inform Japanese character and identity through social interactions. Doi juxtaposes these particularities to those of the west in ways that dichotomize the two and “empirically” distinguish the Japanese character. Doi’s postulation is that tendencies which incline individuals towards the “vertical” social structure develop in childhood and further mature throughout life, providing a cross-generational trait that binds people to the specific society milieu that is modern Japan.

Scholars and intellectuals played an important role in shaping the trajectory of these ideas. For instance, scholars often constructed arguments that reflected ideological remnants from times past and sought to detach the image and identity of Japan from that of China and continental Asia (Hudson 1999; Lie 2001a). Dikötter has stated that “cultural intermediaries – educators, journalists, academics, doctors, and scientists – reinterpreted the language of science, indigenized evolutionary theories, reinterpreted racial ideologies and actively reconstructed their own definitions of identity” (Dikötter 1997, 6). The reach of *nihonjinron* ideologies has thus been widespread throughout Japan and the “thinking elites” behind the dissemination and development of these discourses played an important role in perpetuating these ideas.
Relatedly, Japan’s postwar economic success formed an additional pillar of the nation’s emergent identity. Conventionally referred to as an “economic miracle,” Japan’s economic achievements after the nation’s devastating wartime defeat led to an important reconceptualization of the Japanese character and its defining traits. Christopher Gerteis and Timothy George have stated that after Japan’s defeat, the nation “arose from the ashes of war to become an even greater industrial power while simultaneously establishing itself as a vibrant, pacifist, and contentious democracy” (Gerteis and George 2012, 1). Public officials and citizens alike have attributed the nation’s economic recovery to exceptional cultural characteristics that stress group harmony, collective perseverance, and loyalty to each other and the state (Nakane 1970; Vogel 1979). In 1979, Ezra Vogel published a book titled *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*, in which he praised Japanese institutions for their alleged better performance in comparison to the United States. Vogel states that

“Japan has dealt more successfully with more of the basic problems of postindustrial society than any other country” and that he has become convinced that “Japanese success had less to do with traditional character traits than with specific organizational structures, policy programs, and conscious planning” (Vogel 1979, viii-ix).

While recognizing some of the shortcomings of Japanese institutions, he also argues that America can learn something from them in order to emulate some of these major successes (Vogel 1979, Chapter 10).

Such cultural explanations of Japan’s postwar economic success helped reformulate Japanese identity in a readily consumable and honorable way that was also in line with the nation’s postwar material and economic achievements. Lie notes that it was during this period that notions of ethnic homogeneity developed as a tangible reason for explaining Japan’s
success, whereas previously it existed simply as a discourse and ideology utilized to distinguish Japanese from other populations (Lie 2001a, 130). Today, many Japanese continue to explain national success and failures “as resulting from a quaint culture defined by its relationship with” its own unique traditions and not by “social, political, or even economic forces that shape the contemporary world” (Gerteis and George 2012, 2). Many have come “to see Japan’s ‘economic miracle’ as part and parcel of what it meant to be Japanese was a construct made real by the power of belief as much as by the wealth created during the rapid growth of the postwar era” (Gerteis and George 2012, 4). Evoking discourses of homogeneity has fostered this sense of national belonging, as well as distinguish Japanese categorically and highlight their allegedly inherent and exceptional qualities (Leheny 2003, 39-40).

Despite the popularity of **nihonjinron**, the pervasiveness of Japanese identity, and the discourse these topics have generated, scholars have widely critiqued such perspectives. Offering an array of archeological, linguistic, and biological data, Hudson has argued that what is referred to as the “Japanese” population today is actually the result of two discrete migrations into the Japanese archipelago and the cultural and linguistic amalgamation of these populations (Hudson 1999). Hudson presents evidence to substantiate his claims that the contemporary Japanese population is actually an admixture of diverse groups. Eiji Oguma (1995) has argued that it was the particular context of postwar Japan, which combined a crushing wartime defeat with a search for an assertive sense of worldly identity, that enabled these discourses to emerge when and how they did. The common trend underlying these critiques is the fact that Japan is and always has been a diverse place comprised of a similarly diverse population – one that is not home to a single homogenous entity that can trace its lineage back to pure antecedents (Lie 2001a, 89-94).
These critiques show that Japanese collectivity discourses have been established upon scientifically invalid and conceptually narrow-minded and simplistic notions. Further, they demonstrate that Japan is not, and never has been, a homogenous state by any empirical benchmark. The work of archeologists and biological anthropologists has demonstrated how the Japanese population today is the result of a mixture of different populations, who spoke different languages, and possessed different cultures. Many of these differences can still be seen in Japan today, as regional dialects and local cultures differ dramatically from the north to south, rural to urban, or coast to mountains. For instance, one Japanese friend, born and raised in Tokyo, said that when he speaks to his grandmother, who is a native of rural Tohoku and still lives there, he can only understand about thirty percent of what she is actually saying and that he often just replies “Sō desu” [Oh is that so?] because he really cannot really decipher what she is saying. This is because she speaks a local mountain dialect of Tohokuben, the dialect from the Tohoku region, which is very different from standard Japanese. This is testament to the wide variation that always has and continues to exist within the Japanese archipelago, effectively invalidating notions of a “homogenous” Japanese population.

**The 1980s-Present**

By the 1980s, Japan had established itself as the world’s second largest economy and a country that produced some of the world’s finest quality technology and automobiles. The nation also experienced profound demographic shifts, which coincided with an increasingly educated, older, and wealthier population. As a result, labor shortages quickly developed in various sectors of the economy, especially in manual labor industries. Furthermore, many young Japanese began eschewing traditional professional roles, which they had occupied in the immediate postwar years. Rather than transitioning straight from colleges into companies, many young people began
going abroad or pursuing alternative careers and lifestyles. Increasingly urbanized and educated Japanese young men gravitated more towards white collar work in offices and in major companies. Many young Japanese females changed their employment patterns also. In urban areas, women started to reject a work system that systematically discriminated against females, did not promote them, and saw them as temporary employees who would eventually drop out of the workforce to start a family. Rural women migrated to the cities in search of more fulfilling life opportunities, which left a dearth of young Japanese females in certain areas, especially rural ones. This problem has exacerbated and today one can find rural localities with large numbers of foreign wives married to local men. Yasuo Kuwahara notes that:

“in the 1980s, labor supply and demand tightened, and in the latter half of the 1980s, the labor supply had a shortage unprecedented since the war, behind which doubtless lies the fact that the economy took on the aspect of a ‘bubble’ due to inflated asset prices among other things” (Kuwahara 2005, 28).

These conditions were ripe for migrants to enter Japan in large numbers and that is precisely what happened during the 1980s. Migrants began flowing into Japan, mainly from other parts of Asia. Migrants from China comprised the largest number of new arrivals, although migrants also arrived from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, and as far away as Nigeria and Ghana (Goodman et al. 2003; Lie 2001a; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008; Wakabayashi 1996).
Table 1. Number of Registered Foreigners by Select Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Korean</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Brazilian</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Peruvian</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>598,507</td>
<td>32,889</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2,249</td>
<td>5,334</td>
<td>639,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>544,903</td>
<td>40,481</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>4,962</td>
<td>7,636</td>
<td>598,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>577,682</td>
<td>43,865</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8,566</td>
<td>10,520</td>
<td>641,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>581,257</td>
<td>45,535</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11,594</td>
<td>11,510</td>
<td>650,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>583,537</td>
<td>49,418</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>15,915</td>
<td>16,126</td>
<td>665,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>614,202</td>
<td>51,481</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>19,045</td>
<td>21,773</td>
<td>708,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>647,156</td>
<td>48,728</td>
<td>1,418</td>
<td>3,035</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>21,976</td>
<td>29,221</td>
<td>751,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>664,536</td>
<td>52,896</td>
<td>1,492</td>
<td>5,547</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>22,401</td>
<td>35,690</td>
<td>782,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>683,313</td>
<td>74,924</td>
<td>1,955</td>
<td>12,261</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>29,044</td>
<td>46,635</td>
<td>850,612</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>687,940</td>
<td>150,339</td>
<td>56,429</td>
<td>49,082</td>
<td>10,279</td>
<td>38,364</td>
<td>82,874</td>
<td>1,075,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>666,376</td>
<td>222,991</td>
<td>176,440</td>
<td>74,297</td>
<td>36,269</td>
<td>43,198</td>
<td>142,800</td>
<td>1,362,371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>635,269</td>
<td>335,575</td>
<td>254,394</td>
<td>144,871</td>
<td>46,171</td>
<td>44,856</td>
<td>225,308</td>
<td>1,686,444</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Japan Immigration Association
Table 2. Comparison of Foreigners from Select Backgrounds: 2012 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHINA (PRC)</td>
<td>625,595</td>
<td>730,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>21,654</td>
<td>31,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDONESIA</td>
<td>25,532</td>
<td>49,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOREA (KANKOKU)(^7)</td>
<td>530,048</td>
<td>450,663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYANMAR</td>
<td>8,046</td>
<td>22,519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEPAL</td>
<td>24,071</td>
<td>80,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILIPPINES</td>
<td>202,985</td>
<td>260,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRI LANKA</td>
<td>8,428</td>
<td>23,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THAILAND</td>
<td>40,133</td>
<td>50,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIETNAM</td>
<td>52,367</td>
<td>262,405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^7\) “Kankoku” refers to the Korean Peninsula. However, this category is highly problematic in that it comprises not only recent arrivals from South Korea, but also individuals who had remained in Japan after World War II. These individuals were denied Japanese citizenship and were forced to remain as citizens of “Kankoku” despite having ambivalent connections towards the Korean Peninsula. This number is decreasing because increasing numbers of these individuals adopt Japanese nationality by taking Japanese names and emphasizing their connection to Japan rather than the Korean Peninsula. See Chapman 2007 and Lie 2008.
Amid this sudden diversification, concerns soon emerged about the presence of these foreign communities in Japan. Specifically, issues related to crime and social order began surfacing and the Japanese population started to look critically at large segments of these migrants. For example, Iranians were one of the most notable and conspicuous migrant populations that became associated with criminality. Iran and Japan maintained a visa arrangement that allowed Iranians to enter Japan without a visa during this decade. Many middle-class Iranians left Iran fleeing the Iranian Revolution and began using Tokyo parks as networks to obtain work and information about living in Japan. It was not uncommon for Iranians to arrive in Japan with little information about the country, no accommodation or job prospects, or any knowledge of the language. They arrived knowing that they would find other
Iranians in Tokyo parks. Problems emerged when the numbers of Iranians gathering in these public spaces became more conspicuous. There also developed concerns of crimes by Iranians, such as phone card scams and selling counterfeit goods, some of which were warranted and some not. Concerns over migrant crime quickly became a point of discussion for local authorities and Iranians and Chinese were at the forefront of these discussions (Chiba 2001; Flowers 2012; Friman 1991; Howell 1996; Lie 2001a; Sakurai 2003; Schans 2012a).

By the late 1980s, Japanese officials and the general public grew concerned about the increasing presence of foreigners, their alleged criminal activities, and the future of Japan’s workforce. While immigration intensified and the social problems they brought persisted, so did Japan’s labor shortages. To abate these growing concerns while also continuing to alleviate Japan’s labor shortages, the nation revised its immigration policy in 1990. These revisions reformed Japan’s immigration laws to privilege the entry of people of Japanese descent living overseas. This proved especially attractive for nikkeijin living in South America, where local economies were suffering from instability and political turmoil. The result was hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans – mostly nikkeijin but also many who were not nikkeijin – entered Japan during the 1990s, largely from Brazil and Peru. The economic incentive of this time was considerable as doctors in Brazil were able to make more money working in a Japanese factory for a month than they could practicing medicine in their home country (Tsuda 2003).

This influx of Latin American migrants, however, engendered a new set of problems. The premise behind these policies was that because these individuals were of Japanese descent, they would not bring the social problems brought by populations such as Iranians and Chinese that had manifested in the previous decade. Here is a prime example of how ideas about descent, culture, and identity played out in practice, though not in the way Japanese officials envisioned
it. Because these nikkeijin were so many generations detached from Japan, they did not in fact integrate as officials imagined they would. Many did not speak Japanese very well and they were unfamiliar with contemporary Japanese cultural norms. In short, these nikkeijin were “more culturally Brazilian than expected” and did not integrate well into “Japan’s national cultural fabric” (Tsuda 2003, 315). The problems that this influx caused eventually led to further immigration reforms in the 2000s, whereby Latin Americans were provided economic incentives to leave Japan indefinitely (Tsuda 2003).

As the influx and decline of nikkeijin migration occurred, Japan’s labor shortages and workforce issues intensified. Although the nikkeijin solution abated some of these complications quantitatively, old problems lingered and new problems emerged. All the while, foreign workers continued entering Japan in increasing numbers. This has resulted in a panoply of migrant communities throughout Japan with no signs of slowing down. There is increasing diversity within Japan’s foreign population as migrants from diverse national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds arrive in Japan hoping to take advantages of these lingering labor shortages.

Despite such problems, migration into Japan has persisted. Today, Tokyo’s streets and are filled with foreigners from diverse backgrounds. Chinese are now the largest group of foreigners in Japan, Vietnamese are third, and Filipinos are fourth. Arguably the greatest difference between immigration today and immigration in the 1980s is the more diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic status of migrants entering Japan. Unlike the 1980s, where

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8 See Note 3 above. Koreans officially rank second according to official statistics. However, this figure also includes long-term resident Koreans who still do not possess Japanese nationality. It would be grossly misrepresentative to consider them as “foreigners in Japan” the same way Filipinos or Nepalis would be.
foreigners mostly went to Japan for economic reasons, foreign students from all over the world now look to Japan as a desirable destination in which to pursue their education. Many tertiary and post-graduate students look to Japan as a place to obtain their higher education. Degree programs conducted entirely in English have lowered some of the language barriers that may have prevented foreigners from seeing Japan as a viable destination country for study. There are also increasing numbers of foreign students studying in regular (not specialized English) degree programs. Scholarship from the Japanese Ministry of Education and other sources have also made the costs of these endeavors more reasonable (Bushnell 2012; Mori 2011). There is also a growing number of foreign students who learn Japanese proficiently and take the same classes as Japanese students.

This diversified migration encouraged scholars to examine the nature of these newer migrant communities more closely. Academic inquiries into the experiences of “newcomer” foreigners have revealed important information about the novel and variegated ways these communities try to position themselves within Japan.

Feminist Leiba Faier has documented the effects of this by ethnographically examining Filipina migration to the Japanese countryside through marriage and observed that this form of migration has resulted in “new meanings of Japanese and Filipino culture and identity through their shared daily lives” (Faier 2009, 1). The Filipina wives in her study have taken up social roles Japanese women have by and large abandoned and as a result some of these Filipina women have been reconceptualized as *ii oyomesan*, or “good wives.” Faier notes, however, that the image of *ii oyomesan* was not extended to every Filipina in her field site but instead was applied only to those that “behaved in ways that [Japanese residents] found most amenable,” thus
demonstrating the important connection between cultural adaptation and acceptance in how
Japanese perceive of foreigners (Faier 2009, 139).

This suggests that only foreigners who behave in culturally appropriate ways are accepted
in Japanese society. This may reveal the upper limits of assimilation, which is being accepted
culturally with a different outward appearance. Faier documents how the cultural acceptance of
Others tangibly occurred, albeit to a nominal extent and not in ways free from negotiating
stereotypical images of Filipinas. However, the more significant point is what criteria allowed
for this greater cultural acceptance. Select Filipina women were characterized as *ii oyomesan*
because of their ability to essentially be better Japanese than Japanese women were. Filipinas’
practices exceeded the expectations of foreigners (*gaikokujin*) and aligned much more with what
was expected from typical Japanese women as *ii oyomesan*. Similar sentiment has been observed
by Mario Lopez in his study of Filipina healthcare providers in Japan (Lopez 2012). This is
important because it demonstrates that there *is* room for cultural acceptance of Others, even if the
criteria for this acceptance are somewhat rigid. Essentially, while remaining bound by global
power hierarchies, Faier’s analysis suggests that definitions of Japanese and Other are being
reformulated through everyday experiences, which affect how interpersonal relations develop.

Beata Świtek has ethnographically examined the experiences of Indonesian healthcare
workers in Japan and has documented the ways their experiences problematize conventional
understandings of caregiving (Świtek 2016). Świtek reported that while Indonesian caseworkers
experienced problems of isolation and a loss of self-worth in Japan, through their regularized
encounters with Japanese, both elderly care patients and the Indonesians’ Japanese coworkers,
redefined their relationships with one another through their shared common experiences. Świtek
explains:
“essentializing conceptualizations became complicated by (but also served as catalysts for) the development of intimate relationships on different levels of experience. These relationships allowed for attributes other than culture to become the basis for mutual identifications that could then serve as alternative reference points in everyday interactions” (Świtek 2016, 197).

Here, Świtek shows that common experiences with one another transcended cultural differences in ways that allowed the Japanese and Indonesian parties to conceptualize their experiences on a common ground, despite significant differences.

Such findings were also similar to the ethnographic data I collected. As will be shown in the following chapters, the data I obtained from foreigners from diverse backgrounds and Japanese informants repeatedly expressed that their direct and normalized encounters with the other party led them to reconceptualize the ways they thought of themselves in relation to those others and in both positive and negative ways. Chapter 4 will explain how direct encounters between Africans and Japanese families have reconstructed normalized relations between Self and Other in ways that problematize conventional understandings of ethno-national identity.

While this is not to overlook the new forms of prejudice and discrimination that have emerged, as well as the problematic positioning of biracial offspring, my ethnographic data in accordance with the two ethnographies above demonstrate a discernable change in foreigner-Japanese relations that suggest direct and normalized encounters are changing micro-level understandings of Japanese identity (Capobianco 2017; Faier 2009; Green and Kadoya 2015; Świtek 2016).

Other recent works have explored a range of other topics related to newcomer migrant communities in Japan. Rachel Parreñas has examined the contours of labor and affection amongst Filipina hostesses working in Tokyo (Parreñas 2011). Gracia Liu-Farrer has written an
insightful monograph on the diverse patterns of Chinese student and labor migration into Japan (Liu-Farrer 2011). Milos Debnár has shown how the diversified patterns of European migrants to Japan subvert stereotypical images of these populations as “privileged” and “cosmopolitan” migrants seeking out new experiences (Debnár 2016). Other works have explored the migration patterns and experiences of various groups, including Bangladeshis (Sakurai 2003), Nepalis (Yamanaka 2000), Vietnamese migration and their offspring (Kawakami 1999, 2003; Okubo 2013; Shingaki and Asano 2003), Peruvians (Takenaka 2003) Iranians (Morita 2003; Sakurai 2003), and Pakistanis (Kudo 2008).

While these works have been important for filling a major gap in the literature that overlooks smaller and lesser studied migration patterns into Japan, there is still much more that needs to be done. For example, there are communities of IT professionals from India, Pakistan, and the Philippines who stay in Japan for extended periods of time, some of whom climb the corporate ladder and subsequently establish permanent lives in Japan. There are growing numbers of students turned laborers in various sectors of Japan’s economy that make up a small but growing and conspicuous portion of Japan’s professional and industrial workforce. The prevalence of foreign sumo wrestlers from Mongolia and elsewhere has also been underexplored in scholarly literature, despite massive coverage from the mainstream media. And there are thousands of foreign spouses who have more or less “integrated” and made their livelihoods permanently in Japan that have received little attention (outside of Filipinas and other Asian female populations). These are just some of the many emerging communities within Japan that have thus far not received scholarly attention yet are important for understanding the ways Japan is changing in relation to these wider demographic shifts.
There has also been a growing interest in Japan’s sub-Saharan African community, which despite its conspicuous and somewhat renowned presence in popular discourse, has generated little scholarly attention until recently. The experiences of Africans will be a focal point of this dissertation in the chapters to come. However, it is important here to recognize the insights scholarly analyses have revealed concerning the African experience thus far. Djamila Scans has discussed the marriage patterns of migrants and the ways that they seek to incorporate themselves into Japan’s labor market (Schans 2012a, 2012b). Several Japanese scholars have briefly explored the phenomenon of African migration, as well as shown the different survival strategies and networks they establish as they settle in Japan (Kawada 2005, 2006, 2007; Komai 2001; Wakabayashi 1996). I have also written about the experiences of Africans in Japan and demonstrated how Japanese conceptualizations of and attitudes towards Afro-Westerners (blacks from America, the Caribbean, and Europe) are discernably different from the conceptualizations and attitudes expressed towards Africans from the African continent (Capobianco 2018).

This all amounts to a diverse and complicated environment in which growing numbers of foreigners are engaging in increasingly different livelihoods within Japan. It is hard to do many things in Tokyo without encountering or seeing a discernable foreigner. Several Taiwanese informants once explained to me that their travels through Japan have been made easier than expected because anywhere they went, they were able to find a Chinese speaker. This diversification is occurring rapidly and is considerably altering the channels through which Japanese come in contact with foreigners. The implications of such changes have yet to be seen. However, one can surmise that these trends and the encounters that they produce can greatly reconfigure notions of identity and the ways that foreigners and Japanese engage one another within Japan. Still greater are questions concerning the outcomes of these encounters and
interactions, practically and conceptually. By understanding these outcomes, we can obtain a more nuanced understanding of the ways Japan is changing as a result of demographic change and ethnic and cultural diversification.

Who is “Japanese”?

Who is Japanese? – Despite multiple calculated attempts throughout Japanese history to answer this question, especially by *nihonjinron* proponents, the answer is not as clear cut as it might appear. Historically, there has been enormous ambiguity concerning who is and who is not considered to be “Japanese.” This is in part because the of the particular ways ethno-racial components of Japanese identity have been historically situated and constructed in relation to particular historical epochs (Morris-Suzuki 1994; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; Weiner 1994; Yoshino 1992). Under such circumstances, it is not farfetched to assume that as Japan enters a new stage in its history, in which foreigners are occupying historically uncharted spaces in Japanese society, there will likely be a redefinition of the Self in relation to the Other. In this case, the Other is the increasing numbers of foreigners from diverse backgrounds coming into more direct contact with new segments of Japanese society.

The inconsistency of how Japanese society has conceptualized foreigners historically greatly problematizes any efforts at redefinition. Yoshino provides such an example of the inconsistent application of these terms when his informants referred to ethnic Koreans in Japan. His informants stated that: “No matter how long [Chinese and Koreans] live [in Japan]...they will remain Chinese or Koreans. After all, we are different *minzoku* (ethnic/racial groups)” However, “when their attention was drawn to a number of these former Koreans and Chinese who had become naturalized and who passed as Japanese...most respondents agreed that Koreans and Chinese could ‘become Japanese’ (*nihonjin ni nareru*)” (Yoshino 1992. 119).
‘change of mind’” is evidence that “the relationship between culture and race [in the context of Japanese society] lacks coherence and logic” in its application (Yoshino 1992, 119). His informants made arbitrary and inconsistent distinctions between Japanese and ethnic Koreans and Chinese in Japan. This shows that even when highly racialized identity categories exist, they are not truly static and there often exists considerable ambivalence regarding how they apply to flesh and blood people.

This remains the case today as diversification permeates further into different areas of Japanese society. This diversification adds further complexity to the precarity that is embodied in contemporary Japan. It is the combination of diversification with rapid demographic changes and changing social composition of Japanese life that facilitates this uncertainty in new directions and makes it even less clear who is and who is not Japanese. Japan today is at a crossroads and how ideas about diversity and national identity will develop are uncertain. However, I argue that in Japan today, two radical extreme attitudes towards foreigners can be identified.

On one end of the spectrum is a sense of reinforced *nihonjinron* ideologies that envision Japanese society as under threat internally and externally. Because the nation cannot sustain itself demographically, traditional cultural institutions are at risk of becoming obsolete, which proponents of this school believe would amount to a loss of identity. These proponents have rejected calls for a more multicultural society and believe more needs to be done domestically to keep Japan free of the fast encroaching outside influences.

The other end of the spectrum is represented by a radical embrace of multiculturalism. These individuals see value in immigration and believe foreigners can provide a feasible solution to Japan’s economic and demographic problems. There is growing evidence from statistical surveys (Green and Kadoya 2015) and from qualitative studies (Capobianco 2017; Faier 2009;
Lopez 2012; Świttek 2016) that show how Japanese attitudes towards foreignness are changing among certain segments of the Japanese population. In stark contrast to the refurbished right-wing xenophobia noted above, this multiculturalist line of thinking recognizes the contributions that foreigners can make to Japanese society. These people see foreigners as both a viable solution to Japan’s future labor and demographic troubles and believe they should be better integrated into Japanese society. They argue that Japan’s trajectory should embrace this diversity and the cultural changes it brings. This school of thought is marked by a radical accommodation to foreigners and a somewhat significant rupture of the way things are conventionally done.

It needs to be noted that both radical xenophobia and radical multiculturalism are the extreme margins; those holding these radical and impassioned views are at the far ends of this spectrum. Therefore, it is difficult to truly ascertain how prevalent these extreme ideas are or what their future impacts might be. Most Japanese do not hold such extreme views and instead maintain attitudes towards Japan’s diversification that lie somewhere in between them. It is thus unlikely that these two extremes will be the vanguard of what a new national identity might look like. Instead, it is how the silent majority in the middle develops ideas about the nation’s future and foreign migrants that will shape how national discourse proceeds. The everyday encounters and experiences of the members of this silent majority will have a profound effect on the opinions that they ultimately develop. It is therefore essential that we start to dissect some of the ways that these encounters take place and what effects they are having on their participants. And it is this fact that will set the stage for the upcoming ethnographic chapters, which will explore the impacts these newfound encounters have on Japan’s silent majority.
What does it mean to step into Japan today? When one arrives at Tokyo’s Narita Airport for the first time, what do people expect to encounter? How do such expectations match the reality that they encounter? When I first traveled to Japan in 2009, I expected to see only Japanese staff throughout the airport. I expected to board the Narita Express train to Tokyo and be one of the only non-Japanese people on the train. I expected to check into my hotel and be one of the only foreigners staying in that hotel. Not having much knowledge about Japan, I naively assumed that Japan was a homogenous country, much like the *nihonjinron* literature and its essentialized understandings of Japanese identity had suggested. By sheer coincidence, I watched *Lost in Translation* several days before my trip, so I expected there would probably be other foreigners in Japan, but I assumed they would mostly be travelers or short-term sojourners. It never occurred to me there may be sizable minority communities in Japan besides maybe English teachers and business professionals.

My expectations were at first met without much contestation. For the first days of the trip, I seldom saw other foreigners besides those who were blatantly tourists. I can recollect a handful of experiences where I saw other foreigners in different contexts, such as businesspeople, students, and younger people I presumed were teachers. However, one encounter stood out as a stark exception. I can recollect being approached by an African male in Tokyo’s Roppongi neighborhood.9 This short African man, likely in his 40s, wearing a beret cap asked

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9 Roppongi is a popular Tokyo neighborhood. It was once known as a well-known red-light district and seedy destination, but efforts to revitalize the neighborhood into an upscale posh district have recently shifted its image. While there are still popular nightlife attractions in Roppongi, it is nowhere near the notorious red-light district that it once was. See Cybriwsky 2009 for a detailed analysis of Roppongi’s transformation.
me where I was from and tried to speak to me in English, Spanish, and French. Although I just ignored his solicitation, I couldn't help but reflect on this experience thereafter. What was this African man doing in Japan? Surely, he was not the only one and there were definitely others doing other similar things as him. Did this person speak Japanese, a language that I had been struggling eagerly to grasp? Were there other foreigners that I didn’t see?

Six months later, I was studying in Osaka, where I continued to be surprised by the presence of other non-Japanese communities. I learned Japan was home to large Korean and Chinese communities, that there were indigenous minorities to Japan that did not neatly map onto extant racial and ethnic paradigms, and that there were sizable portions of Latin Americans and Japanese-Latin Americans working in Japan’s industrial belt. These early experiences in Japan affected my life trajectory significantly in that they sparked my curiosity about the experiences of foreigners in Japan. How did they learn Japanese? Why did they come to Japan, as opposed to more popular destination countries for migration like America, Europe, or Australia? How did their interactions with mainstream Japan compare to my own? These questions set off my graduate study trajectory and the manifestation of these studies is this dissertation.

Fast forward to 2018, where if one enters Narita Airport today, the woman queuing foreigners through immigration may be Filipino, while Thai and Chinese staff rearrange luggage carts and perform janitorial tasks. Looking up at the departures and arrivals board are flights arriving from Mumbai, Ulaanbaatar, Ho Chi Minh City, and Mexico City. On a recent departure from Japan, a white staff member (possibly of Russian background) ushered me through the metal detectors and spoke in perfect Japanese to the South Asian man standing behind me on line. When I boarded my plane, the gate was staffed by a Caucasian attendant who made
announcements in English and Japanese over the loudspeaker. Walking through Tokyo’s
Akihabara neighborhood, one encounters Turkish men selling kabobs and halal food, Indonesian
mothers walking with their children, younger South Asian men wearing backpacks and texting
on cellphones, and African touts soliciting pedestrians in front of tourist shops. If one goes into
a convenience store, there is a high probably they will be greeted by Nepali, Chinese, or
Vietnamese workers stocking the shelves and staffing the register (see McKirdy 2018 for a
synopsis of foreign convenience store workers). A Japanese informant recounted to me how he
recently went into a popular pharmacy chain looking for a Japanese equivalent of Icy-Hot and
encountered communication problems. All the staff members at the pharmacy were foreign and
they wore name tags that said “Hello, my name is [their name], I speak Japanese, English, and
Tagalog,” or whichever languages they could communicate in. My informant asked the Chinese
attendant where they could find something like Icy-Hot, but she did not understand. He then
explained it in English, but she still did not understand what he was looking for. He asked if
there were any Japanese staff members around at this time, to which she informed him that there
were not.

Japan is in the grip of rapid and aggressive of social and demographic changes. As I go
about my daily life in Japan today, I see exponentially more foreigners working in Japan than I
observed nine years ago. This is further noteworthy because I live in Fukuoka, a city with a
much smaller foreign population compared to Tokyo. A German expatriate who recently moved
to my current city (Fukuoka) from a smaller city said that she was shocked at how many

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10 Touts are people who stand on street corners or storefronts and solicit pedestrians. In this
context, they mainly describe Africans who will stand on the street of certain neighborhoods and
try to attract customers to their employers’ establishments. These establishments include a wide
range of places, ranging from simple bars to more promiscuous establishments like strip clubs or
brothels.
foreigners there are here. For comparative purposes, Fukuoka is Japan’s fourth largest metropolitan area, with a population of roughly 5.5 million, about 70,000 of whom are registered foreigners (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017).

This ongoing transformation is reshaping the nature of Japanese society as it is conventionally understood. As a space, place, nation, and culture, these demographic changes have the potential to alter dominant understandings of Japan and how Japanese identity is conceptualized. Accelerated by Japan’s population decline and aging population, foreigners have continued to see Japan as a viable place to earn money and search for greener pastures, socially and economically. The number of foreigners living in Japan has steadily increased over the past three decades and their backgrounds have diversified considerably, which has taken its toll on Japan’s landscape. Tokyo, where one can hardly go a few blocks in certain areas without encountering foreigners, is the most obvious example of these changes.

The quantitative change itself is significant and would destabilize any observant travelers’ preconceptions about Japan instantaneously. However, more significant is how these changes are transforming notions of Japan as a socio-spatial entity, both materially and conceptually. Materially, the physical space of Japan is obviously changing; more space is consumed by non-Japanese persons and various forms of hybrid spaces are emerging as a result. Conceptually, it becomes harder to ignore these changes, which has broader implications for notions of identity and national belonging that resound throughout Japan. Understanding the changing nature of Japanese space physically and conceptually is important for grasping the overall nature of changes that are occurring in Japan today.
Foreigners in Japanese Space

The underlying mechanism behind these changing ideas is the foreign presence in places that were once unquestionably “Japanese.” This was why my first trip to Japan raised so many questions and why I became interested in learning about what was actually happening on the ground in Japan. Migration to Japan has gone through several incarnations, but the most recent waves of immigration have arguably had the greatest impact on Japan and Japan’s national consciousness. This migration also carries implications for how interpersonal relations unfold within these changing spaces, as well as for the ways people position themselves vis-à-vis one another within them. Such conditions are ripe for cultural change, as more things foreign, more foreign places, and more foreign actors possess the ability to reshape the sociocultural milieu of Japan in diverse and dynamic ways. As the literature on space and place has demonstrated, such entities are not static and lifeless but are instead reactionary and serve as the sites of dynamic processes that engender, facilitate, or prohibit various forms of social change (Basso 1996; Rodman 1992). They are also deeply entangled with identities and personal sentiments of belonging (Kahn 1996; Malkki 1997; Morris-Suzuki 1998). The presence of outsiders in a space evokes questions concerning what effect this spatial occupation will have on the lives these inhabitants.

At first glance, the presence of foreigners in Japanese space might be seen as problematic, if not threatening. This has been and continues to be true to a certain extent, as in the example of Iranians noted in the previous chapter. Foreigners in large numbers can be thought of as “occupying” Japanese space and participating in activities that “make claims” on that space in an effort to remove it from Japanese possession. This would lead to the politicization of places, whereby they become sites of contestation amongst opposing groups.
This is certainly true in Japan today, as foreign occupation of space has led to some locations being viewed as crime-ridden, dangerous, unsafe.\footnote{As in the case of Iranians gathering in Tokyo parks mentioned earlier, certain places with a highly visible presence of foreigners can gain the reputation of being a seedy and undesirable location. In Tokyo today, the nightlife and red-light districts of Okubo and Kabukichō stand out as such places. However, housing facilities and housing blocks with high concentrations of foreigners have also been shown to develop a similarly negative reputation (Tsuda 2003). There is thus in some cases a conceptual correlation made between foreignness and social problems.} However, while such contestations do occur, it is easy to overemphasize their reach and impact. This is because one may ascribe a false equivalent of correlating occupation with contestation. Because foreigners operate in Japanese space does not mean they are necessarily staking claims to such space in a problematic way. In fact, foreigners themselves may often be doing everything within their powers to blend into these spaces and emphatically \textit{not} cause problems to arise because such problems emerge would have serious ramifications for their own well-being. Chris Burgess, for example, notes how Korean women married to Japanese men in Yamagata, a rural area of northern Japan, make considerable efforts to fit in and co-exist with local Japanese, who often do not understand their cultures and backgrounds (Burgess 2008). In other words, foreigners often do not occupy or control space as much of the literature on space and place suggests.

The most rudimentary example of this can be seen in Japan’s service industry. Japan’s demographic changes have led to an especially severe dearth of workers in the service industry and, as a result, foreigners have taken up such jobs in increasing numbers. One need not venture far in any major city before one encounters foreigners working at restaurants, hotels, or gas stations. These workers are usually required to present themselves as Japanese as possible, linguistically and culturally, when they are working. They must possess a good understanding of \textit{keigo},\footnote{Keigo is formal Japanese language, comprised of different vocabulary and grammar.} must be aware of the cultural nuances they will be expected to deal with while on their
job, and must be able to handle requests and cater to customers’ needs. They are expected to
dress, act, talk, and all other ways present themselves as Japanese as much as possible. Some
foreigners who may speak Japanese exceptionally well and who look Japanese can sometimes
“pass” as Japanese. In such instances, the social boundaries that conceptually prohibited
foreigners from occupying professions in such Japanese spaces are suspended and foreign
presence is permissible so long as cultural and linguistic norms continue uninterrupted.

Foreign convenience store workers, however, also offer an example in which phenotypic
congruity does not conceal foreign background. Convenience store workers wear nametags
depicting their names. In such cases, even those workers who may otherwise pass as Japanese
will be recognized as foreigners by their nametags. Although they are expected to do everything
else the way Japanese workers would be expected to, their nametags readily reveal that they are
not Japanese. Here, the foreign presence in Japan has been successfully “domesticated” and is
tolerated under these “domesticated” or “Japanized” conditions. If social norms are perpetuated,
foreigners within Japanese space are accepted and business proceeds as usual. This is not
insignificant, as it permits the cultural tempo of Japanese life to continue relatively unimpeded,
Despite the underlying demographic changes.

Many Japanese informants I have asked about this have stated that they do not care so
much about the presence of these foreigners working in service positions and some even see it
positively. While some of the same informants expressed concerns and doubts about the future of
Japan in relation to future migration and demographic trends, many seemed at least passively
receptive of foreigners working in Japan so long as they didn’t disrupt the social order of things.
One Japanese informant in his 50s explained:
“It is fine that they work here. They seem like students working part-time jobs. I don’t care they are here as long as they aren’t making life harder for me. They seem to speak Japanese and know what to do when I order things, so I don’t have a problem.”

Another male in his 30s stated that he “really doesn’t care about that” and a female in her 20s said that she has gotten used to being serviced by foreigners: “Maybe in the countryside people will be surprised, [but] I don’t think city people care.”

Others were less content with foreigners working in such positions, though they were in the minority. One elderly man lamented: “It is a real pity. Young Japanese don’t want to work, so foreigners have to come in and do the jobs. Of course, I would prefer Japanese workers, immigration will bring problems and I don’t know if Japan can handle them. It’s a shame.”

However, this same informant did recognize these foreigners’ efforts and was pleased by their Japanese ability: “At least they speak Japanese. I was surprised they could speak [Japanese] when I first saw a foreign person at the [convenience store], but they spoke well enough.”

It is thus not farfetched to surmise that foreigner “occupation” of Japanese space is not always a threat or an overt claim on that space. The large degree of domestication or “Japanization” required of foreigners to occupy such spaces in the first place allows many Japanese to accept their presence as a somewhat tolerable trade-off. Such foreign workers are forced to comply with cultural and linguistic norms to ensure the smooth continuity of everyday life. If they can ensure this continuity, it seems that many Japanese believe that their presence will not be disruptive and they will be better able to assimilate into society – to the extent assimilation is possible.

While I contend the “Japanization,” or domestication, of foreigners is a real and important phenomenon, it is only one part of the picture. There are in fact certain areas in which
foreigners do not operate within Japanese space in such a “domesticated” way and instead operate within their own cultural milieu in ways that challenge, transform, and subvert sociocultural norms. This occurs in a variety of ways and in various gradients.

A lucid example of this is an outright occupation and appropriation of space in ways that are problematic and deemed socially unacceptable. The Iranian example noted in the previous chapter provides a historical example of this, but a more recent example has occurred with migrants who have arrived in Japan from the 1980s onward. There is a video on YouTube titled “Burazirujin to Nihonjin no kyōzon,” or “Brazilians and Japanese co-existing.” The video footage appears to come from a cellphone camera or some other pocket-sized recording device. The picture quality is grainy, but the sound quality is good enough to hear what is transpiring. The video features a blatant clash of cultures as Brazilians occupy a public space drinking, riding ATV motorcycles, and making much more noise than would typically be acceptable on what seems to be a Sunday afternoon. A Japanese police officer attempts to get them to be quiet but there are some language barriers and rather than listen to the police officers demands, the Brazilians proceed to justify their behavior on the grounds that they are having a celebration. The police officer continues to put his hand on his lips and explain that the people in the park should be quieter, but to no avail.

Contrary to foreigners acting “domesticated” in Japanese space, this is an outright example of a claim on Japanese space. This public area, for this day at least, was transformed into a Brazilian space without the consent of Japanese residents. The police officer trying to get them to be quiet is a clear example of how they are violating the conceptual and social rules or norms of this particular space. The next video that appears in the YouTube queue is titled “Tai
Buraizuru chiiki funsō! Nagoya Minatoku Mo-ru 9 ban danchi fukan”¹³ or “Local Anti-Brazilian Conflict! Nagoya Minato-Ward Mall 9th Housing Complex.” In this video, a nationalist car drives through a neighborhood of apparent apartment blocks and shouts antagonistic and right-wing sentiments over a loudspeaker. Phrases like “This is Japan! When foreigners come to Japan, they should obey the rules of Japan. Am I wrong?” and “There are now too many Brazilians in this community,” highlight the tensions that contestations on space can produce. When culturally subversive claims to space occur, tensions arise that can spur ethnic conflicts and produce a cycle of social unrest.

Another example of how Japanese space is transformed in socially problematic ways was explained to me by a foreign teacher in Osaka and his Japanese wife. The couple lives adjacent to a park that serves as a popular drinking spot for foreign exchange students and their Japanese friends. Their story depicts the local-level problems that can arise from the hostile presence of foreigners in Japanese space, which subvert socially normative behaviors. The teacher explained:

“These kids stay in the park until late at night drinking, smoking, breaking bottles, and causing trouble. I often go out and tell them to go away and they often do not listen. The foreign guys and their Japanese girlfriends think it’s funny to cause so much noise and the Japanese guys seem to go along with it. I understand these kids want to have fun and enjoy themselves, but they are being disrespectful to the [locals]. I am always hearing complaints from the neighbors telling me that I should get them to stop because I am a foreigner. I try to explain there is only so much I can do and that these kids do not listen!”

¹³ The use of the Japanese word funsō (meaning dispute or trouble) connotes something of a back and forth conflict and one that is quite aggressive. The fact that it is used to describe this situation demonstrates the strong sentiments attached to this issue. The overall Japanese wording of this video is also rather strange and it may have been worded this way to suggest that the conflict between Brazilians and Japanese in this area is intense.
The couple was surprised that the students caused such problems and that they went unaddressed by the university and to a large extent the local police. They said that this behavior was frightening people living in the neighborhood and that parents would avoid taking their children to the park because of its negative associations. Because the teacher worked for the university, he often would go out and confront the students asking them to leave, which he noted produced mixed results. The teacher added that the couple has actually considered moving because of this problem and they believe it will not improve in the future. They further explained that the park has developed a sort of reputation where the students, year after year will come to drink and be disruptive. Locals have complained about this, but the only effect has been signs indicating that park guests should behave themselves, which do not seem to be effective.

These examples portray some of the more radical contestations and claims on space made by foreign groups in Japan, much in contrast to the “domesticated” presence of foreigners in Japanese space noted earlier. Foreign forces are occupying what were once discernably Japanese spaces and making claims to them in competing ways. But does foreign occupation of Japanese space always occur to such a radical extent? I believe the answer to this question is no. In between “domesticated” occupation of Japanese space and radical occupation of it, there is something like “semi-domestication,” whereby foreign occupants, on the one hand, act in “Japanized” ways but to a limited extent, while on the other hand play up their “ethnic” characteristics, usually for aesthetic or commodification purposes. Some of the clearest examples of this come from Japan’s seedier areas, where ideas and experiences converge to create a blurred sense of spatialized occupation. I suggest here that many of these places constitute a

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14 Tsuda also mentions that Japanese residents of a danchi with a large Brazilian presence often cited that they would rather move than confront the problem (Tsuda 1998, 348).
unique form of “hybrid” space that blends foreign presence with Japanese consumption for an array of reasons. In such places, ideas of a homogenous Japan are temporarily suspended and Japanese actors themselves become active participants in this disengagement and “hybridization.” This Japanese participation, while limited, is not insignificant for understanding the conceptual and material ways these spaces are transformed by a joint occupation by Japanese who are “breaking the rules” and foreigners who are “occupying” Japanese space.

Take for instance African bars and nightclubs. In Tokyo’s Kabukichō neighborhood, there are numerous African-owned and operated establishments. Such establishments also exist in other major cities, but Tokyo has the highest concentration of them. When one first looks at these places they may be tempted to call them unquestionably “African” places. However, upon further analysis, they are not “African” places in a true sense (a true “African” place will be described in the place-making section below). Rather, the African elements of these places are often presented as an admixture of personal, cultural, and commercial means. For instance, when one enters one of these “African bars,” they are often not likely to hear traditional or contemporary African music, but instead are more likely to hear American hip hop, Jamaican reggae, or European house music. The place is “African” in the sense that the culture of the workers and perhaps some of the patrons are African, but for all other purposes, there is not much “African” about these places. Some places may sport African flags on the wall or continental colors, but others would have nothing to do with Africa whatsoever were it not for the workers, owners, managers, or patrons. In other words, “African” elements are often toned down to appease a base of Japanese clientele.

The Japanese patrons of such establishments provide clues as to how these places exist as hybrid places rather than ethnic spaces. Japanese patrons “consume” this brand of African
presentation, usually not because they are driven by any interest in Africa specifically, but instead because they are hoping to experience something new. This is a common reply by most of the Japanese customers to these establishments and the respondents span across diverse demographics (age, gender, occupation, education level). Adventurous young people, office workers, and middle-aged women with spare time have all professed similarly that they frequent such establishments because they are interested in experiencing something new and interesting. One Japanese salaryman mentioned to me:

“At first, I wanted to experience something new but now I enjoy coming here. It’s [interesting] to talk with the bartenders and hear what they have to say. It has become something like a typical izakaya\(^\text{15}\) for me.”

For such people, their initial curiosity led to something more permanent as they are now regulars at these establishments. Their frequent visits to such places often raised their consciousness of Africa and things African in ways that are otherwise impossible. In the process, their knowledge about Africa is subconsciously raised through their discussions with the bartenders. To understand this in full requires some context. Often times, these types of African establishments are staffed by one or two bartenders, sometimes by the owners themselves, sometimes an African and/or Japanese employee. Japanese patrons will come in by themselves or in small groups and simply want to talk with someone, not entirely uncommon to local izakayas or other local establishments Japanese regularly visit. These settings provide a more intimate environment where people can converse and get to know each other. Naturally, given the differences between the Japanese guests and the African owners/workers, this provides a readymade topic of

\(^{15}\) Izakaya are typically small establishments that serve food and drink. They are often frequented by regulars and locals, so it is not uncommon for the customers to develop a more intimate relationship with the owners.
conversation. When Japanese actually talk to Africans at such places, they inadvertently learn about Africa. One African worker explained to me that: “By having these conversations with these Japanese, we make them know something about Africa. We give them an education, even if they don’t want it. So they will always know something about our country after talking to us.”

Such sentiment is also observed by Japanese themselves. One Japanese salaryman in his sixties who patrons one particular establishment in Tokyo noted: “[The bartender from Nigeria] has taught me a lot about Africa. I didn’t know it was such a complicated and diverse place!” While the patrons themselves observe these encounters have increased their intercultural knowledge, one of the most vivid effects of such encounters can be seen from Koji, a Japanese bartender who has worked at African-operated establishments for almost seven years. He has been employed by Nigerian bar owners of several different establishments. While working these jobs, Koji regularly interacted with Nigerian and other African co-workers, bosses, and customers. He also engaged regularly with foreigners and business associates from other non-Japanese backgrounds. Through these encounters, Koji was unexpectedly made aware of the diverse nature of Japan’s foreign community and emerged from his work experience with a more refined comprehension of the true scope of Japan’s diversity, as well as a broader conceptualization of foreigners and their experiences in Japan.

Koji said that he has gained considerable knowledge of things-African from his experiences: “Never in my life did I imagine I would be working for a Nigerian boss! Before I started working in Shinjuku, I was not aware there were so many foreigners in Japan, especially Africans.” He also noted that he has gradually become more aware of the differences between African nationalities and ethnic groups. Before working in these bars, Koji confessed that he

16 All names appearing in this dissertation are pseudonyms unless otherwise specified.
didn’t know anything about Africa’s diversity, but his work made him aware of it and he departed from his work experiences with a more intricate understanding of the scope of Africa’s diversity. He explained: “After working in bars owned by Africans for six years, I now appreciate the difference between Nigerians and Ghanaians, between Igbo people and Yoruba people, and between African Christians and Muslims.” Koji believed that this knowledge put him a unique position because he said that most other Japanese would not likely be able to recognize these important ethno-national differences between Africans, either in Japan or abroad. More will be said about Koji in the chapter on the transformative nature of intercultural encounters, but it is sufficient to say here that people like Koji, who experience perceptual reconfigurations as a result of their direct encounters with people from non-Japanese backgrounds, are increasingly common (as will also be addressed in the later chapter). These hybridized spaces create a spatiality that provides a particular admixture of cross-cultural elements that inadvertently provide a platform upon which ideas about Self and Other can be reconsidered and reconstructed.

It should be noted that these “hybrid” places are often places that adapt themselves to accommodate Japanese clientele and African workers play up their Africanness and/or blackness to cater to the Japanese customers. For instance, one African bar owner explained to me that the décor and the environment in his bar/restaurant was designed this way in order to emphasize specific characteristics of black urban culture and Jamaican dancehall culture. He noted:

“Actually, there’s not much ‘African’ about this place besides me and my workers. But, Japanese people like this kind of stuff, they think this is cool and trendy, so I go with it. I don’t really like to dress in this kind of baggy clothes, but I do it occasionally because [the customers] like it.”
Such statements raise questions about authenticity, commodification, and presentation as it pertains to blackness in Japan, questions that have been addressed elsewhere (see Agyeman 2015; Ivory 2017; Sterling 2010). The takeaway from this fact is that such “hybrid” places are often strategically constructed, visually and perceptually, so as to present a particular image that is to be consumed by the Japanese guests themselves. There is a calculated reason why Jamaican dancehall music is playing at such a place rather than the latest African music.

A similar example can be seen from a local “hybrid” place in Kyushu. An African restaurant with trendy décor, quasi-African photos and artifacts, and a quasi-African menu offers a place that is solely constructed for commodification purposes. The east African owner stated that this is a place intended to provide a comfortable and culturally-inclusive environment catered mostly to Japanese and foreign clientele. It is meant to present an “authentic” example of Africa, but to do so in a way that is warm and welcoming as an environment. Similar arrangements can be seen in African and other ethnic restaurants throughout Japan. Like those of the bar staffs mentioned above, true “ethnic” elements of such a place are toned down to better cater to Japanese clientele. This is true from everything from the spices that go into the food to the ambience that creates a space more welcoming to outsiders. This particular restaurant often hosts events featuring live music and kokusai kouryū (intercultural exchanges). The owner stated to me that he hopes he can offer a place where people from all different backgrounds can learn about African food and culture and share an enjoyable experience together.

The most striking thing about this restaurant is that it is not intended consumption and use by Africans. This is a fact that distinguishes it from purely “African” places, which have a very different atmosphere and market themselves to a very different clientele. On the contrary, this restaurant boasts that it is one that serves “everybody,” trying to create a diverse and hybrid
space within Japanese space. This too can be seen as a somewhat “quasi-foreign” space, one that adopts culturally different tendencies so as to appeal to a wider body of people.

A final example of this can be observed in the case of hostess bars and other “water trade” establishments that are staffed by foreign women. Signboards outside such establishments portray foreign women with flags from the countries these women hail from, often from Southeast Asia. These establishments represent another form of hybrid space, as they take a Japanese cultural place, the hostess bar, and exoticize it by imbuing into it foreign characteristics. Why are these places made foreign? They are made foreign for sheer consumption and offer Japanese customers’ something “exotic” and different. Although this particular form of commoditized foreignness is consumed in highly sexualized manners, it still functions to blur the boundaries of Japan and obfuscate the contents of what Japan actually is.

The Japanese patrons of such places can only overlook to such an extent that they are interacting with foreign women, speaking Japanese, and participating in a very Japanese form of cultural practice to a limited extent. Regardless of their attitudes towards these women, or towards host/hostess culture itself, the fact that these foreign women occupy Japanese space and engage

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17 Japan’s “water trade,” or mizushōbai, is a popular euphemism that refers to the wide variety of nightlife establishments, which include snack bars, drinking establishments, and hostess clubs, among others. As noted by Boye L. de Mente in commenting on the emergence of the “water trade”, “this was a period that saw the rise of huge bathhouses in which the pleasures of the flesh were as much of an attraction as the hot water, a great network of roadside inns around the country that featured hot baths and sexual release, and the expansion of geisha districts and courtesan quarters in every city in the country” (de Mente 2006, 179).

18 Host/Hostess (hostess clubs are frequented by males, host clubs frequented by females) clubs are establishments where customers can sit with a companion of the opposite sex and engage in drinking and conversation. These more often than not non-sexual in nature, though sex has been said to occur outside of the relationships that formulate within the club on rare occasions. Hostesses clubs are mainly visited for companionship as opposed to sexual contact, which can be found at any number of other establishments. For scholarly analyses of hostess clubs and the dynamics of Japan’s nightlife industry, see Allison 1994; Parreñas 2011. See also Faier 2009)
in this particular Japanese cultural form cannot be overlooked. The presence of these foreigners existing and operating in Japanese space, even in these highly gendered and commodified forms, have to inform the reality constructed by Japanese patrons of these places. These engagements and the patron’s consumption of this version of foreign sexuality demonstrate how Japanese actors themselves actively participate in “de-Japanizing” some places to certain extents and engage in the process of “hybrid” “place-making” in certain contexts.19

In such “semi-domesticated” spaces, conventional idea about space and place are destabilized and disengaged, even if only for a short time (i.e. the patrons visit to such places). The Japanese actors who frequent these places play an active role in making them into such hybrid places, as without the presence of such Japanese guests, these would merely be “foreign” places. Instead, they are “hybridized” by the presence of Japanese actors, even if they are “hybridized” solely for purposes of commodification and consumption. The ambience and activities that occur within them would also be very different from those in places meant for notably foreign clients.

These spaces, because they offer such “semi-domesticated” versions of foreignness, occupy a conceptually ambiguous position. On one hand, Japanese hybridize these places by consciously going there, seeking out the exotic and something different, and to disengage from Japanese life. On the other hand, many Japanese continue to conceptualize these places as

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19 This brief section explains an example of the ways that Japanese patrons consume a commoditized form of sexualized foreign culture in Japan. This naturally involves recognizing that such interactions exist in a complicated web of gender, race, and ideas about cultural sexuality. These dynamics are important for understanding the interpersonal dynamics between these actors in the context of the particular hostess club environment. While these dynamics are very important, the scope of this discussion is on the ways places are made hybrid through Japanese participation. For more detailed discussion of the sexualized, racialized, and gender dynamic processes of these interactions, see Allison 1992; Parreñas 2011.
*kikenna tokoro* (dangerous places). Thus, this semi-domesticated version of Japanization is at once readily consumable and sought after, yet it is also conceptualized as problematic and challenging, leading to more ambivalent and negative perceptions. For example, while some Japanese readily go to African bars or Southeast Asian hostess clubs, others see such places as highly problematic and as bringing a greater element of crime and dirtiness to Japanese life. There is no shortage of Japanese discourses about such places as associating them with negativity. For instance, stories about crime and illicit activity in these places are rampant. Street fights, credit card fraud, drink spiking, and rumors of other types of crime taint the image of these places in the minds of outsiders, regardless of their actual circumstances. Thus, such locations exist in a conceptually ambivalent position, which converge Japanese and foreign bodies in space in ways that challenge conventional understandings of spatiality, but which do not posit threats outside of these spaces themselves.

These examples demonstrate the ways “hybrid” places provide an important platform for interpersonal and intercultural engagement that reshapes how Japanese conceptualize foreigners. Even if only temporarily, and in ways that are solely for consumption, the actions that unfold within these locations provide important insights into the ways Japan is changing on numerous fronts. These “hybrid” places emerge because of the actions of Japanese and foreign actors, therefore they are not inherently “foreign places” although they may appear to be on the surface; there is a considerable degree of Japanese participation required to make them into such places. This begs the question of what happens when foreigners engage in “place-making” for themselves, rather than for purposes of establishing a “hybrid” or “semi-domesticated” spatiality intended for a more diverse range of patrons.
It is worth noting in brief how this “domesticized” form of foreignness permeates outside the hostess club into other areas of Japanese society. Some of the foreign women working at such clubs eventually find employment elsewhere and settle in Japan permanently (Faier 2009; Parreñas 2011). These women will often marry Japanese men and raise families in Japan that are culturally Japanese and absent of the cultural characteristics that would exist if their children were raised in their home countries (LeMay 2018). This means that these women learn Japanese to high levels and make efforts to integrate into mainstream Japanese society despite the hurdles they face due of their ethnicity and because of their gender.

As noted in the case of how local Japanese reconceptualized Filipina wives as *ii oymesans*, such women feature prominently in the development of Japan’s social and cultural institutions. This is especially true at the local level, where in a place like rural Nagano, these women have a profound impact on the trajectory of local communities. Many foreign wives have married Japanese men in rural areas because of a similar demographic shift as the one noted by Faier’s ethnography (see also Faier 2007; Nakamatsu 2005; Suzuki 2007). These women are often at the forefront of raising international families, negotiating complicated multicultural family relations and doing what they can to keep their children on the best path possible.

As with many issues arising in Japan, the outcomes of these international families have varied outcomes depending on the particular context. For example, one Filipina woman who came to Japan to work in a restaurant and then proceeded to attend graduate school in Japan and marry a husband of prestigious social background said that she was able to teach her children
both English and Cebuano, her native language, and that she preferred to communicate in the latter because it was more intimate and allowed her develop a deeper connection with her children. She noted that this was rare amongst Filipino-Japanese families, but in her case, she was able to persist and get her kids functional in both languages. In stark contrast to this, another Filipino mother I met asked me in Japanese if I would be willing to talk to her son in English because his English skills were not good. I asked her if her son can speak Tagalog or any other Filipino languages (I didn’t know where she was from, so could not ask about a language in particular) and she replied that his English was better than his Tagalog. In another instance, I was at a Vietnamese gathering and a Vietnamese mother would talk to her very disinterested son in both Vietnamese and Japanese and he would only acknowledge her in Japanese, leaving to what extent he understood Vietnamese uncertain.

The fact that these women learn Japanese to high levels, integrate locally as best as possible, and rear their families as Japanese is a stark contrast to many foreign males who settle in Japan and start families with Japanese women. For example, one American male who cannot speak Japanese professed to me communication problems between him and his son. He noted that he envied his American friends back in the U.S., who could communicate with their children much better than he could. This is a complete contrast to the aforementioned women who use predominantly Japanese to communicate with their children. In another case, a Nigerian man married to a Japanese woman described to me a similar concern that his son was not learning English or Igbo, his native language. This man did not speak Japanese well and worked odd

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Cebuano is the native language of the Visayas region of the Philippines, which includes the popular resort city of Cebu. It is the second most common language spoken in the Philippines after Tagalog.
hours, which limited his exposure to his child. His Japanese wife did virtually all of the child
rearing, which meant his son had limited English and Igbo exposure.

As with all situations, however, this is very context dependent. I have also met African
males who communicate with their children mostly in Japanese, as well as a white Canadian man
married to a Korean woman who spoke to his children in Japanese. On one occasion, this
Canadian man showed me a text message from his teenage daughter asking if I understood the
slang she was using. When I looked at his phone, I was shocked to notice that his entire
communication with his daughter was in Japanese. I asked if he always communicated with his
children in Japanese and he said that he did. He followed up with: “My son is more Canadian
than my daughter though. He sometimes replies to me in English if I use English with him.”

Such exceptions notwithstanding, on more than one occasion people have remarked that
it is much more common for a foreign woman married to a Japanese man to speak Japanese well
than is a foreign man married to a Japanese woman. I have to agree with this statement, as this is
an observation I have made as well. However, as the Canadian man above demonstrates, much of
this is context dependent and there is no one size fits all trajectory that international families
follow. This point, nonetheless, emphasizes the role of gender and the importance of households
with a foreign mother in shaping – and maintaining – Japan’s cultural institutions.

**Foreign Place-Making**

The above section explains what happens when unquestionably Japanese space is
occupied by a foreign presence or becomes “hybridized” through the active participation of
Japanese patrons. The diverse reactions from Japanese society depict the differential ways
foreigners are positioned vis-à-vis mainstream Japan via the spaces and places they occupy.
While these insights are important for understanding Japanese and foreign positionality in
juxtaposition, it says nothing about the ways foreigners make cultural places for themselves within Japanese space. Because these places are often established with the intention of catering to Japanese clients, the “authenticity” of such places is naturally toned down to appease the preference of Japanese clients. In other words, the discussion above is void of the ways foreigners carve out or “make” place within Japanese society. Although foreign “place making” is not unrelated to the processes noted above, foreigners have a considerably greater degree of agency in how certain places operate once they are functionally made. This process is discernably different in nature and thus warrants further explanation in its own distinct section.

As noted in Chapter 2, concepts of place are often closely associated with identity and “place-making” is a process that involves establishing an identity “rooted” in a particular geography (Basso 1996; Field and Basso 1996; Malkki 1997; Rodman 1992). They often function as “points of sociality,” which underscore their importance for those who occupy them (Holston 2005). To abstract away from these processes and understand how they engender material manifestations of identity and spatiality, it is worthy to examine a discernably more “African” place than the ones mentioned above. The following section explains the way a “foreign place” is “made” in the context of Tokyo and how it plays an important role in the lives of those who visit it.

In the backstreets of a seedy area of one of Tokyo’s most popular neighborhoods is an unmarked building that is located among a sea of pink salons,21 themed love hotels,22 and gated shops. As one exits from one of the major stations on Tokyo’s Yamanote Line any time after nightfall and navigates down the neighborhood’s main artery away from the station they will

21 Pink salons, as succinctly and lucidly noted by Wikipedia, are “a type of brothel in Japan which specializes in oral sex.”
22 Love hotels are by-the-hour hotels usually used by people to engage in sexual activity.
pass building after building containing various entertainment attractions, drinking establishments, karaoke bars, nightclubs, and eateries. As one continues their walk, after about ten minutes on foot they will notice the pedestrian traffic has slowed dramatically and the road ahead appears to be even less populated. This seems remarkable considering they just exited one of Japan’s busiest transit stations. Taking a quick turn situates one on a dim block of shops that have closed for the day, a few random ones that remain open into the evening hours, a convenience store, themed love hotels, and pink salons. A two minute walk from here takes one to an unmarked building that appears to be lifeless from the outside. Other than a small sign advertising an *izakaya* on the third floor, the building appears completely empty. As one ascends the staircase, venturing up and past the *izakaya* one eventually reaches a door with nothing but a poster on the outside in red, black, and green that indicates the shop’s name, “Paradise.”

Inside is a dimly lit space with a smaller bar located in the back corner, small tables, and a leather booth. The walls are decorated with pictures from Africa, a map of Africa, and a bulletin board featuring flyers and advertisements. There is a large television streaming videos from a computer but which also receives satellite channels and there is an automated videogame near the door. On the back wall, there is a refrigerator displaying all the alcoholic beverages and frozen drinks that the shop has to offer.

Behind the bar is a middle-aged West African woman named Wendy, who I have come to learn works here most of the nights the shop is opened. Since my first visit to Paradise, Wendy has been very kind to me and has introduced me to other customers and told me much about her background and her experience in Japan. She has always made sure that I felt welcomed and that

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23 Paradise is a pseudonym.
24 This following section draws heavily from Capobianco 2018.
I always had someone to keep me company. Wendy had various responsibilities around the bar, including cooking, serving drinks, cleaning the bar, and a number of other odd jobs. Other establishments that serve as important “places” for African communities are somewhat similar in that they have generally had a lone female bartender/cook who was responsible for fielding all of the orders from clients.

In my experience, “Paradise” is visited primarily by Africans and occasionally adventurous Japanese or Japanese females who are dating African males. However, I would guess that at least 95% of the shop’s overall clientele are African. Wendy has told me that Westerners and Japanese do sometimes find their way inside but during my many visits, I have not seen any Westerners beside myself. Earlier in the evening, the work at Paradise is generally slow. There might be one or two lone customers who arrive to have a drink or meal while enjoying the international television before heading to work. Later in the evenings the shop become more crowded. There might be several different groups of Africans eating and drinking at one time. For example, on one evening there were three Ghanaians sitting at a table, five Nigerians occupying the booth, and one Kenyan sitting with me at a table. Despite this diversity, friendliness and courtesy is expected throughout the shop; whenever people enter, they almost always personally and cordially greet Wendy and all other guests, including those they don’t know, such as myself.

It does not take long before one realizes the important social function this establishment plays in the lives of the African workers who visit. Africans travel to this isolated and out of the way place from all over Tokyo to eat, drink, and socialize. This is particularly exceptional because “Paradise” is somewhat geographically peripheral to many of the locations where Africans work and live. Many guests will go out of their way to stop here on their way to and
from work from other parts of the city and then get back on the train to go home or to their jobs. I am not aware of any regular customers that live close to Paradise and few work in the neighborhood. Thus, visiting “Paradise” may be the only reason many African guests visit this particular neighborhood on a given evening. Although they know they may be the only ones there, many still try to stop here before going to work or after ending a long night of work before heading home. One evening I began talking with Roger, a thirty-five-year-old Ghanaian tout who has been living in Japan for six years. He came into the shop about an hour and a half after it opened and was the first customer of the night (besides me). After ordering his food, I struck up a conversation with Roger who was just sitting watching television. He described this important social function quite lucidly:

“Coming here provides we Africans somewhere like home. The owner is nice, the cook is a kind woman, the food is excellent, and it reminds me of home. They have African shows on the TV or they are showing BBC. It makes me happy. It isn’t convenient for me to come here and it actually it takes me extra time and money to visit. But still I like to come here for a beer or food. It helps me to remember where I am from and meet with people in the same situation as me.”

Roger told me how he enjoys Paradise because it has “everything to offer.” Sometimes it hosts larger gatherings that are frequented by many African and Japanese guests. He states:

“Sometimes “Paradise” will hold parties. Maybe for some kind of celebration or just for fun. There doesn’t have to be a specific reason. There are always lots of Africans here, lots of open-minded Japanese, everyone is drinking, eating, it is a great time. You know, I have many Japanese friends, a Japanese wife, and I have been to many places to party in Japan but here is my favorite place. It has everything you can want.”
For Roger, this place clearly indexes sentiments of home and serves an important role for socializing with others who are like-minded and in a similar situation. Although he says he has visited many nightclubs, bars, and hostess clubs throughout Tokyo, this is still the place to which he remains most intimately attached.

Roger also notes how he prefers this place to others because it is less hectic than other places and everyone maintains a good attitude. Other people I have met here have similarly supported this sentiment. Henry, a forty-one-year-old Nigerian explains that he now only comes here for such leisure:

“When I go to other nightclubs or some kind of bar there are always people there who want to start trouble. They start drinking and they suddenly have a big ego. They will say some shit behind your back or try to get you into trouble. The place I work for on weekends has a lot of Western visitors, especially Americans. They get too drunk and try to fight some other people. Military guys, guys who think they are rappers or gangsters, girls who get too drunk, guys who are on drugs, they come there looking for Japanese girls and trouble. They get loud and start fighting or causing problems and I have to kick them out with the bouncer and other barmen. We have to kick these guys out all the time!”

I once visited Paradise on a more crowded evening and found myself sitting with two other Ghanaians, William and Christopher, at a makeshift table in the corner. I had arrived later than I usually do and the shop was already crowded when I entered. Wendy directed me to sit with William and Christopher who were having a beer and sharing a plate of food. Curious to who I was and why Wendy was so friendly towards me, William and Christopher asked me a lot of questions about the United States and myself. Christopher had a brother who worked in Texas
and now lives in Maryland and was quite knowledgeable about American life. He said that when he visited the U.S. he didn’t like it because it seemed very dangerous and proudly stated that his brother legally owns several firearms for his family’s protection. After twenty minutes or so of talk about America, I started to ask them about their experiences in Japan through which their affection to this place soon became apparent. William says this place is important to him because it is a positive atmosphere compared to some of the other African-owned places in Tokyo:

“I have gone to other places but a lot of them are expensive or depressing. There will be sometimes three Nigerian guys sitting around not saying very much or talking to each other in their own language. What’s that? I don’t speak that and I am a guest. Here everybody is friendly and you have people coming here from all over. Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya. It is a nice place here.”

Christopher added:

“It is a place to be ourselves. It is who we are more than any place else. Do you see the walls here? You see lots of things African. Posters of Africa, pictures of African landscapes and cities. There are African shows on the TV and African music. You can go to some other African bars but probably they have some American hip hop or something random on TV. But here, this is an African place. The food is African, the culture is African, and everything here really makes us feel like home.”

The jovial sentiments many African feel towards “Paradise” are generally somewhat of an exception rather than a rule. As William indicated, many other African places are much more solemn, empty, and less eventful. However, this is also why this place serves an important role for its guests. By coming to “Paradise” these customers know they will receive a welcoming
atmosphere, be around like-minded people, and they can temporarily escape all other problems they are facing since they know the mood will be more positive than elsewhere.

Jonathan, a twenty-eight-year-old Nigerian tout who has been in Japan for two years, expressed to me an important pragmatic function of the establishment. He notes how when his last employer fired him unexpectedly, he hung around “Paradise” and was able to find a job within a few days:

“When I was unexpectedly fired I didn’t know what to do. I am in Japan without a proper working visa so I couldn’t find regular employment and knew I needed to find someone to help me. I was telling everyone I know my situation and was asking them for help. Many of them said they would get back to me but never did. I did this in many other locations too but nobody found anything for me. But one of the Nigerians who frequently comes here helped me out and within three days I was working again. This place attracts a really different type of person than guys who are hanging around other areas.”

While it would be an overgeneralization to assume the primary importance of “Paradise” is as a place to search for employment, Jonathan’s story nonetheless provides insights into some of the diverse forms of sociality that occur here. Jonathan also believes that this place tends to attract people who are generally friendlier in character. He elaborated further:

“Sometimes I see these guys on the street and they are doing some bad things. Maybe ripping some [foreigners or Japanese] off for drinks, overcharging their credit card, trying to pressure them to buy something they don't want. But that never happens here. This place, Wendy, everyone here is friendly, even to strangers. I can’t say that for every place I have visited or worked for.”
I can identify with Jonathan’s feelings. While I have been welcomed warmly in many African places I have visited and been aggressively pressured to buy drinks in a few others, nowhere has the atmosphere been as embracing as in “Paradise.” At Paradise, there is a strong feeling of friendship and comradery that one picks up on after just spending a short time there.

I suggest that one of the main reasons for this is because here African workers can be themselves. They are physically distant from the places where they work as touts, barmen, bouncers, or all of the above. They are also conceptually distant from these places because when they arrive at Paradise – with its pictures of Africa, opportunities to converse with other Africans, and international television – it offers a space where street work can seem like a distant world. In Japan, Africa does not share the same appeal as America or Jamaica and thus it is usually more attractive for African bars to feature American hip hop music videos, posters of Western singers, or Jamaican dancehall music. When one enters other places owned by Africans, as indicated by Christopher, the music is generally America hip hop or pop music, sometimes several decades old, and the walls are decorated with photographs of Jay-Z, Beyoncé, or N.W.A. On rare occasions, when an evening is particularly slow, the quasi-DJ for the evening may put on popular African music, yet these are certainly exceptions. Thus, “Paradise” can be seen as providing necessary escape from the stressful conditions of Japanese life.

It is interesting to also note that the language spoken at Paradise is predominantly English. Because English plays such an important role in Africa, at both national and international levels, it is not surprising that it is the *lingua franca* at Paradise. It is my experience that many Africans from Francophone and Lusophone Africa living in Japan are proficient in English. This creates a very interesting combination of English varieties that are spoken at Paradise. There has been much written in applied linguistics and language education about
“Global Englishes” and efforts to depoliticize and disassociate the English language from Anglophone world (Canagarajah 2012; Pennycook 2007). There is no better evidence of this than observing a conversation between people who speak different English variants unfold. For some Africans, English is a native language, while for others it is a *lingua franca* or a pidgin used solely for practical purposes. For others, English is a third, fourth, or fifth language that is necessary to survive outside of their country.

There are even varieties of English within a given country. For example, in Nigeria, there is a more mainstream version of Nigerian English, which resembles that of the United Kingdom, as well as a pidgin version of English that is much more difficult to understand. Nigerian English may entail merely a different pronunciation from British English, whereas Nigerian Pidgin, on the other hand, has a different lexicon and grammar. What would in a standard variety of English be “I will go” would become “I dey go” in Nigerian Pidgin. Likewise, “I don’t understand” becomes “I no sabi.” For any speaker of a standard variety of English, this is difficult to understand at first. Some Nigerians will talk in this way to other Nigerians, even if there are non-Nigerians present, which means that such non-Nigerians are likely unable to understand everything and thus may be limited in their ability to participate in the conversation. Some Nigerians blend pidgin words into their use of standard English, which may or may not be comprehensible to non-Nigerians. I recall on one occasion when I was speaking with a Nigerian man and a Senegalese man at Paradise and the Nigerian man said something using some pidgin slang to the Senegalese man. The Senegalese man didn’t understand, so he looked at me to interpret what was said in a simpler way. I did my best but had to confirm with the Nigerian speaker in my interpretation.
It is also interesting to note that Japanese is seldom spoken at Paradise. I have never seen it used as a *lingua franca* between Africans without a Japanese person present. And even if a Japanese person is present, it is unlikely Africans would use it with each other. In fact, the Africans may prefer to use another language. This is likely the case for two reasons. First, English is more readily available to serve as a common language. As noted, many Francophone or Lusophone Africans are very skilled (or at least very competent) English speakers, meaning they are ready to engage with English speakers when needed. African students from these backgrounds are likely to be taking university courses entirely in English. Second, Japanese takes substantial time to learn to a conversational level. The U.S. Foreign Service Institute ranks Japanese as one of the most challenging languages for native English speakers to learn. The different grammar, lexicon, and orthography make learning Japanese to advanced levels especially time consuming compared to more closely related languages like Spanish or German.

This is not to say that Japanese is never spoken in Paradise, just to say that I seldom witnessed it. Outside of Paradise and speaking of the urban bar scene more generally, it is commonplace for African males to bring their Japanese girlfriends to a bar every so often. In these cases, Japanese may be used. However, this depends on the Japanese level of the Africans and other foreigners present, as well as the English level of the Japanese girlfriend. This is very difficult to generalize because I have witnessed all of the following: African males speaking with Japanese girlfriends in English with both parties speaking English fluently; African males speaking with Japanese females in broken Japanese and broken English, speaking much less fluently; and African males speaking with Japanese females in Japanese fluently. In other words, when there is a Japanese female present, the language used have varied considerably. In other places, where Africans are owners or bartenders serving Japanese customers, the expected
language is Japanese. In these cases, it is not uncommon for foreigners and Japanese to use Japanese as the common language, since it is presumed that the Japanese cannot speak English as well as the foreigners can speak Japanese. These types of places, however, are discernably different from Paradise in that these are not African places, but rather a commercialized form of African place constructed to some extent for Japanese consumption purposes. The contexts of Paradise and an African owned bar serving drinks to Japanese customers is qualitatively different in many aspects.

Paradise depicts a discernably and unquestionably non-Japanese place that is visited and occupied by non-Japanese patrons. It exemplifies how foreigners “make place” within Japanese space and detach themselves physically and conceptually from Japanese life. Paradise is also by no means an exception; it is instead one of the many foreign places that have been “made” in Japan and serve an important function within foreign circles, such as acting as a “point of sociality.” Another example can be seen in the case of Central Asian places. Many of the features present in Paradise are evident in such places: the human warmth, the sense of “rootedness,” and in some instances, the multiethnicity.

“Samarkand” is another ethnic place that is located one train station away from a major business and social hub in Tokyo. It is a restaurant and bar that offers a traditional Central Asian menu that spans across several national geographies. Usual Central Asian dishes, such as lamb and mutton are staple products here, while more exotic food and drinks can also be obtained. On my first visit, I was surprised to observe my Kyrgyz informant and introduction to the venue, Ruslan, speak to our Uighur waitress in his native language (Kyrgyz), while she replies in hers.

25 To protect the identity of this location, this section will blend together two “Central Asian” places in two major Japanese cities.
26 Samarkand is a pseudonym.
(Uighur). He explained that because Kyrgyz and Uighur are both Turkic languages, and thus closely related, he can understand about 50% or so of what our waitress says and if they have communication problems they may add in a mixture of Russian or Japanese to further clarify. Ruslan proceeded to explain that most of the clientele are here are from various Central Asian countries and sometimes Japanese men, usually salarymen, come for various reasons. One regular patron to Samarkand is an older Japanese man who has a history of doing business in China. He speaks Mandarin with the one of the Inner Mongolian waitress at the shop and he often sits at the bar for hours each day.

Ruslan and his Kyrgyz friend explained the cultural importance of Samarkand and the role that it plays in reinforcing their identity in Japan:

“To me, here is the only place where I can really be a Kyrgyz person in Japan. Everywhere else, we are just people who kind of look Japanese. People sometimes think I am Chinese or Brazilian, but I’m never recognized for being from Kyrgyzstan. Here, everyone knows what I am talking about if I say that is where I am from and I can do everything like I do in Kyrgyzstan. Here, only in this one place.”

Visiting Samarkand, eating native foods, and interacting with others more culturally proximal to themselves helps reinforce a sense of identity and a place that offers some sense of personal and social stability in a diasporic context.

Samarkand also serves as the center for communal activities. Guests talk in Russian or local languages, they can learn about work opportunities, and help others who are new to the community. Ruslan recounted stories about how new members of the community would come to the restaurant and ask for help living and working in Japan, how they would be able to share experiences in Japan and in their home countries and obtain legal advice for dealing with
problems and family issues in Japan. He noted that a few years earlier, an Uzbek man’s wife was having trouble adapting to life in Japan and he was able to utilize the networks he had established from Samarkand to find another woman in a similar situation. Through Samarkand, this man and his wife was able to expand their social networks and establish friendships in Japan that helped them to deal with loneliness and boredom that accompanied their situation.

Considering the above, it is easy to understand how Samarkand functions similarly as a “point of sociality,” the heartbeat of the community and one which members of the community can latch on to for various purposes. Much like the way transnational Africans gather around a similar place in Paradise, for members of Japan’s Central Asian diaspora, an eating and drinking place offers a way to “ground” themselves in a sense of place and identity, which provides some stability and anchor within Japan.

Ruslan and his friends also told me that the restaurant holds an annual party on New Year’s Eve, where people from all over Central Asia and their friends join the celebration. They drink vodka, cook special meals, and socialize in a very unique way unlike other days at the restaurant. Central Asian people who they haven’t seen throughout the year or who come from adjacent cities often show up at this event to celebrate it. They note that it is a very important day for their local community members and it helps give them something to look forward to and reinforce their sense of community while in Japan.

One reason why this is especially important is that there are a very small number of Central Asians in Japan. Because of these small numbers, opportunities to establish themselves and form a sense of community are considerably limited. For example, there are only about 3000 Central Asians in Japan, the significant majority of which come from Uzbekistan (2,469).
Russians and Mongolians each number over 10,000 respectively and these communities are a bit more established and connected to one another than are the patrons who visit Samarkand.

This explanation highlights a considerable problem for Japan’s smaller migrant communities. There are a limited number of places where they can gather and root themselves around a particular locality in ways that connect themselves to where they are from. Unlike larger communities, where such places might be bountiful, Samarkand is the only place Central Asians have to really feel like themselves. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, this was a common theme amongst others as well.

This raises another point that some smaller migrant groups are unable to gather around one nationalistic base and instead are forced to engage in this form of “place-making” at a more diverse collective level. Paradise and Samarkand are not necessary “ethnic” or “nationalistic” spaces but rather “cultural” spaces where individuals visit these places on the basis of a common but not identical background. For example, in Samarkand, one may encounter people from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, or Russia on any given evening. In Paradise, one might meet a Kenyan, a Nigerian, or a Senegalese. This is a stark contradiction from other places that are more homogenous, which serve as a sense of identity for members from one national or ethnic community.

To cite a contrary example, I have also visited places that are discernably Igbo27 Nigerian and are in many ways closed off to individuals from other Nigerian ethnicities or national backgrounds. I once accompanied an Igbo man to one such place in the Kansai area, where he introduced me as his good friend. I sat with him and several other Igbos for the evening in a

27 Igbos, along with the Hausa and Yoruba, are one of Nigeria’s ethno-tribal groups. These groups have distinct languages, cultures, and religious practices, and individuals are often easily distinguished by their names. These identities are also the cause of major tensions domestically.
private corner of this “Igbo” place. My Nigerian informant explained that it is likely a Nigerian Yoruba would not feel comfortable in such a place and it is highly improbable that a Hausa (Nigeria’s largest Muslim ethno-religious-tribal group) would ever enter such a place to begin with. Events that transpired at the bar later substantiated this. That same evening, a nicely dressed Ghanaian man sat at the bar and drank by himself. While new entrants greeted him cordially, he was not invited to participate in the same Igbo conversation that I joined. Whether or not this is a symptom of ethno-national divisiveness, extended hospitality towards an invited guest, or a particular sour relationship between the Igbo guests and the Ghanaian man, or some combination of all three is debatable. However, this particular location existed in stark contrast to the more sociable and inclusive environment offered at Paradise or Samarkand, where multinational and multiethnic groups gather around a collective idea of a common identity.

These represent two different patterns of community making in the diasporic context of Japan. Community making, which is here synonymous with place-making, is something that is contingent on numerous factors and one which proceeds differently depending on the group at large. For example, Igbos make up a significant majority of Nigerians in Japan and many have been in Japan for several decades. These individuals have developed the cultural and economic capital to establish such Igbo specific, which serve as grounding points for the ethnic community. On the contrary, there are only 473 Kyrgyz people in Japan and they are scattered around Japan geographically and across professions. Thus, smaller migrant populations collectivize themselves around places that are more macro in scope and are not exclusive to only one ethnic or national group.
Spatial Implications

From the above examples, it is clear there is no one universal experience of how foreigners exist and operate in Japanese space. There is also no one universal way that Japanese society conceptualizes foreign Otherness, as this depends considerably on the role and wider social conceptualization of such places. Furthermore, the way foreign occupation of Japanese space is conceptualized is contingent on the degree of discord that their presence brings to such places; if a foreigner is capable of “passing” as Japanese by most standards, their presence will likely be overlooked or downplayed so long as cultural flows are perpetuated undisrupted. On the other hand, if the presence of foreigners brings significant discord, as in the case of the Brazilian occupation of the park or in the conceptualizations of Okubo and surrounding areas as “dangerous,” attitudes towards foreign occupation will likely differ considerably and vary from person to person. This underscores the heterogeneity in the ways that Japanese conceptualize the presence of foreigners within Japan.

There are several important points to ascertain from the data presented in this chapter. First, while the foreign presence in Japanese space in unquestionably growing, one must be cautious not to dogmatically equate presence with contestation. This is because foreigners, while increasing numerically, are in fact often occupying Japanese space in ways that are “functionally” Japanese (i.e. to a large extent “domesticated” or “Japanized”). This reduces the discord that their presence brings to Japanese society. While it may be at first shocking to be waited on by someone with the nametag of “Johnson” or “Singh,” as long as culture and interactive patterns continue as normal, the presence of foreigners in Japan is tolerated.

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28 A somewhat seedy area in Tokyo reputed for “water trade” establishments.
A corollary point is that such interactions, ones between a functionally “Japanese” foreigner and a Japanese person, are becoming increasingly normalized. While at first these encounters may have induced a certain degree of shock, they have in many ways become a fact of life for many Japanese. In Japanese cities, one would be hard-pressed to find an urbanite who is still surprised by the presence of foreigners working in service positions or in other jobs. In other words, the foreign occupation of Japanese space is causing many Japanese to reconceptualize the way they understand the foreigner presence in Japan. These normalized encounters cannot help but affect the underlying ideological constructions of Japan’s material and conceptual landscape. The growing presence of biracial offspring, such as Ariana Miyamoto or Asuka Cambridge, are further challenging conceptions of foreignness and producing more profound questions concerning identity. While the ultimate outcomes of these normalized encounters are yet to be seen, there is no doubt an increasingly normalized feeling to the presence foreigners in Japanese. And as Faier has shown, this normalized feeling is not limited to major urban areas, but it is increasingly being felt throughout Japan in its entirety (Faier 2009). These feelings of normalization can only be expected to increase in future years, as Japan’s foreign population continues to grow and diversify.

Second, foreigners also occupy Japanese space in ways that are “hybridized.” This “hybridization” occurs in many ways from acts of the Japanese persons themselves. By patronizing an African bar, Filipina hostess club, or Central Asian restaurant, Japanese actors are actively partaking the reshaping of cultural spheres in which these locations exist. They consciously and conceptually disengage themselves from typical Japanese life to interact with cultural Others. It is hard to say what exactly the effects of these actions are for their understandings of foreigners on a macro-level in terms of integration, but through direct
encounters with cultural Others, these Japanese actors are capable of reconfiguring the ways foreigners are positioned in Japan conceptually. This has been the focus of much of the intercultural communications literature mentioned in Chapter 2. Direct and meaningful encounters with foreigner cultural Others carries the potential to reshape the ways that they are conceptually positioned (Kim 2001, 2008, 2012; Shin and Jackson 2003). More will be explained concerning the effects of interactive encounters in Chapter 4, but it will suffice to note here that the broader effects of such encounters can already be seen, both by ethnographic data presented here, as well as elsewhere in the literature. Several authors have explained how direct engagements with foreign actors have produced reconceptualizations of the how Japanese actors conceptually constructed images of the foreigners with whom they engaged. In some instances, foreigners may even be better bearers of Japanese culture than actual Japanese themselves (Faier 2009; Lopez 2012; Świtek 2016). In doing so, Japanese cultural norms remain unscathed, while foreigners also permeate particular forms of complacent Otherness deeper into Japanese sociocultural dynamics.

Third, it is worthy to consider how foreigners “make place” within Japan, as well as the ramifications of such “place-making” activities. The aforementioned ethnography demonstrates how foreigners use the particular places they “make” and also underscores the important role they serve in establishing a conceptual sense of community, overcoming practical barriers – such as looking for work and establishing connections, as well as temporarily detaching themselves from life in Japan. By carving out segments of Japanese space for their own uses, these people seek to establish a sense of “place” and imbue into it a “symbolic” attachment that serves ideological and pragmatic functions. Places like Paradise and Samarkand, on one hand, offer a place for relaxation, leisure, and socialization that allows patrons respite from demanding jobs.
and experiences living and working in Japanese. On the other hand, they also offer a sense of identity that manifests itself via the lived experiences that regularly occur in such places. Through the establishment of, say, African places in Japan, an African identity is reinforced and connections to both Africa and Japan manifest in the form of these uniquely African places.

What establishes them as “places” of import is the fact that they permit Africans (or other foreign communities) a feasible means through which they attempt to become, or at least feel, “rooted” within Japanese space. As Malkki has noted, people consider themselves as “rooted in place and as deriving their identity from that rootedness.” Since these places provide occupants a sense of identity and material positionality within Japan, one that pursues attaching tangibility to their claims to space, Malkki’s postulation of how people work to “root” themselves is important for understanding these African “places.” In this case, efforts to “root” one’s self in Japan are concomitant with processes of “place-making” that look to establish a sense of belonging and collective participation. At the same time, however, there is an ironic ephemerality to these locations in which the short-lived nature of some such “places” indicate that attempts at becoming “rooted” often fail despite the important setting they provide those who occupy them. Thus, the sustainability of such locations is, much like the migrant experience in Japan itself, paradoxical and ambiguous.

Relatedly, places like Paradise and Samarkand function as “points of sociality” for those who occupy them. However, this process of “place-making” and developing important “points of sociality” is not limited to Africans or Central Asians, or even foreign communities in Japan. The particular arrangements of space and the activities that unfold within such places mark them as “points of sociality,” which are universally experienced by people dethatched from their homes, though in idiosyncratic and context-specific ways. Such establishments offer a space for which
the difficulties of Japanese life and can be temporarily set aside and allow foreign communities
to indulge in conversation and cuisine unavailable in other locations. They may also serve a
pragmatic function for some in that they may offer the opportunity to facilitate access to jobs,
housing, or other resources in Japan.

Frequenting such places provides a conceptual detachment from the perpetuity of
Japanese life that exists outside of them, which are often occupied by exhausting work,
complicated family life, and social marginality. Being members of a diaspora, the pressures
experienced by Africans in Japan range from the relatively trivial and universal – such as those
feelings of homesickness and isolation many living abroad experience at one time or another – to
those that are highly contextually dependent – such as demanding work conditions, complicated
family life, social and legal precarity, and social prejudices. Russell has expounded upon and
historically contextualized anti-black discrimination in Japan (see Russell 1991a, 1998). He
notes how Japanese society has conceptualized blacks in Japan differently from other foreigners
and can at times hold them to a differential set of legal and cultural constraints. Common societal
images of blacks are often conditioned by appropriations and permutations of Western racial
stereotypes. There are also a further set of circumstances facing Africans, which tie elements of
racial discrimination with those of class. For example, if a Japanese person is aware of someone
else’s African (not African-American) heritage, they will often conceptualize of them and
engage with them very differently than African-Americans or other African-descent peoples
(Agyeman 2015). Specifically, Africa, like other places in the developing world is often
stereotypically conceptualized as backward, primitive, and uneducated (Faier 2009; Parreñas
2011; Tsuda 2003). This adds an additional layer of stigma Africans in Japan often grapple with.
Such circumstances create a set of stressors that frequenting a place like Paradise can help to
alleviate, even if only temporarily.

Lastly, one must recognize the significance of the more overt claims to space that result in more problematic occupations of space that transform Japanese-foreigner boundaries in more overt and competitive ways. Foreigners can problematically occupy Japanese space in ways that challenge how it is conventionally conceptualized, as well as make claims to it. When partying Brazilians occupy an open space or when foreign students drink and occupy a park in large numbers, this precludes Japanese utilization of it. As noted, it is in effect not uncommon for Japanese avoid these places and their seemingly hostile environments. Thus, space is effectively transformed from a Japanese one to a foreign one, if only for a limited duration of time. Foreigners continue to do this in all types of forms throughout Japan and their doing so demonstrates how foreign forces can takeover spaces for their own uses and aspirations.

These public appropriations of space often occur in ways that are temporary and are only suspended from the mainstream for certain periods of time. The foreign teacher’s wife above described foreign students in the park as “becoming” a foreign place only in the evening. The concept of an “ethnic neighborhood” is still somewhat limited in Japan and thus foreign contestations and claims on Japanese space tend to occur in certain temporal bursts rather than as a permanent transformation. Some areas have definitely been transformed into permanent foreign spaces, such as some danchi (apartment blocks), but for the most part, such examples remain relatively few. There are no Muslim enclaves such as Oslo’s Grønland or East London, no “Little Ethiopias” as in Los Angeles or Washington D.C., or no “Little Italys.” There are historical Chinatowns and Koreatowns, but these have long and complex histories and thus far contemporary migrants have not gathered themselves into enclaves as such, at least not yet.
The reason for this relates back to the fact that foreigners in Japan must often times be “domesticated” and also because there are so few foreigners actually in Japan. The “domestication” of foreign workers in Japan is in many ways responsible for preventing the widespread emergence of foreign places in Japanese space. Because a lot of foreigners operate
within the confines of the rules set by Japanese society, and because many go out of their way
not to break such rules, there is relatively limited existence of places that are discernably foreign and that posit a serious threat to Japanese space. Additionally, the overall numbers of foreigners in Japan are still comparatively low and are not as widespread throughout the country as in other developed nations, so the extent of foreigners in Japan, while growing, is nevertheless considerably constrained by this fact. Foreigners are still only around 2-3% of Japan’s population and they are heavily concentrated in cities. There are thus inherent constraints on the capacity of foreign populations to actually make claims to Japanese space and position themselves with them.

Together, this produces a very volatile cultural climate in which the boundaries between Self and Other are increasingly blurred but conceptually and in practice. The data provided in this chapter points to ways that forces of change have been set in motion in Japan, as well as what conceptual ramifications these changes have for the ways that foreigners are conceptualized and engaged within Japanese society. In short, these changes are producing an increasing variety of highly personal and subjective responses, which are leading to a plethora of ways that Japanese are conceptualizing foreigners in a changing Japan. While some have come to conceptualize foreigners in the positive, such as “ii oyomesan,” others have conceptualized their presence as something dangerous or problematic for the future of Japan. Such contrasting perceptions also highlight the paradoxical and conflicting existence of foreigners in Japan. At
once foreigners are viewed as a necessary and tolerable anomaly, on the other they are viewed as a problem needing to be addressed. By further analyzing the ways these ideas develop and shape interpersonal relations between Japanese and foreigners will be important for understanding the future trajectory of Japanese-foreign relations, as the diversifying character of these encounters possess the potential to greatly reshape heretofore conceptions of identity within the context of Japanese society.
CHAPTER 4
SOUNDING OUT CULTURE

One evening I found myself sitting in a small, lonely bar in Tokyo’s Shinjuku neighborhood with Christopher, a Ghanaian man who had been in Japan for about eight years, and our Nigerian bartender. Since coming to Japan, Christopher has worked various odd jobs, including bartender, security guard, street tout, and a bunch of other manual labor positions. At the time of this encounter, he was stably employed as a bartender. On this particular evening, Christopher recounted his story of how he met his Japanese in-laws for the first time.

Three years earlier, Christopher married a Japanese woman almost ten years his junior. The couple now resides in Saitama with their two children. His wife’s parents are originally from a rural area in Tohoku (northern Japan), where they currently still reside. They dislike traveling and thus do not see their daughter very often. Christopher has a daughter from a previous marriage and his wife has a son from a previous marriage. Christopher did not expect the first encounter with his in-laws to transpire the way that it did. About a year and half after marrying, Christopher’s wife unexpectedly called to inform him that her parents had arrived and wanted to meet him. Christopher said to me that he was initially nervous about their meeting:

“I didn’t know what to expect. I know many Japanese people have some negative images about foreigners, black people, and Africans and I am all three of them. In the past, my wife had told me that her parents had some reservations about marrying an African and this was concerning.”

While spending time with his friend after a day of helping him, Christopher unexpectedly received a phone call from his wife saying that his in-laws arrived and that he should come to meet them immediately. He listened to her and readily went out to meet his wife, daughter, stepson, and her parents at a nearby train station. Christopher initially though that because his
kids ran up to him and greeted him happily that he might have left a good impression on his in-laws. However, his in-laws were very cold to him during the evening.

At one point during the night, Christopher told his in-laws that he had used the money he earned working in Japan to build his family a big house in Africa. When he said this his in-laws emphatically replied “Uso da!” [That is a lie!]. Christopher said that they refused to believe he had such a big house in Africa and that he actually built it with his own money. However, Christopher remained adamant that he had built such a house and promised that he would prove it to them when they returned home. He followed through with his promise later in the evening, but they still refused to believe the photos were actually his house until he finally he showed them a picture of the finished building with him and his family standing in front of it. After talking in Japanese for a bit, they admitted that this was in fact Christopher’s house and then expressed to him their apologies for not believe him. Christopher noted:

“After seeing these pictures, they sincerely apologized and said all they knew of Africa was what they had seen on television. War, sick people, homeless people, disease. While I still think they preferred their daughter marry to a Japanese, after this they are more comfortable with me and have treated me very kindly.”

A few months later, I followed up with Christopher to inquire about how the relationship with his in-laws had developed after that encounter. He noted that since then, his in-laws have opened up to him and started to treat him and his daughter as family members. He believed that his first encounter changed their impressions of him and that they have since expressed more kindness towards him. Christopher’s ongoing relationship with his in-laws and his efforts to correct their perceptions of Africa have resulted in them altering their conceptions of family life and foreign Otherness.
What Christopher’s story ultimately shows is how intercultural encounters can reshape ideological predilections and how direct interactions with cultural Others can potentially induce critical reflections regarding how people think of themselves in relation to others. While one should not necessarily take the outcome of Christopher’s encounter as some sort of new status quo that all Japanese-foreigner encounters should follow, the results of his encounter with his in-laws should not be understated. After being proven wrong, Christopher’s in-laws reflected on and subsequently amended their own naive conceptions of Otherness. This reflection led them to reconsider the ways they thought about their own family, cultural Others, and the diversity that exists within and outside Japan. What exactly transpired between Christopher and his in-laws is limited to Christopher’s own interpretation and retelling. However, it seems evident that his in-laws, after having their preconceived notions of him destabilized, began to reflect upon their own identity as a family and members of a culture.

The real significance of Christopher’s story is that it is emblematic of larger social processes that are unfolding in Japan. Christopher is surely a unique example in several ways: the particular way he met his in-laws, their overtly stereotypical and prejudiced views of him, his social positionality as an African worker in Japan, and their particular social positionality as an elderly couple from rural Japan. However, situations like Christopher’s are becoming increasingly common in Japan. Interracial marriages are at an all-time high and these numbers are expected to intensify in the near future as Japan’s population continues to shrink and as foreigners come to comprise greater proportions of Japan’s population. Intermarriages themselves and the cultural hybrids they produce are important for understanding interpersonal dynamics. The ways these proxy encounters via in-laws and other mechanisms can affect the ways Japanese actors perceive of and engage foreign Others. It is also noteworthy to consider the
ways that these encounters not only produce critical reflections about cultural Others, as well as how they produce new forms of racism and new cultural stereotypes and attitudes. Although intercultural encounters have the potential to reshape interpersonal relations in positive ways, this is by no means a definitive outcome of such encounters. In fact, they are also capable of creating new forms of prejudice and racism that create a novel set of conditions cultural Others must overcome to make themselves in society.\(^\text{29}\)

**Language and Intercultural Interaction in Japan Today**

Japan’s changing demographics are compelling newfound forms of sociality and interpersonal encounters. Perhaps the greatest difference between contemporary and historic engagements between Japanese and cultural Others is that in the present day the scope of Japanese-foreigner interactions is more diverse, both geographically and contextually. Whereas in the past, engagements with cultural Others could be limited to a select few realms of Japanese life, today the contexts in which Japanese and foreigners encounter one another are much more intertwined and much more complex than in previous years.

As noted in Chapter 2, intercultural communications scholars have highlighted the ways that engaging with cultural Others can force individuals to reconceptualize themselves and their relationships to the Others with whom they engage (Kim 2001; Patel et al. 2011; Shin and Jackson 2003). While the majority of scholarly attention has focused on the ways that the cultural Others (the foreigners, the sojourners, the marginal) change as a result of these encounters, “it is not only the displaced who experience a displacement” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 10). Members of the dominant group are also forced to reconfigure themselves and adapt

\(^{29}\) Some of the ethnographic data from this chapter was originally published in 2017 (see Capobianco 2017).
to intercultural “stress” (Kim 2001, 2012) that is brought upon by the changing relationships that occur from novel forms of encounters between Self and Other.

**Positive Encounters**

To best explain what implications these novel forms of sociality and interpersonal encounters have on understandings of Japanese identity and the social positionality of foreigners, it is first helpful to understand how some foreign and Japanese actors have made sense of their engagements with one another. Because the demographic changes gripping Japan are so diverse and so profound, there are a multitude of novel ways in which interpersonal encounters are unfolding with lasting implications.

One such example of how these changes are unfolding can be seen in the case of Ken and his host parents. Ken is a Nigerian graduate student studying at a university in Tokyo. He is naturally a very outgoing person and is always interested in making new friends and learning about different cultures, which is no doubt one of the reasons why he developed such a strong relationship with his host parents in the way that he did.

I was unaware of Ken’s relationship with his host parents until he invited me to a presentation he was giving in the summer of 2014. I was visiting Tokyo for a few days to collect data and I contacted Ken to ask if we could get in touch while I was there. Ken told me that it would be hard to fit me into his hectic schedule but instead asked if I would like to accompany him to a presentation that he was planning to give. He did not explain much about this presentation and only said that he was giving it to his host parent’s “community organization.” I agreed and met Ken in Shibuya the day of the presentation.

We proceeded by train to the conference venue. On the way, Ken revealed a little more information about the presentation. He explained that his host mother asked him to discuss his
experiences as an African living in Japan to a club that she and her husband belong to. He told me that he prepared a PowerPoint presentation on the cultural differences between Japan and Nigeria, the social and professional difficulties he experienced living in Japan for several years, and how he believed Nigerians and Japanese could better get along. He noted that the presentation would be in Japanese and his parents told him that most of the people in the audience members would only speak Japanese.

We soon arrived at the presentation venue, where we met his host parents. They pleasantly greeted us both and welcomed me to the event. His host mother began asking me questions about life in America, while Ken went with his host father to change. His host mother told me that she visited the New York City and Los Angeles in the 1980s and she expressed how much she enjoyed her trip. Ken told her I was from New York and she was very curious to know what the city was like today.

Ken returned ten minutes later with his host father. He was dressed in traditional Edo attire and we proceeded to the presentation room. It was a small classroom like room that was suitable for about thirty people. I helped him decorate the front wall with various cultural artifacts from Nigeria and we taped a large map of Nigeria to the blackboard.

When the members of the club began arriving, I was shocked to see that the group consisted entirely of elderly members. While Ken was setting up his PowerPoint, I asked Ken’s father what the goal or purpose of this club was. I was even more shocked when he explained:

“We are a kokusai kouryū [international exchange] organization for older people. We are

30 There are over 300 ethnic groups in Nigeria, all with unique language, customs, and culture. The three largest groups in Nigeria are the Hausa (from the north), Yoruba (from the southwest), and the Igbo (from the southeast). The Edo people are from the south-central region and speak a language distinct from that of their Igbo and Yoruba neighbors.
interested in learning about other cultures and traveling abroad. We are really curious to hear about how foreigners think of Japan and to learn what issues they face.”

I was taken aback by this as I naively never thought elderly Japanese people would have any interest in kokusai kouryū. I assumed this was something college students participated in so that they could improve their English or learn about other cultures, not something that Japanese seniors would actively pursued. Ken’s father explained:

“Some of us here have traveled abroad, lived abroad, or just really want to learn more about things outside of Japan. We think there are not enough chances to pursue these interests in Japan and want to take advantage of the opportunity to know more about other people.”

He told me that he and the group have been thinking about asking Ken to do a presentation for some time. However, they were afraid to actually ask him because they worried it might make him feel uncomfortable and put Ken in a difficult situation. Nonetheless, they finally decided to ask him and to their delight he agreed.

During his presentation, Ken talked about a wide range of topics, including what he thought were the major differences between Nigeria and Japan, how Japan is seen from his perspective as a Nigerian student, and what I found to be most interesting, how Japan has become a part of him and he takes this aspect of Japanese identity within him wherever he goes. He stated that his experience in Japan has profoundly influenced his own identity and outlook on life and living. Although Ken did not elaborate on this point in much detail during the presentation, I asked him about this later and he explained that after leaving Japan to travel abroad, he realizes that he misses Japan after just a few days:
“I always want to go back to Japan. I miss the orderliness of it, the respect, and the politeness. I recently took a trip back to Nigeria and was so surprised at how soon I was fed up with the traffic, crowds, and people. I missed Japan and looked forward to soon returning.”

Following Ken’s presentation, Ken’s host parents treated us to lunch, where I learned more about his relationship with his host family. Ken met his host parents through Douglas, a mutual acquaintance of Ken and myself, who was the family’s original host son. Ken’s parents’ experiences with Ken and Douglas provided the opportunity to act as parents again; their children have since grown and left home, so frequently hosting Ken and Douglas provided an opportunity to again indulge in parental duties.

Ken and Douglas also offered them the chance to learn about a different culture. In turn, their parents were able to provide them assistance in their efforts to adjust to life in Japan. Douglas was the first to meet them and Ken’s parents said that Douglas initially had a difficult time adjusting to Japan:

“Douglas was really surprised at how life was different in Japan compared to Nigeria. Unlike Ken, who has a family living with him, Douglas was alone in Japan and didn’t seem to find much support in his peers. There were a lot of things about Japanese culture he didn’t understand and these were things I never realized. Hearing Douglas’ struggles living in Japan really opened my eyes and made me sympathize with his difficulties. We promised to always offer him help when he needed it and he really became like a son to us.”

Ken’s host parents noted that at first, they underestimated the extent of the issues that foreigners faced when trying to adapt to life in Japan. They said that they knew foreigners experienced
difficulties but thought these were just minor hurdles that their host children would be able to
traverse. However, when they heard their host children talking about the frustrating issues they
faced, Ken’s host parents said that it led them to reconsider the nature of foreign experiences in
Japan. They also noted that it was only because they heard these complaints from their host
children, people whom they trusted and cared about, that they began to reconsider their
understandings of the foreign experience. Ken’s host mother explained:

“Douglas complained that Japanese people were too insincere to him and didn’t
understand his perspective. At first, I didn’t believe him but when Ken said very similar
things, we began to take them more seriously. We talked with both of them about these
issues and it was shocking to hear that they were treated so badly.” The father also noted:
“I don’t think we would have believed them if we weren’t so close to them. But because
we think of them our own children, we [had] to take them seriously.”

For Ken’s host parents, communicating interculturally and maintaining an openness towards
other cultures helped them broaden their cultural horizons and reconceptualize the scope of
diversity that exists in Japan. Their encounters with their host children brought to attention a
number of aspects about Japanese society and cultural Otherness that went heretofore
unacknowledged, such as the difficulties that foreign residents encounter. This compelled them
to reconsider foreigners’ experiences and reflect on how they might be able to proactively
minimize some of the difficulties foreigners face. Although they recognized Japan seriously
lacked diversity, which they noted could make life challenging for foreign residents, they were
unaware of the extent of such difficulties. They also feared they might be part of the problem by
remaining ignorant and not acting on their concerns.
By establishing relationships with their host children and concerning themselves with their children’s well-being, it can be said that Ken’s parents effectively broadened their conceptual horizons. After such reflection it became apparent that they had previously overlooked the difficulties foreigners may face living in Japan. They also recognized that these experiences shaped how they thought about their family in that they now consider both of their host sons to be part of their extended family. Ken feels likewise as he requires his children to refer to his host parents as “grandmother” and “grandfather.” The family also emerged from these experiences with a more expansive and inclusive idea of what Japan’s future identity should look like – in effect, an amended version of national identity. Seeing the constructive ways their host children contributed to Japanese society and how they sincerely identified with elements of Japanese culture, Ken’s parents reciprocated by expanding their conceptions of what Japan’s identity should look like.

While one might consider Ken’s case an aberration, perhaps one that only happens in isolated instances, I also observed similar experiences by other African students. Most notable was the case of Aboka, an Igbo Nigerian in his late twenties, who developed a similarly close relationship with his host family. Aboka invited me to meet him and his host family because he thought it would be interesting for my research. Over a lunch and coffee with Aboka, his host mother, host father, and host brother, I was told strikingly similar things by Aboka and his host family.

One afternoon in 2014, Aboka invited me to have dinner with his host parents. He knew about my research with Africans and foreigners in Japan, and he thought this would be a nice opportunity for me to meet his host parents to see how they interacted. He arranged for us to meet them at Ebisu station and after about ten minutes of waiting Aboka spotted his family. A
Japanese couple in their mid-40s and teenage boy emerged through the ticket gate and warmly greeted Aboka. First, his *okasan* (mother) greeted him with a long hug and his *otosan* (father) followed suit with the same. He then greeted the teenage boy, his younger brother, with a fashionable handshake and shorter hug and asked them all how they have been. After a minute or two of expressing their mutual delights, Aboka introduced me to them. They greeted me with equal warmth (minus the hugging) and explained that they are delighted to meet any good friend of Aboka. We proceeded to a nearby restaurant.

Aboka met his family on a university-sponsored trip that offered him the chance to stay with a Japanese family. Aboka’s host mother said she initially agreed to host an international student because she wanted her son to be exposed to people from other backgrounds and broaden his cultural perspective. There were only a few non-Japanese children that her son was exposed to growing up and she believed that this would be a good opportunity for him. Aboka’s *okasan* said that she had lived for a short time in Canada and traveled abroad on several occasions. She thus hoped that her son would also develop a similarly strong interest in and appreciation for foreign cultures as she did. She stated that:

> “Japanese people are very closed-minded and I don’t think it is good for my son. I want him to have opportunities to meet new people and to see that being able to interact with people from other cultures is an important skill.”

She believed this short-term exchange program would be the ideal way for her son to develop such interests for himself.

However, she also noted that she didn’t believe such a strong relationship would develop between Aboka and her family: “I thought we would just have a foreign student stay with us for a weekend. We didn’t know what to expect but honestly believed it would just be for a few days
and that would be it.” Aboka and his family both recognized two factors that helped this relationship develop in such unexpected ways. First, Aboka spoke more Japanese than the family expected him to. The family mentioned that they were at first nervous because they feared there would be considerable communication barriers. Aboka’s host mother described her English at the time as rusty at best, her son never interacted with a “true” foreigner before, and her husband only knew a few English phrases. However, because Aboka spoke what he said at the time was “intermediate” Japanese, the communication barriers were much less than anticipated. Aboka’s host mother explained that the relationship between her family and Aboka motivated her and her son to take English study more seriously. After meeting Aboka, they enrolled in an English conversation class and hoped they would be able to use English more in future interactions with him. Second, both her son and Aboka are very interested in football. They said that their shared passion for football has kept them in regular contact through social media and messaging services. After Aboka left the family, his brother was eager to talk more with him about football, which allowed communications to continue on a regular basis. Aboka had even taken several trips to play football with his brother on weekends.

Aboka explained his motivations for wanting to become involved with a Japanese family:

“Although at the time I had been in Japan for about seven months I had never been in a Japanese home. I am studying here but have only been in my university dormitory and the rooms of other international students. When the university informed us about this program to spend time with a family, I wanted to take advantage of it. At first I was a bit unsure what to expect. I know some Japanese can be very closed-minded and since I am a Nigerian I didn’t know how they would react. But I was really pleased with [my family]
and how they appreciated my company. Their hospitality was really something I enjoyed and it motivated me to become more informed about Japanese culture and society. It also changed a lot of negative perceptions I previously naively held.”

In brief, Aboka’s continued meetings with his host family led them to perceive him differently as time passed.

The examples of Aboka, Christopher, and Ken demonstrate several points about the ways meaningful intercultural communication can provide a platform upon which critical identity transformations can occur. In all of these cases, the Africans and Japanese cited changes to the ways they perceived themselves in relation to others as a result of their encounters. While it might be argued that these individuals maintained an intercultural orientation prior to these particular encounters, it is nonetheless true that these encounters influenced them in significant ways. Specifically, the aforementioned Japanese actors embraced a more inclusive understanding of their personal and familial identity than they previously maintained. They also effectively reconfigured their outlook towards cultural Others. Establishing relationships with their African counterparts reconditioned the ways these Japanese people perceived of cultural Otherness within Japanese society. These changes emerged as a direct result of normalized and meaningful communicative encounters, which demonstrates how relationships develop across cultural boundaries and in ways that can reconstruct understandings of personal identity and cultural Otherness (Kim 2001; Patel et al. 2011; Shin and Jackson 2003). Novel relationships between Japanese “parents” and their African “children” complicated existing identity constructions that the Japanese parties maintained. While it is difficult to generalize the long-term impacts of these relationships, it is clear that such interactions carry transformative characteristics capable of inducing critical reflections and transformations regarding the ways social actors perceive
themselves in relation to others.

As a result of the relationships they established with their African children, the Japanese mentioned above were compelled to reflect upon their self-understandings and identities. The families emerged from these encounters with a more expansive and dynamic comprehension of themselves, as well as their proximity to cultural Others. These intercultural relationships served as the impetus that facilitated changes within the families. However, the implications of these relationships do not cease at the familial level, but rather they carry broader implications for understanding the trajectory of interpersonal relationships within Japanese society. As Japan continues to diversify, it can safely be assumed that more such encounters will occur and that they will reach more distal sectors of Japanese life. Such novel encounters can induce changes that compel more Japanese to reconsider their constructions of self-identity and their perceptions of cultural Otherness. It can thus be expected that a greater number of Japanese identities, both individual and familial, will similarly be reconstructed in ways that maintain a greater sensitivity to Japan’s ongoing diversification. While there is no certainty positive reconstructions will occur as a result of such encounters, it is inevitable that some of them will lead to similar outcomes. It can accordingly be expected that more Japanese will develop a greater sensitivity towards culturally different foreigners, which can lead to greater recognition of their presence in Japan. Therefore, the transformative capacity of intercultural relations will likely continue to reshape the dynamics between Japanese and foreigners for the foreseeable future. Whether or not this will ultimately lead to a greater recognition of foreigners in Japan remains to be seen. However, the fact that these types of encounters are providing an alternative to majority-minority relations cannot be overlooked.
Negative Encounters

The aforementioned examples portray ways that intercultural encounters have produced changes that can be interpreted positively. To date, academic literature has underrepresented the positive transformations that can occur between Japanese and foreigners. On the contrary, most scholarly analyses have focused on the problematic ways that these two groups engage one another and seek to strategically position themselves vis-à-vis the Other. While the positive outcomes of such encounters should not be overlooked, it is important here to recognize that negative outcomes continue to be common as well. In general, there needs to be a more balanced approach between the positive and negative outcomes of these interactions.

A corollary point is that while these negative outcomes are occurring, they are occurring in some qualitatively different ways than have been previously noted. The peculiar nature of Japan’s demographic changes is producing more diverse forms of negative outcomes. At the same time, these negative encounters also echo some of the scholar’s earlier findings. A vignette will help elucidate how these negative outcomes manifest.

On a hot summer July day, I needed help correcting my Japanese CV. I was looking for someone fluent in Japanese and English, and who was also able to translate the nuances I was trying to convey. I contacted an informant, Erika, to help with the task. She said that she also wanted help on her graduate school application to a foreign university, so it worked out that we would both help each other. Erika is very proficient in English. Her current job at an airport requires her to use English on a daily basis and in complex situations. She has spent some time in the United States and has very clear pronunciation.

After reviewing our respective applications, we stopped for ice coffee. Erika knew about my research on foreigners in Japan and we started talking about the social and cultural
significance of these changes. Surprisingly, Erika began bluntly and passionately telling me about her recent trip to a convenience store.

“I went into the convenience store to buy a rice ball and I was shocked to see what it was like in there. The moment when you enter, the whole store smelled liked curry and all the workers there looked like [they were] from India or Nepal. There were cases of food in front of shelves that were still being [stocked], there was garbage on the floor, and the counter where people sit was really disgusting. I didn’t even want to sit there and eat my rice ball. I was really surprised. When I wanted to pay for my rice ball, I was waiting on line for like 30 seconds and then one of the workers finally saw me. He slowly walked over and didn’t even say anything. I really can’t believe this experience, it is so uncommon for me. I asked myself ‘Is this fucking Japan?!’”

Erika’s description of foreign workers in a Japanese convenience store was followed by her detailed description of her experiences engaging with foreigners elsewhere. About her job, Erika explained:

“At the airport, there are many people from China and they really suck to deal with. There was one Chinese man who came to me and kept screaming at me in Chinese and trying to grab the stuff from behind my counter. He couldn’t speak Japanese or English, so we had to find one of the Chinese staff members to translate for him. I think he was drunk. He told [the Chinese staff] that I was rude to him and she asked why was I rude to him. Can you believe that?! I was trying to help him, but he couldn’t speak English or Japanese, and he was yelling and being aggressive. And she didn’t believe me.”

And at a nightclub:
“I went to a nightclub and there were many guys from Nepal who were there. I was with my friends and we just wanted to dance with each other. But these guys from Nepali [kept] coming up to us and trying to dance with us. They started to rub on my friend, so we just sat down. But then several of them followed us to sit with us. It was really annoying and I told my friends I will not go with them to that club ever again.”

These experiences capture a much more negative and problematic side of the interpersonal encounters that are occurring in Japan. In strong contrast to the cases mentioned above, in Erika’s case, positive and harmonious notions of society are emphatically not emerging within this context.

Erika’s explanation captures several dynamics at play that are in many ways emblematic of Japan’s changing character. At the outset, this is an evident example of how interpersonal encounters do not lead to more positive conceptions of Self and Other to emerge, but rather evoke new forms of prejudices and strains on interpersonal relations. Also unlike the cases above, where interpersonal relations had led Japanese actors to reshape the ways they conceptualized cultural Others in the positive, these encounters led Japanese actors to conceptualize cultural Others in the negative. These also lead to the production of racialized sentiments towards foreigners of certain backgrounds, which have ramifications for the ways racial categories are conceptualized.

This also raises the question as to *why* these perceptions emerged and what has happened on a meta-level. While these particular experiences are the catalysts of Eriko’s feelings, it is worthy to consider what else is happening conceptually that is causing these ideas to develop.

First, while these are most definitely racialized portrayals of certain foreign groups, knowing a bit more about Erika personally will show that her prejudices are not extended to
foreigners in the abstract but only in certain cases. For example, she has had two ex-boyfriends, both Americans, one white and one black. She was also helping me, an American, correct a Japanese CV. Until this point, she has never said anything to me that I would have interpreted as pejorative towards foreigners. Therefore, Erika’s sentiments towards foreigners in Japan does not extend to foreigners in a general sense. Otherwise, it is highly unlikely she would be taking time to tediously correct a CV that would potentially be used to keep me (a foreigner) working in Japan.

This also leads to the question of what extent the backgrounds of these particular foreigners factored into her conceptualization of these experiences? Would she have reacted this way if an American or an Australian had been the cause of her bad experiences? Or rather, are these attitudes conditioned by global power differences with Japan and other countries? Other scholars have noted the ways that Japanese have conceptualized themselves as superior to people from industrializing countries (Faier 2009; Tsuda 2003). Erika’s explanation and negative feelings might also be a result of prejudice towards people from a perceived socioeconomic status. While all three examples exhibited behavior that transgressed Japanese cultural norms, the effects of these transgressions may be compounded by the ethnoracial backgrounds of those who committed them.

Second, it is interesting to note that language, in this case, did not play a major role in shaping Erika’s perceptions. Whereas in the case of Christopher, language played an important and crucial role in the process, in Erika’s cases language was not an issue. The South Asian store clerks she encountered spoke Japanese fluently, albeit in a disinterested and very un-Japanese manner. Speaking Japanese is required for store clerks, otherwise it is unlikely they would be hired. She also noted that the Nepali males she encountered at the nightclub spoke to her in
Japanese and continued to do so even after she replied to them in English. Additionally, Erika is fluent enough in English to compare my English CV with my Japanese one and inform me of what I could do better. This shows that while the changing linguistic patterns in Japan are important, they are not at all determinative. A common language of Japanese only extends so far in changing attitudes and perceptions. Culture, on the other hand, remains a significant driver of changing attitudes and may overshadow the impact of language and the ability to maintain the cultural status quo is vitally important when conceptually constructing ideas about Others. As noted in Chapter 3, many Japanese were relatively unconcerned with foreign workers in convenience stores and were surprised (positively) by the fact that they could speak Japanese. Granted, they did not share the same cultural experience as Erika, where her cultural expectations of a Japanese convenience store were not met. But nonetheless, cultural and linguistic fluency is in some cases, worth something.

Here, however, linguistic fluency did not ensure smoothness of interaction. The reason is that the cultural differences were significant and led to a major disruption of Erika’s perceived sociocultural norms. Leaving a convenience store messy, providing bad customer service, and behaving in unexpected ways at a nightclub may have crossed conceptual cultural boundaries that Erika considered important in her perceived identity of Japan. This demonstrates that lack of cultural fluency, or disregard for cultural norms, can be a more significant reason as to why intercultural communication breaks down and prevents interpersonal relations and perceptions from developing in the positive.

Third, it is important to reference the literature on space and place for reasons as to why Erika was so distraught by these experiences. The convenience store provides the clearest example of why space and place are important in the construction of people and their identities.
In Japan, convenience stores are pervasive and in major cities one can find a convenience store on every couple of blocks. In some places with significant foot traffic, there may be three or four convenience stores located all within extremely close proximity. Convenience stores in Japan are also much more dynamic than those in western countries. For example, you can pay your bills there, buy more or less full meals there (many Japanese professionals rely on convenience stores as a source of food), buy medicine there, and many other things. They are thus unique cultural institutions, despite their seeming banality.

Recall that the literature review on space and place closely tied notions of identity to localized spatial entities (Basso 1996; Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Rodman 1992). In this context, the convenience store can be seen as a major sociocultural institution and one that embodies Japanese identity. If Erika’s story is factually correct, the foreign workers at that convenience store could be seen as breaking many of the norms of Japanese convenience store culture. In Japan, where customer service is typically valued highly, standards of sanitation are highly esteemed, and workers are not expected to allow shelves to be left empty and stores sloppy, this was a major violation of social norms. If Erika possessed understandings of convenience stores as a uniquely Japanese space, one intertwined with a sense of cultural or national identity, then this was a major rupture to what she had experienced.

As noted earlier, it has become increasingly common to see foreigners working in Japanese convenience stores. In most instances, foreign workers do not leave the store in such bad condition and most possess work demeanor exactly as you would expect from a Japanese worker. Linguistically and culturally fluent foreigners are generally not looked at negatively simply for being foreign.
At the same time, I can substantiate Erika’s claims. I know the convenience store she is referring to and to say that it is not always in the best of shape is complimenting it. It is located on a very busy street, it is not especially well-kept, and it seems that there are an ever-revolving number of foreign students who work there. Whereas in some convenience stores you will see the same workers on a regular basis, such is not the case in this particular store.

It is thus imperative to understand the kind of spatial disjuncture that Erika may have experienced on her visit to this convenience store. The same can be said about her visit to the nightclub and her experience in the airport. If her and her friends were expected to enter a typical Japanese nightclub, they might have been put off by the mere presence of foreigners there, let alone the fact that they might have been behaving different to their expectations of what should happen at a nightclub. And at the airport, belligerent and aggressive behavior from a foreign traveler is likely to evoke negative response because such behavior grossly transgresses Japanese cultural norms. Therefore, another reason as to why Erika responded to these experiences as she did can be traced back to the fact that there were major transgressions of her conceptual spatial boundaries.

Space and place, and upholding status quo constructions of them, are important for preserving the dynamics between foreigners and Japanese in a rapidly changing Japan. The kind of conceptual disjunctures that occurred to Erika can happen to any Japanese when their sense of space and place is destabilized. It is not merely that the acts themselves are problematic, but rather that the entirety of their notions of space and place, which are deeply tied to a sense of being, belonging, and identity, are affected. In turn, the negative impacts of these encounters may be exacerbated when considering them in relation to the wider set of changes Japan is experiencing.
Language, Power, and Identity

A popular strand of postmodern feminist literature has focused on the important role of language in the construction and reproduction of social identities. These works have explored the dynamic ways that variables such as gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality intersect with forms of institutional power to (re)produce particular identities of majorities and minorities (Norton 2000; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2001). An important takeaway from such scholarship is that there are multifaceted variables at work that account for the ways that identities get constructed in time and space. Linguistic variables always lie at the center of such constructions and exert influence over the trajectory of such identities.

This literature provides a powerful lens for understanding the nature of contemporary foreigner-Japanese encounters as they unfold in Japan today. Most notably, these works demonstrate how language can be used as a mechanism of power to limit the access of group members in society (Norton 2000; Simon-Maeda 2011; Norton and Toohey 2011).

This is especially true in the case of Japan, where the allegedly “innate” qualities of foreigners are perceived to make them incapable of understanding Japanese language, culture, and sociolinguistic nuances. As noted earlier, perceptions about who is and who is not Japanese often intertwine language, culture, and biological hereditary in order to differentiate sociocultural belonging (Kondo 1986; Yoshino 1992). To some extent, these sentiments still hold true today and manifested themselves more than once throughout the ethnographic data collection for this dissertation. Sometimes these sentiments appeared in subtle forms, while in other cases it was much more explicit. One Japanese informant, an older woman in her fifties explained how this is the case. Although she worked as part of the administrative staff for a university that dealt with
foreign students, she maintained a subtly pessimistic view of foreigners and their Japanese
language capabilities. She explained:

“I love working with the foreign students, but I’m always cleaning up their messes...

They persistently have problems understanding Japanese documents and understanding
what they need to do. I appreciate their effort to learn and speak Japanese and think it is
cute when they try. But, I don’t think most of them will ever be able to truly understand
Japanese.”

She jokingly added: “This means people like me will always have a job.”

This informant made this statement in a long dialogue of conversation. We were actually
casually talking about university administrative issues and the all of the different procedures new
staff members must deal with when entering a new university. In fact, this was hardly noticeable
in the conversation and one would likely overlook it had they not been somewhat familiar with
the kinds of literature on Japanese perceptions of foreigners.

I also do not believe this informant meant this in a way that intended to be malicious or
racist. From what I could ascertain, she clearly enjoyed her job, the constant need to speak
English, and all of the interactions she had with international students. I certainly would not
consider her to hold prejudiced or racist views towards foreigners. However, this still does not
detract from the fact that she looks at foreigners as having some sort of incapacity to understand
the more complex elements of the Japanese language.

One Japanese man spoke a bit more frankly about his experiences with foreigners. This
man is the owner of a small business and says that he has been asked by several foreigners about
potentially working with him. He says that he would love to hire them but that most of those who
inquire would simply be too difficult to train and that he could never trust them to meet with Japanese clients. He explained:

“It would be hard for me to really trust a foreigner in front of a Japanese client. I hired one American guy, but he was truly an exception. He really understood Japanese ways of thinking. Even if a foreign person can speak Japanese very well, I don’t think they really can understand what the other Japanese person means in a conversation. I think this is impossible.”

This man is more direct in expressing his feelings. The Japanese language and corresponding culture, for better or for worse, are viewed as impenetrable to most foreigners. Besides those with exceptional abilities, or who grew up in something of a Japanese household, it is clear that this man feels very unconfident about the ability of foreigners to learn the language.

While it is not explicitly stated, what such ideologies do is effectively limit the conceptual extent that foreigners can become tangible members in Japanese society. If there are limits to the ways that some Japanese perceive of foreigners and presume that they possess an inherent incapacity to fully adapt or integrate, then language can work as one of the boundaries that delineates Japanese from foreigners. Because they might be seen as have some innate deficiency, the perceptual boundary between Japanese and foreigners can be maintained or reinforced. In this way, language – and perceived language capacity, specifically – effectively functions as a mechanism to distinguish Japanese (in-group) from foreigners (out-group).

However, it also should be noted that as with all boundaries, these are fluid, permeable, and often times weakly constructed ideologically. As Yoshino noted, when his Japanese informants were asked what of the minority Chinese and Koreans born in Japan, they cited that they could become Japanese (nihonjin ni nareru) and that these boundaries could in fact be
permeated under the right circumstances (Yoshino 1992). The way they become Japanese is that they acquire the cultural and linguistic capital to effectively “pass” as Japanese and that they are in many ways unrecognizable.

In such instances, it is clear that Japanese actors still maintain some racialized perceptions of foreigners. On the basis of their language skills (and their perceived capabilities), foreigners in the abstract are still stereotyped as being different and incapable of ever being on the same level as native Japanese when it comes to language skills. While this is likely not particular to Japan, what is particular is the ways that such perceived incapacities relegate foreigners to the social peripheries, seemingly indefinitely. In many other countries, native-like language skills are not requisite for being considered a tangible member of society. In contrast, a language-culture-belonging connection still appears to perceptually distinguish foreigners from Japanese in ways that enforce social and ethnic boundaries, as well as notions of belonging within society.

This can be understood as a result of institutional power as a means of delineating boundaries within society. The cultural institutions set in place have defined a very particular set of criteria that converges to establish a sense of social belonging, whereby language is seen as an important factor to differentiate identities. It also suggests greater attention needs to be paid to the ways that power works to establish these boundaries and how it is operationalized to distinguish people categorically. If foreigners are “Othered” perceptually because of their perceived language abilities, it is unlikely that they will ever be accepted as full members of society, and relations between Japanese and non-Japanese will remain strained.

While the postmodern literature discussed above is helpful for explaining how Japanese power and language function in conjunction to distinguish boundaries of Self and Other, this
literature is not without its shortcomings. Namely, this literature only explores the negative ways that certain variables, such as power or ethnicity, function to establish forms of Otherness. Although these are certainly crucial for understanding the changing nature of Japan today, they also overlook some of the more positive outcomes that have emerged from these encounters and language experiences. To obtain a fuller picture of the ways that these encounters have unfolded, as well as to more comprehensively grasp their sociocultural implications, it serves well to consider how what these more positive results entail and what effects these have on interpersonal dynamics.

It is important to keep language as the focus of these experiences and understand that rather than occurring in a cultural vacuum, the language learning experience is always culturally conditioned. Thus, understanding what effects language learning and communicating in a different language have on acquired linguistic skills, requires greater attention to the products that emerge from such encounters.

To explain the function of language and the way linguistic mechanisms are restructuring relations between Japanese and foreigners, it is helpful to examine the case of Shiori. Shiori is a middle-aged divorcee from Fukuoka and her story emphasizes the important role of language and communication in her self-identity and the way that she sees herself in relation to foreigners. Much of her story accords with the postmodernist writings on language, power, and identity, and also works well to contextualize the larger systemic changes that are currently unfolding on the ground in Japan today.

Shiori noted that she began studying English because she was upset after her divorce and wanted to challenge herself to try something new. She noted that taking English classes was at first “a way to keep busy” but she said that studying soon became more than just a hobby. She
said that through her continued study, she even began to look at herself and her classmates differently as a result of her study:

“I started to think there was something different about us students. All of my classmates were older like me, but we felt more confident about who we are from taking these classes. Even though our levels are still low, we think [of] ourselves as happier people because we study hard. We look up to the teacher at our school who can speak English very well and hope one day to have the language and culture skills like he does.”

As her English improved, Shiori told me that she started to feel more confident in herself and feel more empowered by her study habits and language capabilities. Thus, she used her study of English as a means to redefine her personal identity in a more positive way.

The most interesting aspect of Shiori’s story is how one experience dramatically changed the way she perceived herself in relation to foreign people in Japan. She recounted a story about how she was on a domestic sightseeing trip and saw a group of foreign tourists observing the same exhibit that she was. She said that she heard them speaking in English and asked them if they had any questions about the exhibit:

“When I did this, I was really nervous. I tried to explain to them the [about the exhibit they were viewing] as best I could. I gave them some of the history about it and asked them if they were enjoying Japan. I only understood a little of their reply back to me, but it was a great interaction and it made me feel like my study has paid off!”

Shiori said that this was incredibly out of character for her and that she had never done anything like this before. Shiori also explained how this experience further propelled her motivation and pushed her to challenge herself further. She enthusiastically expressed that she hopes to do this
again when the next opportunity presents itself and that she hopes the next interaction will involve more communication and be more fulfilling that the first.

I asked her why she found this interaction particularly exciting and what she found so interesting about it. Her answer was that it was because she further developed her confidence but also that she could use these skills to meet new people and learn about others in a way she previously thought to be impossible:

“I have never interacted with a foreigner before besides in my English lessons. I have said things like “hello” to them and simple things like that, but this was the first time I had a real conversation with foreigners. When I actually spoke with them, I realized that my interest in English could be so much more than it is now. I can learn more about American culture, I can read some books, and make new friends. I think that I can experience the world much differently than I previously have.”

Shiori also noted that this helped her to develop a newfound curiosity in foreign people, especially those living in Japan. Whereas she previously believed foreigners exist in their own circles, inaccessible to her own life, she believed this experience has made them more accessible to her:

“I see foreigners often in Fukuoka. They are everywhere and there are many different types. There are many different ones and some don’t speak English. I always thought that they are living in their own worlds and that because I can’t speak English, probably I can’t communicate with them and they don’t concern me. But lately there have been more foreigners in Japan and there have been some difficulties between foreigners and Japanese. I have been more aware of them. Now, I think I can actually communicate with
them! They don’t seem to be so far away from me anymore and I think now that I had one interaction with them, I can have more.”

By communicating with the foreign tourists at this exhibit, Shiori expanded the ways that she understood foreign Otherness. She began to see foreigners as less distant from herself and instantaneously more accessible to her.

Shiori’s story exemplifies the multifaceted ways language and communicating across cultural boundaries influenced her self-identity and how she positioned herself in relation to foreigners within Japan. It is important to recognize the diverse ramifications of these processes and how they played out. She developed greater confidence in herself and in her English ability. By applying her acquired linguistic skills, she further broadened the ways that foreigners were accessible to her and believes that she began to see them differently within Japanese society.

Shiori’s case also reveals important information about how Japanese language learners can reconstruct their identities with greater orientations towards foreign Otherness as a result of their acquired language skills. As she studied English and applied her language skills in practical and meaningful settings, she gradually incorporated elements of cultural difference into who she was and what she believed she could access. Such a point underscores what many other authors have noted about the language learning process and how it affects notions of self and Other (Gao 2007; Kim 1994, 2001; Norton 2000; Qu 2005). Given the current situation in Japan today, the opportunity for such situations will likely be greater than has previously been the case. This in turn means that more Japanese may engage with foreigners in such settings and ultimately impact how some Japanese come to view foreigners in Japan.

To a lesser extent, Shiori’s story also reveals important information about how Japanese learners can reconstruct their identities with greater orientations towards foreign Otherness. In
other words, it shows how these learners developed a more “intercultural” identity. Although evidence of this is somewhat nominal in Shiori’s case, other examples from Japanese learners can further exemplify these changes. In particular, Japanese learners who have developed significant language skills and have spent time abroad have reported that their language skills have propelled them to both think differently of themselves and think differently of foreigners in Japan.

Here, I would like to draw examples from two Japanese learners who experienced such changes when they went abroad. First, I would like to explain the case of Suichiro, a Japanese graduate student in his twenties who spent over eighteen months studying and researching in the United States. Through his experiences abroad, using his language skills, and communicating directly with people in the United States, Suichiro acquired new insights on the nature of his language and intercultural communication skills. After completing his studies, Suichiro referenced these experiences to construct a more interculturally-oriented identity of himself vis-à-vis other Japanese people who he believed lacked such skills. He explained:

“Going to study in the U.S. is something that not many other Japanese can do. I think they really lack the ability to understand foreign culture, but I know I can. I think this is something that is important that [distinguishes me] as a more unique Japanese.”

Although Suichiro said that his time in the United States was important to him, he experienced further, and arguably more prolific, changes to his self-perception and the way he perceived cultural Others after he returned from his study abroad. Upon returning to Japan, Suichiro hoped to retain his language skills and to continue communicating with foreigners. To do this, he frequently visited places foreigners would regularly visit and befriended as many foreigners as he could. Unexpectedly, doing so led him to have further revelations:
“Interacting with foreigners in Japan has made me reflect on who I am as a Japanese and who they are as foreigners. I began [befriending] some foreigners in Japan and was surprised to hear from them about how difficult living in Japan can be for them. I have experienced similar difficulties when I went abroad. I think we [Japanese] need to be more accommodating to them if we want them to stay in Japan. We need to be more diverse and accepting...In Japan, people have to consider that foreigners here need help. If they don’t understand something, we shouldn’t blame them and instead we should try to help them. Too many people never think about how hard it is to do something in a place they are unfamiliar with and too quickly criticize foreigners for their difficulties adapting to Japan.”

Such encounters provided Suichiro a lens through which he could compare his experiences to theirs.

Upon recognizing the similarities of their experiences, Suichiro mentally shortened the conceptual distance between himself and foreigners, which in effect has ramifications for how he understands them to be positioned within Japan:

“One foreigner told me that he was sick but couldn’t visit the doctor because he wasn’t confident in his communication skills. This was the exact same experience that I had my first month in America! I remember very clearly how I was sick and looking on the internet for [remedies] I could make at home to cure my sickness because I didn’t want to visit the doctor and have to communicate...Instead of thinking of foreigners as different, [Japanese people] should realize they are humans. All humans have problems and many people cannot relate to serious problems people might have in another place. I never realized this but we are really all the same. I think it’s useless to talk about how everyone
is different and ignore how similar we are. It doesn’t matter if we share our similarities in America or in Japan, we are all the same.”

An important point here is that Suichiro’s identity and perceptions of foreigners changed after he engaged with foreigners in Japan. Although he had considerable experience engaging and interacting with foreigners outside of Japan, it was not until he actively engaged foreigners within Japan, and recognized the similarities between their experiences and his, that he really reflected upon and eventually altered the ways he perceived foreign experiences. Shifting the locus of interaction to the domestic sphere allowed him to better sympathize with foreigners and relate to their hardships. These feelings brought them conceptually closer to him and are responsible for his reconfigured ideas about Japan and national belonging.

Takeyuki shared with me a similar story. Takeyuki is a Japanese male in his late twenties who currently resides in the northern United States. Before going to the U.S., Takeyuki had many international friends and a foreign girlfriend in Japan. He was also very interculturally minded, but he explained that his time abroad was qualitatively different from his time in Japan:

“Interacting with foreigners in Japan was interesting at first. It was nice to talk with them and help them, but it is totally different from engaging with Americans in America. In Japan, I am kind of like a cultural authority and I need to talk with foreigners about Japan all the time. I don’t care about Japan, I want to talk about other things too, not just Japan. I am other things besides a Japanese person. In America, I have much more freedom to talk and I don’t feel restricted with what I can do. It is much better for me to make American friends in America than in Japan.”

While he did note some frustrations with his time in the U.S., Takeyuki still said that he enjoyed everything about living abroad and being forced to operate in a foreign culture. He also
mentioned that he had much more meaningful encounters with foreigners in the U.S., whereas his encounters with foreigners in Japan were relatively limited in scope. The fact that he was having meaningful encounters with Americans in the United States compelled him to reshape the way he thought of himself and his own identity. He explained:

“[My experience abroad] made me realize how I don’t want to go back to Japan. I want to live in foreign countries and make my life somewhere else. I appreciate Japan and know it will be hard for my family, but that is not who I am. I am much happier in America and I have more interesting opportunities. If I stay in Japan maybe I [would] become a [businessman] or just some worker at some uninteresting place. In America, there are so many more opportunities and I can express myself freely and feel myself so much better. If I never went abroad for studying, I would have never known this.”

Although his changes were quite radical, they offer a good example of the potential ways individuals can change the way they see themselves and Others as a result of their language learning and intercultural communicative experiences.

The cases of the three Japanese interlocutors noted above reveal important information about how Japanese learners reconstructed their identities with greater orientations towards foreign Otherness. While each case is unique, it is important to recognize the role of language and cross-cultural communication in these processes. This underscores observations that several writers on the topic of language learning and intercultural communication have also explained, which note that the binaries conventionally associated with language and identity are often insufficient to capture the dynamics of what truly unfolds within learners (Gao 2007; Kim 1994, 2001; Qu 2005). In short, identities are better seen as perpetually being in progress rather than static and unmalleable (Hall 1990; Norton 2000). And language learning and intercultural
communication can be critical components that challenge these identities to progress in particular ways.

Language from the Foreign Perspective

The above section highlights the particular ways in which Japanese informants expressed changes concerning their identities as a result of their language learning and intercultural communicative experiences. Their outcomes are varied and demonstrate the idiosyncratic ways that language intersects with notions of identity and belonging in contemporary Japan. The same phenomenon can also be viewed from the foreign perspective. Foreign learners of Japanese also experience changes, both positively and negatively, as a result of their language learning experiences and the enactment of their acquired language skills. Here, I would like to demonstrate an extreme case to show how foreign learners of Japanese use language, intercultural communication, and Japanese culture as a means to redefine themselves in contrasting ways.

On one extreme end of the spectrum is the case of Mary, a 30 year-old American translator working in Japan’s Kanto region. Mary’s experience as a Japanese learner and as a translator in Japan have combined with her distaste of American cultural norms and led her to take on a more Japanese-centric identity. She considers her experience learning Japanese to be something of a “journey” that has gradually led her to adopt the particular identity that she had. She explained:

“Learning Japanese has been a long experience for me. I started in college ten years ago and never looked back. It has been a complicated journey and throughout the time I have come to love Japan more than the United States...I never really fit in in America, but here
I am able to feel myself and feel like my skills and talents are worth something and are valued.”

Mary said that since she came to Japan as a JET, she has thrown herself into the culture and had been trying her hardest to “integrate” and do things like local people. She started off as a JET teacher in a rural area in western Japan, which she also says influenced the perceptions of her initial experiences:

“The people in [the town where she worked] were welcoming to me. I think they loved the fact that I could speak Japanese and that I really tried to be a part of their community and I think this drove me even more to study Japanese and get better. The more I stayed there, the more I loved it. Living in a small community and working with great kids really made me attached to them.”

Her sentiment towards her early experiences in Japan as something of a “honeymoon” period, whereby arrivals to a new place find everything wonderful and mysterious in comparison to their home countries.

There is nothing especially novel about her experiences; many foreigners living and working in other cultures similarly express such sentiments. In Mary’s case, however, this honeymoon period never seemed to end. Instead, it transformed into something that mixed with her distaste for her home country and she began to see life in Japan as a viable alternative to a life in America. She explained:

“After my first year on JET, I decided that I never wanted to go back to the United States. I hated life in America. I never really fit in, I was always an outcast, I never had a great

31 JET stands for the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme. It has remained a popular vehicle for attracting foreign teachers to Japan. See McConnell 2000 for a detailed description of the JET Programme.
relationship with my friends or family. Being in Japan allowed me to be different and I felt that I could be myself in a positive way. I loved the feeling and decided that I would do everything I can to stay working and living in Japan. I studied Japanese using the things I liked to do for hours each day....Reading comics, watching dramas, and talking with people in my neighborhood. I passed the language proficiency tests each time I took them and studied hard to pass [the highest level]. When I showed the questions on the test to some of my friends, they said these were difficult questions. This made me feel more Japanese and as though I belong here.”

Mary’s dislike of the United States and her favoring of Japan are interrelated and one continued to inform the other. She began to see Japan as an escape from the troubles of her life in the U.S. and she decided to immerse herself in Japanese study and trying to live like a Japanese. She spoke to about wanting to become a Japanese citizen (which would involve renouncing her American citizenship) and “really” becoming Japanese. She also explained that she wears clothes that are culturally sensitive and appropriate for Japan, unlike other “gaijin” who wear whatever they want to work and school and do not consider local fashion norms or trends.

Mary’s case is an extreme example of someone using Japan as a way to remake themselves and their identity. She has essentially used her experiences in Japan to rebel against her home culture, which she has come to detest and see as inferior. Through the course of our conversations, she never spoke positively of the United States. Why Mary’s case is important is because Mary’s case is actually not all that uncommon. While the nature of her radical transformation is certainly exceptional, it does not take a lot of talking to foreigners in Japan before one comes across such sentiments. Such sentiments are quite common among people from North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. These sentiments tend to take the form of
people using their fluency in Japanese language and culture to rebel against their home countries for various reasons. For example, one Canadian male noted to me that when he came to Japan, he felt that for the first time in his life he “truly had friends.” Another man from the U.K. said that his dislike for government politics in Europe drove him to Japan and he believes that he is treated better in Japan.

These points are filled with contradictions that any critical observer would raise issues with, but nonetheless factor importantly in these informants’ constructions of identity. For example, although Mary cited that she (as a female) was treated better in Japan than in the United States, gender discrimination is much more rampant in Japan and much less criticized publicly. Undoubtedly, her views of Japan have been blurred by the fact that she was treated somewhat differently than a typical woman her age because of her background, language skills, and appearance. The point is not so much whether these assertions are accurate but rather the extent to which they are truly believed and operationalized in the construction of identity amongst informants. In the case of these Western observers, these foreigners very much believed Japan was a better alternative than their home countries and thus they construct their identities as such.

It should be noted that many people from non-Western countries similarly feel this way. Several informants from Africa, the Middle East, and South America have also expressed Japan as a desirable place to live in juxtaposition to their home countries. Ken noted that once he leaves Japan, he soon yearns to come back due to the orderliness and cleanliness of the country. An Iranian female informant who was in the second year of her graduate study program said:

“In Japan, I am free. The second I got to Japan, I threw my hijab away and won’t wear it again until I go home. Finally, people don’t judge me about how I look and what I do. No
more gossip, no more bullshit from hypocritical people. I am so happy to be in a country like this.”

Thus, it is not only a select group of foreigners that are using their language and cultural experiences in Japan to remake themselves in ways that draw on Japan’s attractiveness. Foreigners from all over the world do see life in Japan as an asset and as an opportunity to remake themselves, despite all of its shortcomings. This theme of using Japan as a particular location and cultural institution upon which to reassert one’s identity is important because it shows that foreign residents are capable of remaking themselves in ways that are inclined towards Japan. Again, given the scope and breadth of Japan’s demographic changes, it is likely such changes will continue to occur in the near future, thus compelling further relations between Japan and these particular foreigners to develop in positive ways.

Despite the fact that some positive outcomes from these encounters do emerge, it is important to note that there are also negative encounters that surface. For a variety of reasons, there are foreigners who see the linguistic and communicative barriers as things that drive them away from Japan. During the course of this fieldwork, it was fairly common to meet foreigners from a multitude of different backgrounds who were rather discontent with their situation in Japan and sought to return to their home countries and move elsewhere. Many saw the language and cultural barriers as insurmountable and rather than struggle to become quasi-accepted into society, they instead believed it would be best to seek opportunities elsewhere. This emphasizes the fact that many barriers remain and that foreigners looking to fit in still must overcome barriers that restrict their incorporation into Japanese society.

The experiences cited above explain how language and intercultural interactions function to define foreigner-Japanese positionality in multifaceted ways. It is too simplistic to merely
write these encounters off as problems, as has tended to be the case in scholarship. It is much more beneficial to recognize that these outcomes occur on a continuum and that there are diverse ways that these factors realign foreigners vis-à-vis Japanese society. Understanding the diversity of such outcomes is paramount for understanding the diversifying nature of Japan today.

On the surface, these revelations may seem trivial. It is not really surprising that engaging with cultural Others may lead one to reconsider themselves and reconstruct their identity in a different way. After all, we are all a collection of the encounters and experiences we’ve had. However, the true significance of these findings is that they carry wider implications for Japanese society and in fact transcend the particular contexts in which they occur. Embracing someone culturally and racially different as a new part of your family or by being frustrated by the condition foreign workers leave a convenience store are not isolated instances. Instead, they are signals of a transformative process that is affecting many aspects of society and are in many ways redefining the status quo. As these positive and negative encounters respectively become more normative, a new precedent is set for the ways that Japanese society makes sense of and engages with cultural difference. It is the fact that these encounters are becoming increasingly common that make them noteworthy. It is also this fact that signals the potential for more widespread changes in Japan and which can potentially reshape Japan’s trajectory for years to come.
CHAPTER 5
RACIAL AND CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN JAPAN

Japan’s rapidly changing demographics provide new challenges to historical discourses that have stressed Japanese homogeneity, biological purity, and the interrelation between culture and biology. Asuka Cambridge appearing on Japanese television stating that he is proud of his biracial heritage demonstrates that he is both conscious of this heritage and that is not afraid to profess this in public. The same is true for Ariana Miyamoto discussing publicly how a word like “ha-fu” more readily captures her experience, as well as the experiences of thousands of other biracial people in Japan. In one sense, these examples show how difficult it will be to retain old ideas about national identity that essentialize and stereotype “Japanese” people and overlook the range of diversity that truly exists in Japan. People like Cambridge and Miyamoto challenge these older notions of identity, which in turn may compel reconsiderations of how identity is perceived and allow for new forms of identity to emerge.

However, one may dispute how “diverse” these biracial individuals actually are. There is no question that these people look different than how Japanese might expect a “Japanese” person to look and they are readily distinguishable by their appearance. At the same time, however, they are culturally indistinguishable from the mainstream, non-mixed Japanese population. By and large, people like Cambridge and Miyamoto grow up monoculturally and are readily subsumed into Japan’s cultural sphere, where they are “made” culturally Japanese through their upbringing. Culturally, therefore, such individuals are not aberrations. While their parents may reenact the cultural traditions of their homelands in Japan, for second-generation biracial persons identification with other cultures is severely limited.

In this chapter, I critically consider the “hybridity” of these biracial persons and examine how and to what extent Japanese society is concerned with their differences. Although there are
voices, mostly from the far right, who profess that such people are staunchly not Japanese, once
one starts moving away from the far right political spectrum toward the middle and further
towards the political left, the question as well as understanding of the constitution of Japanese
“people” becomes much more complex. Conceptually, many may view these “different”
Japanese people negatively and express concern about the influx of immigration Japan is
experiencing. However, it also appears that as these demographic changes occur, and as the
communicative encounters mentioned in Chapter 4 unfold and further diversify in nature, there is
greater potential for negative ideas to be debunked. Further, several recent surveys have shown
mixed results concerning the ways Japanese people perceive foreigners in the abstract (Facchini
et al. 2016; Green and Kadoya 2015). I aim to show that Japanese attitudes towards foreigners
cannot be captured on a simple positive-negative dichotomy. Instead, Japanese attitudes towards
foreign others are informed by a number of different factors that conflate, contradict, and
ultimately obfuscate attitudes towards cultural differences that problematize any efforts to
generalize trends towards foreigners. While Japanese certainly maintain abstract attitudes and
ideas about foreign difference, in practice (i.e. at the personal level), these ideas are much less
clear and riddled with complexities.

Consequentially, there emerges a greater chance that mainstream Japanese people are
more likely to view mixed Japanese people as tangible members of society. Furthermore, several
recent studies have suggested that although Japanese attitudes towards immigration and
immigrants remain mostly negative, there are fairly large segments of the Japanese population
who do not perceive immigration as negative and in fact view it positively (Green 2015; Green
and Kadoya 2015). Rather than marginalize cultural differences, the focus shifts to how well
biracial individuals can maintain social norms and practices that are at risk of being lost by
sociocultural and demographic diversification. In a few cases, such sentiments have even been extended to first-generation immigrants themselves (Faier 2009; Green 2015; Świtek 2016). In most cases, there will likely be a generation gap where society looks at second-generation foreign and biracial offspring differently from their parents because of their cultural capital and ability to maintain the cultural status quo.

**Race, Ethnicity, and Hybridity**

As noted in Chapter 2, race and ethnicity have played important roles in shaping Japanese identity as it is currently understood. Whatever position one takes in academic debates about these concepts, it is hard to deny that race and ethnicity have historically worked together to define the biological and cultural parameters of Japanese identity. Although ethnicity and race are socially constructed phenomena, they can be based in and inform a cultural materiality that dictates understandings of belonging. For instance, there is a foundation to Japanese identity that has its roots in Japan’s cultural and historical processes, which ultimately manifest themselves in the everyday sociocultural norms of Japanese life. This is because ever since the Meiji Restoration, race (*jinshu*) and ethnos/nation (*minzoku*) have been assigned a central role in Japan’s public discourse through multiple incarnations over the nation-building, colonial expansion, Asia Pacific War, and postwar economic recovery and beyond (Lie 2001; Oguma 1995; Pyle 1996). However, in this current climate of rapid social and demographic change, it is important to consider the ways race and ethnicity are yet again deployed differently compared to the recent past, in order to make sense of the differences between Japanese and non-Japanese persons in the public imagination of the Japanese society at this time. Questions surface surrounding if and how old ideas about race and ethnicity hold true today and how they have adapted to the changing reality on the ground in Japan. By considering race and ethnicity through
the lens of Japan’s demographic changes, we can ascertain a more nuanced understanding of the ways that they work together to inform contemporary life.

This chapter provides ethnographic data that was collected from various Japanese and foreign informants that were gathered from 2014-2017. While some have come from systematic structured interviews, others have come from informal interviews, observations from participant-observation in different settings, or some mixtures of these. Throughout the course of data collection, I have asked many Japanese informants what they think about people like Akusa Cambridge to try to understand their perceptions about such individuals. Responses express strong differences of opinion:

“Yes, Cambridge is definitely a Japanese person! He is black, but he was on the Olympic team. If he was not Japanese, then he would never be on that team. So, I guess people need to consider him Japanese. And I do too.”

“To me, I think he is Japanese. Maybe a little bit strange, but definitely I think he is a Japanese because of his language and culture. When I feel him talking, I understand that he is Japanese, but just looking at him I cannot.”

These informants recognized Cambridge’s Otherness but also his Japaneseness. In doing so, they considered him to be Japanese, at least in some sense. Interestingly, the quotes above came from informants who were unaware of Cambridge’s Jamaican heritage. One thought he was American, while the other defined him as “black” and unsure of where exactly his heritage was from. However, because he looked somewhat Japanese, represented Japan, and acted culturally Japanese, this person felt he could be thought of as a Japanese person. This raises an interesting point that shows how some Japanese accept people who look different as Japanese. If people
such as Cambridge are being accepted as categorically Japanese, despite rather conspicuous differences, this potentially paves the way for similar persons to do so in the future.

On the other hand, some insisted that Cambridge was not Japanese or pointed to his “complicated” background as evidence of his ambiguous status. The most vivid response of this came from a Japanese office worker in his late thirties who stated that:

“I disagree. I do not think he is Japanese. He is half-Japanese but that means he is different from most people. He is not really Japanese because anyone who looks at him realizes that he is not the same as everyone else” (emphasis added).

When I asked this informant if he considers Cambridge to be culturally Japanese and to what extent that influences his opinion, he stated that:

“Yes, he can speak Japanese, he knows Japanese culture, but because he isn’t Japanese, I don’t think he can ever truly be Japanese. There are some things only Japanese people can comprehend and because he has been influenced by another culture, I think it is hard for him to really become Japanese [nihonjin ni nareru no wa muzukashii].”

This claim is strikingly similar to what scholars documented decades earlier. Kondo, conducting fieldwork in Japan as a third-generation Japanese American during the 1980s, observed similar sentiments:

“It is a minor miracle that my first few months in Tokyo did not lead to acute agoraphobia, for I knew that once I set foot outside the door, someone somewhere would greet one of my linguistic mistakes with an astonished ‘Eh?’ I became all too familiar with the series of expressions flickering over these faces: bewilderment, incredulity, embarrassment, even anger, at having to deal with this odd person who looked Japanese
and therefore human, but who must be retarded, deranged, or – God forbid – Chinese or
Korean” (Kondo 1986, 76).

It is clear that some Japanese continue to conflate appearance (an important component of race) and cultural belonging, which prevents them from considering individuals who are *ha-fu* as Japanese. While the “Other” population being conceptualized has changed, the underlying sentiment persists that people without two Japanese parents are incapable of comprehending what is required of them to fully function in Japanese society. Despite all evidence suggesting otherwise, such people continue to hang onto old essentialist notions of identity, informed by *nihonjinron*, that distinguish Japanese from non-Japanese.

Neither the accepting view of Cambridge, nor the prejudiced view of him (and those like him) are static. Instead, they represent two extremes on an evolving and ever-shifting continuum. On this continuum, lines are not clearly delineated but rather are comprised of contradictory sentiments that are shaped by personalized experiences and ideologies. As some Japanese come to see foreigners more positively or incorporate people such as Cambridge into the Japanese collectivity, others continue to marginalize difference, either on the basis of older notions or on the basis of personal encounters (as was the case of Erika in Chapter 4). While it is difficult to say which of these sides will gain more traction in coming years, it is likely that such opposites will continue to coexist, creating complicated and obfuscated conditions surrounding how different Japanese actors conceptualize difference.

**Hybrids and Japan’s Cultural Influence**

There is a common saying about Japan that the “nail that sticks out gets hammered down.” This suggests that in Japan there is little room for individualistic expression, cultural abnormalities, or things that counter the status quo in a very general sense. This is especially true
of children born and raised in Japan and who have limited exposure to other cultures. Children born outside of Japan may be excused for their lack of cultural knowledge, much in the way that foreigners are excused from abiding by all of Japan’s cultural norms, but these excuses also exclude them from being considered as “Japanese” in a conventional sense, as has historically been the case with Japanese children who returned to Japan after spending significant time abroad (Goodman 2003). Further, this is true of most children born and raised in Japan regardless of their ethnic and racial backgrounds. The underlying reason for this is that there are high expectations of Japanese people in that they are often expected to maintain the cultural order with minimal disruption. Those who cause disruptions are looked down upon and stereotyped as culturally problematic. Without some sort of resisting force, those reared in Japan often emerge culturally as a “Japanese” person, though perhaps with an asterisk because of their difference in appearance and the extent to which this difference is important is of growing debate. It is worthy to explore to some extent the ways that supposedly “hybrid” people fit into this sense of Japanese culture and how the category of Japanese is malleable to adjust for deviations in cultural behavior.

This often creates a paradox in that mixed-race second-generation children brought up in Japan are culturally “Japanese,” detached from their parents’ cultures, yet also can be excluded from being considered as Japanese because of their physical appearance. To demonstrate how this occurs, it is worthy to consider a case of Ken’s children. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Ken is a Nigerian student studying a doctoral course at a university in Japan. He is in Japan with his wife and two children, Sam and Michael. Sam was born in Nigeria but has since spent his life in Japan since he was three. Michael was born in Japan and has never been to Africa. Both children, now
ages 10 and 7, have attended Japanese daycares, kindergartens, and primary schools for all of their formal education.

The ramifications of this upbringing are heartfelt in Ken’s household and are the cause of much tension and cultural discrepancies. Sam and Michael only talk to each other in Japanese, speak limited English, and often reply to their parents in Japanese or very broken English. Ken speaks Japanese at a high intermediate level, although his wife, Mary, speaks only basic Japanese. Mary has explained to me the problems this has brought to their household:

“Frankly, this situation is stressful for us and it sucks. Especially for me because I cannot speak Japanese [unlike Ken, her husband]. They just refuse to speak to us in English, especially Michael. Even if we smack them and try to make them use English or not watch Japanese television, they only use English for a few minutes and then are right back to using Japanese.”

The children watching Japanese television seemed to be a particularly stressing issue for Ken. Although they received satellite television channels, which broadcast shows in English, the children prefer to watch cartoons and television programs dubbed in Japanese rather than those in English. This annoys Ken and Mary because they know that by watching English television, their English will improve, but their children refuse to do so unless their parents force them.

Another issue pressing the couple is the fact that their children know little Edo, their parents’ native language. Ken says that Sam can understand some but that right now Michael is hopeless. He gets the impression that they both understand more than they appear to but that they never speak it. Ken explained:

“This is really frustrating for us because we want them to grow up with knowledge of our culture and traditions. If they don’t know [our language], they won’t understand our
culture and what their family expects of them. Already I don’t think they will survive if we ever go back to Nigeria and I hope we can get them out of Japan doing some other stuff. Right now, they are like two black Japanese kids.”

These language and cultural tensions were a constant frustration for Ken and Mary. When I spoke with the two boys, I got the impression that their understanding of English was somewhat ambiguous. I would ask them questions in English and sometimes they would acknowledge they understood. Sam would occasionally answer me in English, while Michael would never reply in English. I would try to facilitate communication by speaking to them in Japanese, which they responded better to, but Ken would scold me for doing so.

Some might view Ken’s case as an exception because of the quite radical generational differences between parents and children. However, I observed strikingly similar things in another African couple’s children. In this East African couple, the wife was studying, her husband was working, and their two young children attended Japanese schools from an early age. In this case, the children’s outcomes are even more extreme. With this couple’s children, their willingness to speak English was even less than Sam and Michael’s and when I spoke with the younger of the couple’s children, they only spoke in Japanese. I asked my friend, the father, how he communicated with him and he said there were no problems when he is at home, although I cannot help but feel as though he was graying the truth somewhat. I never heard his son say more than a few words in English and he seemed much more comfortable speaking to me in Japanese than he did his father in English. It is clear that there is a negative side to these language and cultural tensions that families have struggles dealing with.

Although such situations are definitely a cause of stress for the foreign parents, on the other hand, there are also some positives that emerge from these conditions. Ken explains that
Sam is one of the best students in his Japanese class and has made good progress in his Japanese. Sam recently won an award for being the second-best speaker in his class and Ken says that he is proud of his son’s abilities. However, Ken also explained that this raises another sort of tension: the longer his sons stay in Japan, the better they will become at Japanese, the more comfortable they will feel speaking the language, and the more detached they will become from he and his wife’s culture. As one could imagine, this considerably obfuscates his plans for the future and what would be best for his family henceforth. He worries that the longer he stays in Japan, the more detached he will become from his children culturally, which will further problematize any efforts for his children to adapt to a new environment. Ken and Mary professed that it was never their intention to be settled in Japan. Nor did they want to return to Nigeria. Thus, other English-speaking countries – the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand – have all been targets for locations where they might like to eventually settle. However, given the cultural development of his children, he and Mary believe that the decision to relocate outside of Japan may have to happen sooner than later in order avoid further cultural rifts between them and their children.

While this phenomenon of immigrant children and parents having cultural differences is common among immigration scholarship (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Portes and Zhou 1993), I want to argue here that the case of Japan is different for several reasons. First, in the context of many immigrant communities throughout the world, many parents speak the language of their host society, at least to a communicable level. If Mexican children respond in English to their Spanish-speaking parents, there is a high probability that said parents can understand their children. The parents are likely to known English to some extent, which doesn’t make communication impossible. The same is not true in Japan, where there are instances of real communication barriers between parents and children. Take for instance, the American man,
who mentioned to me that he had communication barriers speaking to his children because he cannot speak much Japanese. While he can communicate with his children, he recounted to me that there is a big difference between how he communicates with his children and the ways that his friends in the U.S. can communicate with their children. This is not merely a loss of cultural identity, as in the case of Mexican-American children who respond in English, but rather a full-on communication barrier that prevents the utmost fluid communication from occurring. This situation is compounded in Mary’s case because she does not speak Japanese. For such people, the communication barriers that emerge between them and their children are especially difficult to deal with because communication doesn’t just become difficult but rather impossible.

The educational, social, and cultural mechanisms in place in Japan cause lead children to develop such strong cultural and linguistic behaviors. In places where diversity and multilingualism are promoted within the educational system, even superficially, there is some consciousness of bilingualism and the need to raise children to be fluent in multiple languages and cultures. This is not true in Japan, where the cultural trends focus on making students proficient in Japanese and only Japanese. The educational and sociocultural mechanism in place function to “make” these children Japanese first and foremost, and these systems do so without discrimination. Biracial children are often unaware that they are different until later in life when they might be bullied for their different backgrounds. Therefore, conformity and cultural hegemony is built into Japan’s educational system and is not inherently obtrusive of non-Japanese students. Marginalization of non-Japanese persons comes at a later point in life outside of the educational system itself.

This raises the question of what happens if diversity becomes more normalized than it already is? The school system is already capable of producing “black Japanese children” that are
culturally and linguistically Japanese and who are detached from their parents’ cultures (see also LeMay 2018). If these mechanisms remain in place, it begs the question what will happen as socio-demographic diversity continues at its anticipated pace? What extent will phenotypic diversity become a social norm? I am inclined to believe that this would produce at least a “passive acceptance” of people who do not look Japanese, so long as this difference does not disrupt the cultural status quo. This ties back into the larger argument made in this dissertation that Japanese identity is becoming much more contingent on cultural fluency as opposed to arbitrary ethno-racial congruity.

Mary believed that it was not possible for her children to truly retain two distinct cultures in Japan and that for her boys it was a zero-sum game in which the acquisition of Japanese norms meant the loss of African norms. She explained that she really didn’t anticipate this problem and she earnestly believed that she and Ken would be able to preserve their children’s African identity and in doing so compared their family to biracial African-Japanese children:

“I thought we would be able to keep [Sam and Michael’s] identity because we are two parents. I am with the boys when they are not in school, so I didn’t think we would have this problem. We’ve met a lot of Nigerian guys married to Japanese women and their kids are very Japanese. Obviously, it’s because the wives stay at home and raise the kids while the father works. Most of these guys are hustlers. We know this is why these kids don’t speak English that well. But we never thought this would happen to our kids. We realized that they are just like one of the hustler’s kids that we know…Father works at night, doesn’t see his kids much, basically the Japanese mother is just raising them. In this case, we know that there will be problems, but we thought this case was different from ours, but I guess we were wrong.”
Mary admits that she does believe her boys are better at English than the Nigerian-Japanese children she compared them with. She also concedes that it’s probably a lost cause for her children to learn her native language. Although they seem to be able to understand some of it, they cannot use it themselves. Nevertheless, these problems are still a major source of tension and concern for the future of her family. The root cause of this is the fact that the formal Japanese educational system, in which both Sam and Michael are enrolled, “domesticizes” those students who are enrolled in it, even those of different ethnonational backgrounds (LeMay 2018).

Here it is worth recalling that in Chapter 3 I argued that the presence of foreigners in Japan is becoming increasingly accepted, at least passively, so long as they do not disrupt the cultural status quo. Here, the “domesticization” of foreign children takes places in schools and makes them “Japanese” through the ways the education system is structured. If one relates this fact to the data from Sam and Michael above, it is clear that until these children experience some sort of cultural pushback from Japanese society (in the form of racism or discrimination) it is unlikely that they will think of themselves as different. If two parents pressuring their children to not speak Japanese cannot force a change on the children, it is unlikely that other external forces will as well. Several foreign-Japanese couples I have spoken with have expressed similar concerns to me and have consciously decided to relocate for their child’s education. One Canadian father noted to me:

“Things were fine until she left kindergarten. She would speak English at home and was doing pretty well. Suddenly, it was like she was a totally different person and she never wanted to speak in English. On the weekends it’s fine, but when she’s been in school all day, when she comes home, she never wants to switch back to English mode.”
The father also noted that they were in the process of relocating back to the Canada in an effort help preserve his daughter’s English and sense of intercultural identity.

The reason it is worthy to note this “domesticization” is because without it, it is unlikely that people like Cambridge and Miyamoto would generate such debate and be accepted to the extent that they are. Some of the informants above noted that such people are unquestionably Japanese and their representing the Japanese Olympic teams demonstrates their Japaneseness. It is unlikely this would play out as it did had Cambridge been more bicultural and had he asserted a more non-Japanese identity in someone.

It is worthwhile to distinguish between what I will call “typical foreignness” and “domesticated foreignness.” Both represent forms of external difference, but they engage with mainstream Japanese society in very different ways. “Typical foreignness” generally consists of those foreigners – phenotypically, linguistically, or culturally – who are unquestionably taken as non-Japanese. Examples of this would be people like myself or Ken, who are foreigners and raise no questions as to our non-Japaneseness. Then there is “domesticated foreignness,” which is a form of foreign existence in Japan that occupies a much more ambivalent zone. I would like to include under this “domesticated foreignness” a wide range of individuals who in some instances can “pass” as Japanese – phenotypically, linguistically, or culturally – yet in other instances may not. To a large extent, many Japanese do not use factors such as immigration status or permanent residency as means to distinguish foreigners. Instead, more superficial markers such as education, appearance, or language (or some combination of these) influence the ways Japanese actors perceive of particular foreigners. Although factors like immigration status or residency status might inform conceptualizations of foreigners in the abstract, at the interaction level, more superficial markers are stronger indicators. This may be the outcome of
any number of reasons but which nonetheless *may or may not* preclude an individual from being considered as “Japanese.”

An example from Japanese popular culture will illustrate this. For instance, Cambridge’s biracial and bicultural background, his success representing Japan on a global stage, and his linguistic and cultural fluency present him as a case of “domesticated foreignness.” Despite his dual identity, various indices mark him as “Japanese” even though he does not resemble someone who is typically thought of as Japanese. Cambridge and others like him exist in strong contrast to more “typical foreignness” at the other end of this spectrum. This sense of “foreignness” leaves no question or ambiguity concerning one’s personal background.

Behavioral, cultural, and linguistic indices differentiate these senses of “typical foreignness.” One *gaijin tarento* (foreign talent) that epitomizes this end of the spectrum is Bobby Ologun. Ologun is a Nigerian professional fighter who naturalized to become a Japanese citizen. After coming to Japan for a fighting career, he began appearing on Japanese television depicting a persona of a buffoon who is entirely perplexed by things Japanese. For example, he would appear in his fighting trunks, with no shirt on, and appear befuddled at the way Japanese use chopsticks to eat.

Ologun’s character is ripe with racialist depictions of Africa and primitiveness. This speaks loudly to the distinction made between Africans and African-Americans (discussed below). However, most critical to this discussion, is the fact that Ologun depicts essentially the anti-Japanese: foreigners who do not adhere to Japanese cultural norms and disrupt the cultural status quo by their presence and inability to adhere to culturally normative behavior. His performative behavior on television is intended to demonstrate the buffoonery of foreignness, the inability of foreigners to handle Japanese life, and to demonstrate how the penetration of
foreigners into Japan represents a threat to sociocultural norms. In one sense, Ologun’s character is the object of satire, while in another sense the character represents the threat that is imposed by foreign Otherness.

This “typical foreignness” exists in stark contrast to Japanese cultural norms and leaves no room for ambiguity concerning who is and who is not Japanese. No Japanese person would ever profess confusion over how chopsticks are to be used or how to sit in the *seiza* position (another one of Ologun’s antics on television). Many would also know how to behave in public and not violate the cultural norms of society (also as Ologun has been portrayed as doing). This epitomizes a rougher, more dense form of foreignness that is in some ways unable to be domesticated. They are simply foreign and nothing can be done about it.

Curiously, some Japanese can also be pushed into this “typical foreignness” category. Take for instance Hitomi, the wife of an American man, who has spent several years living in California. She explained to me:

“When they see me with my husband and my son, people think I am not Japanese. I am usually speaking English with them and my husband looks really like a foreigner. Long hair, dreadlocks, dresses like a hippy. Sometimes Japanese ask me really stupid questions like: ‘Even though you’re not Japanese, your son understands Japanese?!’ or ‘Can you use a Japanese toilet.’ Then I tell them I am Japanese born and raised and they are so surprised and apologetic. They thought I was a foreigner.”

Hitomi’s case is one whereby she becomes a “typical foreigner” because of her behavior and proxy via her marriage. People began to see her less as Japanese because of the way that she carried herself, even though her appearance for all other purposes was Japanese. It is also
important to note that Hitomi did not take a staunchly anti-Japanese protesting position as some other women in similar situations did not.

In another case, an American male married to a Japanese female explained how his Japanese wife could not stand living in Japan on their second move back to the country and the couple subsequently relocated to Australia to live somewhere that better matched her lifestyle and beliefs. This man met his wife in the United States and later obtained a teaching job in Japan. When his wife returned to Japan, however, she felt considerably constrained by her work options, the culture of gender discrimination, and the norms she was expected to follow for being Japanese. He noted that his wife started wearing short leave shirts that exposed her tattoos and clothes that were considered inappropriate for her line of work. Their move to Australia was compelled by her desire to leave Japan and raise their children elsewhere.

All this suggests that foreigners (and in some cases, Japanese as well) who do not “domesticate” or cannot be “domesticated” are differentially conceptualized and treated. This is true of foreigners and the offspring of foreigners themselves and is why Sam and Michael are becoming more “Japanese” than their parents would like. Without this domestication, or perhaps “Japanization,” there are greater risks to the cultural status quo, which would be more problematic than otherwise would be the case. This process of keeping the cultural order intact at all costs is imperative and it is crucial to bear in mind Sam and Michael are not aberrations or exceptions to the rule in any way. I have encountered second generation biracial or entirely non-Japanese children who are culturally Japanese and have trouble communicating with their parents. One Vietnamese middle schooler I met refused to speak to his parents in Vietnamese. Some biracial Filipino-Japanese children grow up monolingual speaking only Japanese, and even
some American children cannot communicate well with their American parents (usually fathers).\footnote{It is complicated, if not problematic, to draw broad generalizations from the cultural identity of foreign offspring. It is more beneficial to consider the identity of each biracial offspring on a case-by-case basis, as in some instances children do retain some sense of bicultural identity and one that subverts the status quo. For example, one young biracial Japanese-American girl I met in the course of this research, age seven, retained a sense of both Japanese and American identities because of the fact that her parents decided it was best for her to spend several months a year in the United States.}

There is a very paradoxical element to these conceptualizations. Yoshino has noted that there were significant contradictions in how his Japanese informants conceptualized foreign Otherness and suggested that although foreigners were of a different racial stock, some foreigners could “become Japanese” in some cases. Other authors have observed similar findings (Goodman et al. 2003; Lie 2001a; Tsuda 2003). It is therefore problematic to draw conclusions based on rigid foreigner-Japanese dichotomies and it is equally problematic to obtain a concrete understanding of how Japanese conceptualize foreign and cultural Otherness in this context.

It is also hard to understand how Japan’s cultural mechanisms work to define Japanese and foreigners in different ways. Rather than drawing concrete conclusions, it is perhaps more beneficial to consider foreigners on a case by case basis and to consider their experiences in Japan idiosyncratically rather than collectively. In doing so, the Japanese-foreigner dichotomy is considerably problematized, which sets the stage for the future of Japanese-foreigner relations to develop.

This lack of consistency is the starting point for where new ideas about Japan can emerge. For better or for worse, because there seems to be a growing lack of consensus as to what is and what is not Japanese, it becomes hard to tell how ideas of Japan’s future identity will develop. Because biracial people are not being unambiguously relegated to the social margins...
and instead occupy some uncertain liminal space, there exists more possibilities for ideas about
Japanese identity to be reconceptualized differently. These may take the form of a more
accepting sense of identity that incorporates such biracial persons and considers them part of
Japan’s national body, which I would argue is certainly occurring to a certain degree. At the
same time, it also engenders the possibility that new constructions of identity may in fact be
more nationalistic and exclusive in nature henceforth, which in effect can lead to new forms of
racism and prejudice against non-Japanese persons.

An impetus for change has commenced and in the future Japanese society will likely
encounter greater challenges to status quo conventions. This will result in complex debates
regarding who is considered “Japanese” and by what yardstick these assertions are measured.
The interconnection between these discrete forces carry the potential to reshape Japanese society
in considerable ways that can potentially redefine “Japanese” and “Other” as identity categories
and produce constructions of identity very different from what is currently experienced in Japan
today.

**Foreigner Integration and Segmentation Among “Typical Foreigners”**

Although foreigners in Japan are all differentiated from Japanese in the abstract as
“foreigners” (*gaikokujin*), there are different ways of conceptualizing and categorizing foreigners
based on various factors. Scholars have previously examined these differences to some extent,
such as comparing the differences between white foreigners and Asian foreigners (Lie 2001a) or
the differences between white and black foreigners (Russell 1991a, 1991c, 1998). However, to
obtain a more nuanced understanding of the ways that this current immigration is engaging with
Japanese society, it is important to understand these different categorizations in greater detail and
to understand how these differential conceptions lead to differential engagements between foreigners and mainstream Japanese society.

It needs to be stated at the outset that there are different ways that these categorizations can be made and that they are not mutually exclusive. This makes asserting any definitive claims difficult. Rather than attempt to hierarchically categorize foreigners in Japan, it is better to understand the ways that particular foreigners get conceptualized as sort of triangulation, whereby numerous factors influence the way different individuals are perceived.

**High Skilled vs. Low Skilled (Education Background)**

One way Japanese society distinguishes foreigners is whether they engaged in “high” or “low” skilled professions (Gong 2018). These categories themselves are not without problems, but they do nonetheless capture some crucial differences. I found it curious that throughout the course of data collection that students in tertiary or graduate education would usually conceptualize their experiences in Japan more positively than would laborers or laborers turned entrepreneurs from the same country. For example, Nigerian graduate students studying in Japanese universities would not profess as critical attitudes towards Japan as would Nigerian workers who worked in manual labor jobs or in nightlife sectors. The same was true for Philippine nationals who worked as English teachers or who attended Japanese universities compared with Filipina hostesses or laborers. This was often true despite the fact many of these “higher skilled” workers possessed less cultural capital (language skills, cultural competencies, local knowledge) than did those “lower skilled” workers. Other scholars have identified similar segmentation in Japan’s Indonesian community (Meguro 2005; Okushima 2005).

I shared these insights with some Japanese informants and inquired with them as to why this is the case. Several of the replies from Japanese informants included:
“It is because they are smart and attending universities. People from their countries may have some serious problems and lack of ability, but these students showed they are not like that. They are hard-working and believe Japanese education can help them. I think that is great and I hope they earn skills that will be helpful to them and to Japan” (Japanese female, 27).

“Maybe students are treated differently because they are just in Japan temporarily and Japanese people like educated people. They think that these students are just exchange students or will go back home after they are done studying, so many people do not care. Plus, Japanese people like people who have education, so I think that’s why” (Japanese male, 30s).

“Students don’t [cause] the same [social] problems as other workers do, so it is not surprising that they tell you they are treated different. Students come to Japan, study, and are usually peaceful. Other foreigners come and make problems and don’t live peacefully. They cause problems in their jobs, commit crimes, are lazy, and don’t respect Japan” (Japanese male, 40).

These results demonstrate that many Japanese likewise recognize a difference between those foreigners in higher education and those in more manual labor positions. They also hold stereotypical views of both educated students and low-wage workers. It is also noteworthy that the Japanese female mentioned above believes that these students from countries less highly regarded are somewhat unique in that they allegedly work harder than their counterparts in their home country. She sees such individuals as standing out from the rest and accomplishing something greater than others, which makes them more highly regarded.
Interestingly, this social stratification based on education level also exists among the Japanese population as well. There is a stark division of labor in Japan, whereby white-collar office positions are regarded much higher than blue collar labor. This suggests that foreign populations are being judged by Japanese criteria. In other words, when a foreigner is perceived as being educated, Japanese people are more likely to praise them and perceive of them more highly. The opposite is true of foreigners engaging in low-skilled labor. In these cases, Japanese are more likely to perceive of the foreigners as being problematic and being of a lower social class.

The fact that Japanese are using the same stratifications to conceptually distinguish foreigners as they do other Japanese shows that there is not a rigid “us-them” dichotomy, onto which all foreigners are placed into a concretely “them” category shows that there is some flexibility in how foreigners are perceived. It would be interesting to survey on a massive level, whether mainstream Japanese people would prefer to live next to an educated foreigner, fluent in Japanese and familiar with Japanese culture or a Japanese person of a working-class background. The responses may be more diverse and varied than most people would expect.

**Language Ability and Perceived Language Ability**

Another interesting variable that affects how Japanese informants perceived foreigners was their Japanese language ability and their perceived language ability. Others have noted that Japanese often see the Japanese language as an impenetrable skill for foreigners and that the fact foreigners have acquired even basic Japanese skills is rather exceptional. Kondo, for example, has noted that:

“Race, language, and culture are interlaced, so much so that any challenge to this firmly entrenched conceptual schema – a Caucasian who speaks flawless idiomatic and
unaccented Japanese, or a person of Japanese ancestry who cannot – meets with all manner of unpleasant reactions: in the former case, coldness and intimations that such behavior is unnatural and repulsive; in the latter, with exasperation and disbelief” (Kondo 1986, 76).

Since the Japanese language is seen as such a complicated skill for foreigners to master, efforts on behalf of foreigners to learn Japanese are usually regarded quite highly. However, it should be noted that these accomplishments have a differential impact depending on who achieves them. This in turn affects how mainstream society perceived different foreigners (both at the individual and collective levels) and presents an opportunity to examine how Japanese society constructs and conceptualizes difference more broadly.

It is important to recognize that “Asian” foreigners speaking Japanese tend to elicit much less praise than do non-Asian foreigners. Here, “Asian” is considered as “East Asian,” primarily Chinese, Taiwanese, or Korean. This is likely the case for linguistic, geographic, and cultural reasons. For example, Chinese knowledge of *kanji* provides an advantageous starting point for many Chinese learners of Japanese. The fact that they do not have to learn thousands of new ideographs to read intermediate-level texts is a considerable advantage over those without such knowledge. Similarly, Korean grammar is almost identical to Japanese grammar and the languages share many of the same words. Geographically, the countries being located so proximal to one another has resulted in a long history of interaction that continues into today. Chinese and Koreans are typically the largest groups of tourists to visit Japan per annum. On a cultural level, there is also the chance that inherent biases exist towards these groups that further downplay these foreigners’ accomplishments. Long-term prejudices towards these groups can possibly overshadow their accomplishments.
On the contrary, Westerners who learn Japanese to high-levels (and often to levels less fluent than their East Asian counterparts) are regarded with praise and admiration for their supposedly remarkable accomplishments. If only a matter of politeness, it is not uncommon to see foreigners even making a nominal effort to speak Japanese be regarded with praise. This often seems to be the case regardless of foreigners’ outward appearance. The better the skill level of the foreigner speaking, the greater the admiration they will elicit.

One evening, I accompanied a group of foreigners out with some of their Japanese friends. Among the group was an African-American who spoke Japanese exceptionally well and was well-versed in cultural nuances. His skillful use of Japanese elicited praises from every group of Japanese we encountered that night. Everyone was remarkably impressed by his skills. While he was certainly conscious of what he was doing and was intentionally aiming to elicit such a reaction, the response was nonetheless significant. This demonstrates how language can be used as a means to break down cultural barriers and bridge relations between two groups, even if only in exceptional cases.

Elsewhere in the course of my fieldwork, praise for foreigners’ Japanese abilities has also come at much lower skill levels. My own experience notwithstanding, on numerous occasions I have encountered foreigners with much weaker Japanese skills who still elicit praise and admiration. This praise and admiration may only be a sign of courtesy, but it nonetheless is common. For example, I can recall one instance when a French speaker was speaking in very remedial level Japanese to a group of students at a café. His intonation was strange, his grammar...
was incorrect, and fluency was simply not there. Yet he was still met with praise and admiration from the Japanese group. The fact that he could carry on a conversation in Japanese, even nominally, made him praiseworthy and shows how language skills play a role in constructing perceptions of difference.

National Origin

One additional way Japanese society conceptualizes foreigners differentially is on the basis of their perceived prestige and a distinction between whether these nations are perceived to produce skilled or unskilled labor. Rather than consider a person’s own educational background, this category of differentiation conceptualizes foreigners based on their national backgrounds and the perceptions surrounding these nationalities. These are often tied with highly racialized stereotypes of certain countries of origin and reflect the ways that Christopher’s in-laws initially perceived of Africa. However, much like Japanese classifications of foreigners in general, these too are riddled with problems and inconsistencies. It is worth exploring these contradictions in some detail so as to better understand the differential ways that certain groups of people are conceptualized.

The clearest example of how this plays out is in the contrasts between members of different “racial” groups. Although all are conceptualized as being different from Japanese, they are not all one in the same. The contrast is quite striking when one considers the difference between African-Americans and Africans from Africa. Scholars have written extensively on the ways that Japanese society has engaged African-Americans. Such ways include positioning American blackness as fashionable, stylish, liberating, and subversive (Condry 2007; Cornyetz 1994; Kelsky 2001).
These depictions staunchly contrast with the ways Japanese society conceptualizes Africans from the African continent. In this case, Africa is associated with poverty, war, backwardness, primitiveness, and underdevelopment (Capobianco 2015; Russell 2011; Wakabayashi 1996). Because of this, it is not uncommon for Africans in Japan to portray themselves as being from America and saying that they are American. One African bar worker explained that this helped to alleviate many of the burdens that are associated with being affiliated with Africa in some way and caused people to look at him a different way:

“If you tell Japanese people you are American or Jamaican, they love you. They are interested in you, your job, they ask if you are involved in music. If you say you are Nigerian, most are not interested in such a way and some will even look down on you. They will ask silly questions about Nigeria and Africa that are sometimes offensive and disrespectful” (Capobianco 2015, 199).

Referring back to the case of Christopher, it is highly unlikely that if he had been (or perhaps presented himself) as African-American that his in-laws would have questioned his abilities or view him as negatively as they did.

Curiously, Jamaica occupies something of a unique status that appears to be more closely situated towards the African-American “cool” end of the spectrum rather than the African continent end. Many Japanese associate Jamaica with Bob Marley, reggae music, dreadlocks, and subversive cultural habits (Sterling 2010). In fact, on more than one occasion I have met Africans who presented themselves as Jamaicans and continued to do so until I pressed them on the issue. The most vivid case was when I encountered a street tout in Tokyo’s Kabukichō neighborhood who was trying to solicit me into a strip club. When I asked him where he was from, he said that he was from Jamaica, which I did not believe. I questioned him more critically
on this, as he continued to try to solicit me, and he ultimately admitted that he was in fact African.

When I asked him why he presented himself as Jamaican, he explained that he thought white people tended to trust Jamaicans more than Africans and that Japanese people liked Jamaicans better than they did Africans. Likewise, many Japanese have some affinity with Jamaica. One Japanese male who liked hip-hop showed me his textbook for learning Jamaican Patois that he hoped to use on an upcoming trip to Jamaica. Additionally, I have encountered several other Japanese who had traveled to Jamaica because they wanted to know about the country’s music and dance cultures. Kawada Kaoru has also noted how Africans often pretend to be African-Americans to attract customers. Her informants reported that when asked by potential clients about their ethnic backgrounds, they would reply “America” or “Jamaica” because “Japanese expect [Africans] to answer that [they] are from America and it doesn’t seem they have any interest in Africa” (Kawada 2005, 87).

Russell suggests that Japanese perceptions of blacks are in many ways informed by Western racial hierarchies that date back centuries (Russell 1991b, 2009). Despite these differential perceptions, Japanese society tends to conceptualize blacks in the abstract in highly racialized ways that have their roots in Western racial ideologies. Many Japanese maintain racist views of blacks that affects their treatments towards them. The number of black English teachers has historically been far fewer than those of white English teachers and there have been several mainstream lawsuits of blacks suing Japanese for discrimination. Despite these similar experiences, there are important differences concerning the ways that Japanese society conceptualizes and engages different black populations.
This bears some similarity to the different backgrounds of white females in Japan. In many cases, Japanese and foreigners alike tend to associate women in Japan from Russia, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe as sex workers. This association is much different for white women from North America, Australia, or Western Europe who do not have such connotations attached to them. Here again is an example of members of a similar “racial” category being conceptualized differentially based on their socioeconomic background. However, women (and men) from these backgrounds, in fact engage in a wide variety of jobs and have maintained very different relationships with Japanese society (Debnár 2016).

These are just some of the most basic examples of how different variables can inform constructions of foreign Otherness in Japan. Often times, highly stereotypical images of countries are projected on to flesh and blood people from these countries, which reduces them to essentializations. Not all of these essentializations have the same impacts on people and their abilities to position themselves within societies. It is therefore important to consider the ways society tends to conceptualize these categories in the abstract and to associate people with such stereotypical depictions.

Otherness, Japaneseness, and Cultural Hybridity

The points raised above suggest that there are many factors to consider when explaining the ways foreigners and their offspring come to be positioned and perceived within Japanese society. It should be most obvious that there is no “one size fits all” model and that there are many idiosyncrasies that influence the ways Japanese conceptualize foreigners. This makes generalizations difficult. Such idiosyncrasies notwithstanding there are several points of discussion worthy of further elaboration.
Japan’s education, social, and cultural forces act in ways that effectively weaken many non-Japanese children’s cultural identity and replaces it with Japanese cultural norms. For instance, the children mentioned in this chapter all “became” very Japanese through their experiences in the Japanese educational system. In some cases, so much so that their non-Japanese parents worried that they would be losing their sense of identity and became concerned about their future abilities to adapt outside of Japan. In this way, the education system and overarching cultural context work in tandem to instill in young people a strong sense of Japanese norms (LeMay 2018). And this is the case regardless of the ethno-racial background of children themselves.

Public education is in many ways responsible for the effective and complete “domestication” or “Japanization” of children. The lack of room for bicultural identity, mixed with a school system that instills societal norms and cultural attitudes that discourage deviation, create conditions whereby sociocultural forces and public education converge to create the underlying mechanism responsible for making young children into typical Japanese citizens. Education lays a strong foundation for these norms and the social elements that exist outside the education system, which emphasize a certain degree of order and way of doing things, and effectively turns this foundation into practice. In the cases above, the result is people who look different but are culturally Japanese in every other way. This is where debates surrounding contemporary identity really become complicated because these “Japanizing” forces dissolve the historic conflation of biology and culture, which has historically been an important component of Japanese identity. Whereas in the past, biology and culture were one in the same, these particular “hybrid” people challenge these conventions in significant ways.
This would suggest that as more biracial children are born and reared in Japan, Japanese society has the capacity of subsuming them and turning them into persons capable of being fluent in Japanese culture. If this trend continues, it may considerably lessen the potential impacts that immigration and biracial children will have on Japanese society. Without significant intervention on behalf of non-Japanese parents, it is unlikely that second-generation children raised in Japan will develop a strong sense of racial or ethnic identity. Where identity tensions will emerge will likely be if such children experience discrimination or social exclusion in schools or in society. At this point, it is hard to tell how these children will be received in such cases. However, the foundation will be there for them to be taken *prima facie* as Japanese. Whether or not they are accepted as such will be a pressing question for future generations and will potentially have a considerable impact on Japanese society.

This carries questions concerning whether or not such children are truly cultural “hybrids.” Ken’s proclamation that his children were like “black Japanese kids” raises serious questions as to what extent such children fit into a typical understanding of a hybrid offspring. Extant literature on this topic typically suggests that hybrid children have strong and conflicting senses of identity, ambiguity about their place in the world, and tensions with their parents and society. Thus far, given that in Japan such offspring seem to be accepted or excluded on a case-by-case basis, there is still uncertainty about how this will play out in the future. If Japan comes to accept many of these biracial children as “Japanese” despite their phenotypic incongruity, this could pave the way for a new sense of Japanese identity to emerge. Particularly, one that puts much less emphasis on outward appearance. On the other hand, if Japanese society comes to exclude such children and instead increases their prejudiced sentiments towards them, this would suggest a more problematic trajectory for such children. It will also likely indicate that tensions
will continue and there may even emerge some levels of social discord caused by such children and their accompanying identity tensions. Again, as with many issues facing contemporary Japan, the ultimate results have yet to be seen, though the seeds for change, for better or for worse, are ripe.

This then raises the question as to whether or not the children of biracial offspring will encounter the same problems that their non-Japanese parents did. The differential treatment of foreigners themselves suggests that the children of foreigners may be treated differently according to their parents’ backgrounds. For instance, a biracial African-Japanese offspring will likely encounter greater forms of exclusion than will a Chinese-Japanese offspring who is largely indistinguishable from the mainstream population. Here, the variable of appearance would likely mean that the Chinese-Japanese person would be able to integrate much smoother than would the African-Japanese person. This has already happened to a large extent. However, it may also be the case that there comes to be a wider acceptance of who is or is not Japanese and therefore the parameters of who is accepted as Japanese may be expanded. From a cultural standpoint, we can assume most children will be culturally Japanese without question and will have the capacity to integrate into cultural settings without problems. The major issue preventing the integration of such persons is the fact that they may not look Japanese and because biology and cultural remain conflated, there are issues regarding their acceptance.

What is arguably the most profound impact of this is that their presence produces a wider debate about cultural fluency versus phenotypic congruity. If people who look different – who Japanese society has historically marginalized, racialized, and Othered to exclude them from national collectivity – perform in the Goffmanian way as functionally Japanese, this begs the question as to what extent cultural fluency compensates for phenotypic congruity? Will
individuals who do not look Japanese but are culturally Japanese – like Cambridge, Miyamoto, and the thousands of children born of non-Japanese and mixed background being raised in Japan – become more accepted as a tangible part of Japanese society? Or will their difference continued to be marked and will they remain in the social margins?

I argue that there are two possible outcomes, neither of which are mutually exclusive. On one hand, there is the possibility of extreme acceptance, whereby people who look different but are culturally fluent are absorbed into the national collectivity as has been the case with some foreigners in the past. Historically, this has been contingent on these particular people being able to “pass” as Japanese phenotypically and culturally. However, in a future Japan in which diversity and mixed children will become increasingly normalized, there may be a greater push to accept as Japanese people who can “pass” culturally. If minor slight differences are all that differentiates these people, we may see an expansion of who is tangible accepted as Japanese.

On the other hand, there is the possibility that these people will be met with extreme exclusion from Japanese society. Japan’s racialization and marginalization of Others may become more pronounced or the growing presence of foreigners and mixed children may spur greater backlash from nationalists who view their presence as a threat to society. In recent years, there has been an upsurge in right-wing nationalist movements that have both echoed old forms of racism (such as those directed against ethnic Koreans) and new forms of racism (direct more towards immigration and foreigners in general).

Rather than fall at one of these extremes, I argue that what is most likely to develop is a passive and subtler acceptance of foreigners and mixed racial persons. This acceptance will develop in tandem with new forms racism and discrimination, which are also subtler and more abstract. Diversity is a reality in Japan and it is one that Japanese society cannot escape. I have
no doubt that the intercultural encounters cited in this dissertation will make great strides for debunking and challenging stereotypical views about foreigners and cultural Others. The growing presence of biracial celebrities and the public discourse surrounding these debates will most definitely raise awareness among people who do not have direct contact with foreigners or mixed children, which will challenge cultural paradigms.

Only 1 in 20 marriages in Japan is a *kokusai kekkon* (international marriage, a term used to indicate a marriage between a Japanese and non-Japanese person). Ninety-five percent of marriages are still between two Japanese people.\(^{34}\) While this ratio will likely decrease further in the near future, there is still a lot of room for Japanese cultural norms to persist unscathed. The awareness that will be raised and the more positive attitudes of foreigners and mixed people that will develop will happen at the individual level, say when a foreigner marries a Japanese person and the Japanese in-laws realize that the foreigner is actually a decent person. Collectively, however, old habits will die hard. This will not be a radical change, but rather a slower process, which will allow time for old ideas about difference to adopt new forms and expressions. In short, while direct encounters will have real impacts at the individual level, at the societal level it will likely take much more time before cultural attitudes are shifted to the positive.

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\(^{34}\) Marriages are becoming increasingly less common in Japan and there are many people in their thirties who have never married or who have divorced. These changing marriage patterns are, in conjunction with Japan’s aging population, one of the main causes for the overall population decline that Japan is experiencing.
CHAPTER 6
SPECULATING THE FUTURE

Japan’s situation produces many more questions than answers. The country’s demographic changes are set to intensify in the coming years and foreigners are likely to comprise greater proportions of Japan’s economy, labor market, and society. No longer will foreign Otherness be confined to the social margins, but instead it will be thrown into direct contact with the Japanese sociocultural status quo and this will happen with a frequency never before experienced. While this has already occurred to a small extent, Japan’s present diversification is miniscule in comparison to what might occur in the not too distant future. These changes carry important ramifications for Japan’s trajectory and how the nation will construct and assert an identity in the twenty-first century. Specifically, these changes will generate wider discussions about the positionality of non-Japanese people within Japan, more critical discussions of what it means to be Japanese, and reconsideration of how biracial, culturally Japanese people fit into Japanese society. At the same time, these changes have implications that help understand how theory and practice converge. Namely, these changes highlight the ways theories about race, ethnicity, nationality, and identity more broadly intersect with the lived realities on the ground in Japan today. This chapter will reconcile this gap between theory and practice by explaining the practical and theoretical ramifications of these changing demographics and interpersonal dynamics.

In a broad sense, the demographic changes highlighted in this dissertation affect notions of identity, Japanese-foreigner relations, and how national identity intersects with notions of difference. Due to of the particular way that Japanese identity has been constructed historically, identity ideologies have played an important role in how society has treated foreigners and minorities. In the future, where foreigners and biracial people will permeate into deeper areas of
Japanese life, there will likely be conceptual changes to the ways that identities and interpersonal relations are constructed.

Theoretically, Japan’s situation helps elucidate the operation and limitations of many of the academic concepts discussed in Chapter 2 (specifically, race, ethnicity, nationality, identity, space, and place). On the one hand, these theories provide a unique perspective into how majority-minority relations develop and can help us to anticipate what might happen henceforth. By using these theories as a lens through which to view Japan’s demographic changes we can better understand the cultural, social, and intellectual ramifications of the rapid diversification of one of the world’s least diverse societies. On the other hand, these theories are often limited by the conceptual frameworks which they impose on sociocultural contexts. No theory can perfectly capture social dynamics in ways that fully represent them and thus such ideas are inherently imperfect. It is worthwhile to also explain the limitations of these theory in an effort to examine how they can be improved upon for future research.

**Japanese Identity, Race, and Culture**

Identities change over time and in relation to different internal and external factors. Thus, people can move in and out of identity categories in accordance with these fluctuations. Poststructuralists have emphasized how identities are constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed, and how these processes have serious implications for intergroup relations (Hall 1997; Norton 2000; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2003). It is thus important to understand how ideas about who is considered Japanese will be reflected through these changing demographics.

Perhaps the most profound change that will occur is the fact that who is considered “Japanese” based on outward appearance will likely change, which will be accompanied by a more expansive set of criteria who will be considered as Japanese ethnically. What might a
typical Japanese person look like in 2050? If Japan’s demographic changes unfold as they are expected to, even in a limited capacity, the answer is that a typical Japanese person will probably look different than today. Considering the increasing commonness of kokusai kekkon (international marriages), as well as the biracial offspring these marriages produce, it is plausible to expect there to be greater diversity in Japan in the decades to come. While today people with different physical appearances are still somewhat rare in Japan, their presence will become increasingly common. By different appearances, I mean here both foreigners and their mixed offspring, essentially anyone who cannot feasibly “pass” as being Japanese based on their outward appearance. Such variation will throw into Japan an element of difference that has more or less been non-existent from notions of identity and belonging previously. In Japan, one can certainly recognize variation in people’s physical features, but these differences are usually very subtle. This is a stark contrast to countries like China, Thailand, or Vietnam, where generations of intermixing between different groups has produced a much wider variation in people’s physical appearance. In Japan, phenotypic difference is still associated with Otherness. However, the forthcoming demographic changes will force the nation to renegotiate its relationship with such differences. As biracial and phenotypically different people become increasingly common, the strong elements of Otherness currently associated with phenotypic incongruity will likely wane, even if only to a very small extent. This means that Japanese society has a greater chance of conceptualizing different people as tangible members of its national collectivity; in essence creating a society that is more diverse and more accepting of diversity. It is difficult to say if these individuals will be accepted as Japanese in full, but as their presence becomes more normalized, there will likely be a greater degree of acceptance – at least passive acceptance – that emerges.
Correspondingly, there is a high likelihood that this gradual diversification will further weaken the race-cultural conflation that still exists in Japan. Historically, this notion was thrown into flux by the fact that *nikkeijin* did not smoothly integrate into Japanese society. The end result was that many Japanese believed that Latin American cultural influences diluted or tarnished their Japanese cultural characteristics, which was allegedly responsible for the *nikkeijin’s* failure to integrate. While this was a convenient excuse to explain this failure, and also to perpetuate the flawed race-cultural conflation that exists in constructions of Japanese identity, the presence of more foreigners and biracial people in Japanese society will once again challenge these notions and further destabilize the conflation of race with culture. As more supposedly “non-pure” people become accepted as tangible members of Japanese society, it will be much harder for Japanese society to seriously conceive of race as having a relation to culture. So many people will be transgressing these norms, that this idea will be unable to persist in any serious capacity, thus dislodging the conceptual associations of race from those of ethnicity.

If this disassociation occurs, it is likely that the status quo will come to place greater emphasis on cultural characteristics and the ability to maintain the cultural order. As demonstrated in the ethnographic data above, and in numerous other ethnographic studies on foreign communities in Japan (Faier 2009; Lopez 2012; Świtk 2016; Tsuda 2003), Japanese society looks favorably on efforts to maintain the cultural flow of life. The literature has largely shown that historically Othered people have often been subsumed into the Japanese national collectivity, effectively overlooking their differences. A typical Japanese person will likely prefer to engage with someone who looks different but who can maintain the cultural flow compared to a person who looks similar but cannot. This was evidenced clearly in the case of the *nikkeijin*, where phenotypic and ethnic ties did not ensure the smooth integration of Japanese
Latin Americans into Japanese society. The impact of this is that the ability to maintain the
cultural status quo will likely emerge as a differentiating factor in determining who is and who is
not Japanese, even more so than is the case today. Thus, it is not unlikely that those who can
perform culturally as Japanese will have a place in Japan’s future national collectivity, whereas
those who are not culturally fluent will not.

This does not mean that future Japan will be free from prejudice and discrimination on
the basis of appearance, but it does indicate that the forms such racisms take will likely be
different from the past. Discrimination in Japan will likely take on a different character as these
cultural elements surpass racial elements as defining who is and who is not Japanese. Because
race is a form of power hierarchy in society (Castells 1989; Crenshw et al. 1995; Delgado 2012;
Siddle 1996), we can look to the function of these power hierarchies for clues as to how different
forms of discrimination may emerge. As the social power structures that undergird racism
against cultural Others change, so will ideas about race that are built into these structures. If, as
noted above, cultural variables play a more important role in determining who is and who is not
Japanese than does appearance, we can hypothesize several different, possibly overlapping,
outcomes.

First, today’s power structures and forms of racism may persist but in weaker forms. As
more Japanese engage foreigners in intimate contexts, we can expect stereotypical images of
foreigners to decrease as Japanese form more meaningful relationship with them. Theoretical
literature (Kim 2001, 2008, 2009) and Japan-specific literature (Burgess 2008; Capobianco 2017;
Faier 2009; Lopez 2012; Świtek 2016) suggest that this is already happening. However, despite
the fact that these forms of racism may decrease, they will not disappear and racism against
outsiders will persist. There is no society that is free of racism, so it would be misleading to
assume that more positive intercultural relations will abolish racism and social stereotypes outright. However, the racisms that do persist may be less pervasive and more restrained. At the same time, some elements of diversity may become increasingly accepted and normalized because this diversity does not disrupt the cultural order. In this case, there will likely be similar forms of racism and prejudice that are asserted against non-Japanese persons, but with much lower frequency.

Second, there will be some actors within Japan who seek to preserve the current racial and power structures by evoking stronger forms of racism and xenophobia. These voices see foreigners and biracial people with resentment and believe that diversity is tantamount to an attack on Japan’s national sovereignty. Such voices can already be seen in emergent forms of right-wing nationalism and xenophobia that are gaining traction, which have rearticulated old forms of racisms against Japan’s historic minority communities, while also expressing discontent with Japan’s demographic changes and what the future may bring. Although these voices are currently rather marginal, how they respond and what influence they will gain can potentially complicate relations between Japanese and foreigners and their children. This has the potential to cause civil strife in greater degrees than Japan has seen before. In 2015, Sweden – a society often thought of as being much more welcoming to foreigners and refugees than Japan – experienced an influx of refugees and migrants that shifted the nation’s demographics 1-2%. This shift led to the development of new forms of nationalism, xenophobia, and populism in Swedish society. Japan, a society much more closed to foreigners and with substantially less diversity, is potentially looking at a demographic change where the influx of foreigners and non-Japanese persons would dwarf the one that Sweden experienced in 2015. How new forms of racism take shape and gain influence will have important ramifications for notions of identity, cross-cultural
relations, and social order in the coming decade. This should be taken as a warning to all parties involved that efforts to diversify Japan should proceed cautiously in all fronts because there is a major risk of escalating ethnic tensions should these changes proceed as anticipated.

Third, it is plausible that people who are today considered marginal or different will be subsumed into existing power structures and that these structures themselves will take a different shape. If cultural variables come to play the most important role in constructing identity, as I have suggested, it is plausible that those who can preserve the cultural status quo will be incorporated into Japanese society’s existing power structures. While this would entail a significant conceptual paradigm shift, which would likely take at least a generation to occur, it is not implausible to suggest this will happen. Rather than marginalizing people on the basis of how they look, these power structures will shift attention to the basis of non-phenotypic variables, such as culture or socioeconomic status or education. If cultural congruity takes on a greater importance, we can anticipate that other variables will take their place.

Any of these possibilities would alter the relationship between race and power in Japan. These three trajectories are not mutually exclusive and instead may happen simultaneously. It is therefore important to consider how notions of race and power are transfigured in this current climate. The results of these changes will likely affect notions of identity and intergroup dynamics that have heretofore not been experienced in Japan.

What would essentially occur is not an abrupt and radical shift in who is considered Japanese but rather a delicate rebalancing of the variables that make such distinctions. Right now, Japanese people who look different occupy somewhat of an ambiguous space in Japanese society. Is Asuka Cambridge (and others like him) really Japanese? This is a topic of debate and contestation. However, Japanese society continues to maintain appearance as an important
variable for differentiating Japanese from non-Japanese. As biracial offspring become more common, the pendulum will slowly but steadily shift, perhaps as far as to the point where only culture is a determinant of Japanese identity. These people will become more accepted through the types of interactions discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Normalized encounters will, in many cases, lead to reconceptualizations of cultural Others in more positive ways. Therefore, we can suspect that over time, intercultural encounters will compel these changes and the emphasis on racial and cultural variables will shift solely to cultural ones.

A shift in localized attitudes underlies and reinforces changes that shift the focus from does one appear different to does one act different. These newfound attitudes do not occur in isolation but instead are accompanied by a shift in cultural, personal, and social dimensions of Japanese life, which to fully understand we can evoke Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” (Bourdieu 1990). The idea of habitus is used to explain ingrained attitudes, beliefs, and value systems that influence the culture of everyday life. These are often subconscious attitudes that are exist in people’s minds. The existence and operationalization of habitus has far-reaching influences in society and plays an important role in shape perceptions of Self and Other. In the case of Japan, it is not unlikely that we will witness a change in habitus that privileges cultural fluency over appearance. Thus, the conceptual framework Japanese people use to make categorical distinctions of in-group and out-group will change, in turn influencing who is and who is not thought of as Japanese.

Such changes in habitus will be brought on through the direct encounters with cultural Others that have been discussed in this dissertation. As more positive relationships between Japanese and foreigners develop, Japanese habitus will change in ways that forefront this difference to a greater capacity. It would be hard to argue that the vignettes discussed above, that
portray Japanese actors as experiencing changing attitudes of cultural Others as a result of their direct encounters, did not emerge from their interactions with an updated sense of habitus that views foreigners more positively. The permeation of positive, cross-cultural interactions will result in habitus changes that ingrain into Japanese perceptions the possibility of accepting outsiders to greater extents.

If this shift from an emphasis on race to an emphasis on culture unfolds as suggested, race will not become obsolete from constructions of Japanese identity. Considering the ways that scholars have discussed race, it is unlikely that race will ever go away as a construction. But it is increasingly likely that the meanings and importance that Japanese actors ascribe to race will change. Racial ideology in Japan, in its current form, which is an essentialized conflation of race with culture that marginalizes difference on biological grounds, cannot possibly continue if biracial persons are subsumed into the national collectivity to a greater extent. Once biracial people begin to be accepted as Japanese, racial ideologies emphasizing purity and biological similarity can no longer persist. What is instead likely to happen is that race will take on new meanings in the construction of Japanese identity and will inform these constructions in novel ways. And in this we can see the malleability of race as a concept.

This will likely entail a shift in the importance of biology in the construction of Japanese identity. Paradoxically, the importance of appearance will wane, while the importance of Japanese “ancestry” may come to play a more profound role. On the one hand, physical differences will become less of a decisive factor in differentiating people. It may be the case that one can be readily subsumed into the national body even if they may look different. Thus, in one sense, the phenotype that is connected to biological differences will decrease.
On the other hand, however, because of the wider changing context in which this decreased emphasis on appearance is occurring, biological Japanese ancestry may play a greater role in differentiating people. Because phenotype would no longer function as a differentiator of people, a more complex understanding of race may emerge in which Japanese ancestry plays a more pronounced role in conceptualizing biracial persons and their role in Japanese society. After all, biracial persons are half-Japanese and some may seek to conceptually explain the integration of said persons on the basis of their ancestry. In other words, the traits that would otherwise differentiate such people are overshadowed by the common Japanese ancestry that they share. This means that Japanese ancestry, or being of biracial parentage, may emerge as important in these new understandings of race.

If the former case were to occur (i.e. if Japanese ancestry would take on a new abstract meaning), there is also the possibility that culture and race may recombine in a new form. In this new race-culture connection, cultural fluency becomes associated with Japanese ancestry, not necessarily “pure” racial ancestry as has heretofore been the case, but with a lessened sense of genetic similarity, through which some ancestral connection to Japan comes to substantiate people’s cultural fluency. This would reconfigure the ways that Japanese society conceptualizes and applied notions of race, which would lead to new understandings of race and culture in Japanese society. These new understandings may in fact conjoin notions of race and culture in new ways that are not yet seen rather than fully disassociating them.

Brubaker suggested looking at race, ethnicity, and nationality as an “integrated family of forms,” which entails examining their interrelation and how they together inform live experiences and shape human relationships. Because there are major practical and conceptual complexities associated with differentiating these concepts in practice, Brubaker posits that it is
better to consider how they function in tandem. This idea is particularly useful for understanding identity in Japan – historically, in the present, and in the future. It is very difficult to conceptually differentiate notions of Japanese national identity from those of ethnic or racial identity; these variables have converged historically to create a particular essence of Japaneseness that combines and conflates them all. Considering the data presented in this dissertation, it is likely that in the future these variables will become even more obscured in the future. A shift to increase the importance of culture would essentially mean that differentiating these will become even more complicated. The end products of this process will likely be quite different from anything that Japan has experienced before.

**Changing the “Imagined Community” of Japan**

Another important theoretical area that would be affected if these demographic changes occur is how ideas of an imagined Japanese community are constructed. Anderson’s notion of imagined communities has proven useful for scholars of many different fields. Originally applied to the case of national identity to explain how members of nation-states develop strong attachments to each other and to their national bodies, scholars have since applied this concept to different variables and explored how people conceptualize themselves as members of different imagined collectivities. These have included membership into imagined racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic communities, amongst others. Such works have shown the different ways identity can be constructed to develop a sense of belonging along different variables. It is therefore worthwhile to consider how Japan’s demographic changes, and their impending effects, can impact notions of an imagined Japanese community. Scholars have shown that notions of imagined collectivity in Japan have changed several times throughout history and that these changes have been compelled by both internal and external forces (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993;
Fujitani 1996; Lie 2001a). In this volatile and precarious environment, it is important to consider what impact these changes will have on Japan conceptually.

Most fundamentally, these demographic changes will affect who is tangibly thought of as a member of Japan’s national collectivity. As these changes take shape, there will also be changes concerning who is considered Japanese. Such changes will likely lead to a wider range of people being conceptualized as Japanese, even if only to a limited extent. This will expand the notion of Japan as an imagined collective body to incorporate these individuals. While the Japanese majority will likely make such conceptualizations with different degrees of acceptance, there will be a time in the not so distant future when people like Cambridge and Miyamoto are unquestionably conceptualized as Japanese. Even if these people are incorporated in a limited capacity and at the social margins, this is a shift that is likely to occur as the shift towards cultural fluency noted above unfolds. This shift also may not happen consciously or purposely. It may be the case that these biracial, slightly different individuals are “subsumed” into the national body subtly, much in the way that historical minorities who have not challenged the status quo and assimilated into society have been incorporated. How exactly this unfolds remains to be seen, but it is likely that such a change will occur sooner than later.

As implied above, this will likely be a very subtle change in that it will gradually become less unique for biracial persons to speak Japanese and act culturally Japanese. Biracial people will quietly be subsumed into the national collectivity and in the process and cultural variables will play a more important role in defining who is and who is not Japanese. On a conceptual level, this will increase the importance of cultural variables and alter what is deemed appropriate of a Japanese “performance” in Goffman’s terms. Goffman’s idea of performance is relevant to the situation in Japan. One’s ability to perform as “Japanese” may take precedence over other
variables. While performance encompasses both how one appears and behavioral traits, in future Japan the later will become much more important. This will change the meanings that are attached to performing as Japanese, passing as Japanese, and being a Japanese person that is part of this imagined collectivity. Who is taken to be Japanese will be determined by who can act Japanese and maintain the cultural status quo. In an extreme case, physical experience might be completely disregarded in the process and cultural variables would be the sole determinant as to who is and who is not part of this imagined national body.

In his model, Goffman noted that audience members (in this case, the evaluating Japanese majority) use clues to uncover information about unknown informants. If certain performative criteria are met, performers (foreigners and mixed people) are approved and accepted into the larger collective body. In Japan, the clues and criteria that factor into this dynamic are likely to change in accordance with demographics and their corresponding sociocultural elements. This will provide an interesting lens through which we can understand Japan’s demographic changes and the ways that mainstream Japanese society evaluates notions of Japanese ness.

This expansion of the imagined community that is Japan will be accompanied by a shift in what Japan itself is and how Japanese nationals conceptualize Japan as an entity on the global stage. Japan is being forced to position itself within a complicated web of global relationships that is filled with volatile spheres of influence, transnational alliances built on shaky foundations, and renewed populist movements. Japan is thus forced to reconcile domestic issues with international ones. How Japan constructs and asserts an identity in this context will influence the way it proceeds throughout the twenty-first century.
This changing sense of imagined Japanese community also reflects a change in the boundary that governs Japanese identity in a Barthian sense. Barth postulated that a fluid boundary mediates who is and who is not conceptualized as members of a particular group. He noted that boundaries change over time and in relation to wider cultural and intergroup dynamics. What we can effectively see in the data and analysis from Japan is that this boundary is mutating in a way that fundamentally alters the “cultural stuff” within it. As Japan’s diversification proceeds, the boundary of who is and who is not considered Japanese will become less clear and eventually it will become more permeable. This is so because as more people who would traditionally be conceived as non-Japanese penetrate this boundary, which happens as a result of positive encounters with the mainstream majority and through a wider conceptual awareness, the boundary itself will effectively change. This fluidity may set the stage for a different form of Japaneseness to emerge in the twenty-first century; one that is more permeable and inclusive of different peoples, but one that is also exclusive based on a new set of criteria.

We can speculate in some ways how this boundary may operate in such a future setting. If we accept my postulation that culture will become the most important variable in defining Japanese identity at face value, we can predict how the boundary of Japanese identity will function. Of utmost importance will be the ability to perform as culturally Japanese. This means perform as Japanese in every sense – linguistically, culturally, and socially. In fact, the shift from race to culture may also place a stricter emphasis on culture, whereby faux pas are looked down upon with greater disdain. In a recent internet documentary titled *A Life in Japan* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQaCZsPLRos), one of the foreigners interviewed was a long-term North American resident of Japan, who explained this dynamic quite well. In short, this American said that he will never be Japanese because of his inability to perform as Japanese.
Despite the fact that he is incredibly fluent in Japanese and runs a traditional Japanese sake shop with his wife, he explains how when he makes errors in speaking, Japanese reply with the term “yappari,” which translates to something like “of course.” Essentially, this is suggesting that the standards for cultural performativity are already high and that as these demographic changes unfold, cultural traits may come to play an even greater role in establishing who is and who is not Japanese. Thus, the boundary of Japanese identity will be increasingly governed by one’s ability to pass as culturally Japanese and in doing so appearance will perhaps play a much less significant role than has been the case historically.

This expansion of the imagined community that is Japan will be accompanied by a shift in what Japan itself is and how Japanese nationals conceptualize Japan as an entity on the global stage. Japan is being forced to position itself within a complicated web of global relationships that is filled with volatile spheres of influence, transnational alliances built on shaky foundations, and renewed populist movements. Japan is thus forced to reconcile domestic issue with international ones. How Japan constructs and asserts an identity in this context will influence the way it proceeds throughout the twenty-first century. A key factor in this projection will be the nation’s relationship to diversity and to outsiders. Does Japan become a nation welcoming of migrants and embracing of a multicultural society? Or does populism gain a foothold in Japan, as elsewhere, and does the nation take a staunchly anti-migrant approach that produces more problem relationships between Japan and its minority groups? Only time will tell, but how this trajectory develops will have a considerable impact on Japanese-minority relations into the future.
New Minority Identities, Space, and Place

Alternatively, in this changing environment, there will likely emerge more opportunities for minority populations to assert and develop identities that heretofore have not been possible. Cambridge appeared on national television showing cleats that expressed his dual identity as half-Jamaican and half-Japanese. This is something that has historically only been met with marginalization and discrimination. Historically, there have not been many opportunities for minorities in Japan to express anything like a “hyphenated” or “dual” identity (Lie 2001a, 2009). However, Cambridge may be evidence that this is to some extent changing. There may emerge some space for biracial persons, *ha-fu*, and other minorities to tangibly assert their identity within Japan and receive some sort of recognition.

In his ethnographic study of the changing conditions surrounding Japan’s Burakumin population, Joseph Hankins has noted that in the twenty-first century, it has become fashionable and culturally acceptable to assert a Buraku identity in some contexts (Hankins 2009, 2012). This identity is not only tolerated but is even encouraged by local government leaders for publicity purposes. Hankins explains that this is not necessarily done out of concern for Buraku people or out of genuine benevolence but rather because the publicity brought on by these efforts appears politically fashionable and works to substantiate contemporary discourses that argue for greater minority rights in society. By appearing to support Buraku groups’ activities, these politicians and government bodies are able to appear concerned without actually getting significantly involved in minority issues.

This is an indication that diversity, and the acceptance of minority identities in particular, is becoming more common. If Buraku groups are able to express a public identity, call attention to past wrongdoings, and receive some support from local politicians, this means that the door is
opened for similar efforts in the future. These future efforts may come from children of foreigners in Japan, who are increasingly looking for a voice and a consciousness with which to relate. There is a greater likelihood that such voices will have a channel to express themselves in the future.

Such expressions and pluralities would also impact constructions of similarity and difference. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, Japanese identity is one that is highly spatialized and connected to Japan’s geography and urban landscape. How the relationship between identity and spatiality will change in the future remains uncertain, but it is likely that there will be some conceptual reconfigurations as these changes occur. To what extent remains debatable, but some important points can be recognized here.

First, the ties that link identity to Japan’s geography will remain unchanged. Japan will remain an ancestral homeland of the Japanese people that factors prominently into constructions of identity. Culture will remain closely tied up with notions of belonging that are rooted in Japan’s spatiality, despite the fact that more people may be incorporated into this identity. There is thus far no evidence that these associations will weaken.

Second, some ill-intentioned actors may evoke spatial understandings of Japanese identity as a means to assert new forms of xenophobia and prejudice. Specifically, conservative voices may voice, with greater power and influence, their concerns over immigration and its effects on Japan. In doing so, they will renew sentiments that are hostile to foreigners and in turn generate populist sentiments. This is arguably what happened in the case of Erika and in the new upsurge of anti-immigration voices that are emerging amongst the ongoing debates about whether immigration should be permitted. This is an important development to consider because
if such voices gain influence, this could spell serious trouble for Japan’s relationship with diversity henceforth.

It is important to note that these anti-foreigner sentiments are inherently tied up with Japan’s spatiality, which is closely associated with Japanese identity. Japan is not merely a geographic entity within which these events are unfolding, but rather an active and politicized space that is conceptually linked to notions of identity. Although the nation-state apparatus collectivized and unified the Japanese population into one coherent body, the connection that Japanese share to the nation’s geography has much deeper roots (Fujitani 1996; Morris-Suzuki 1998). Thus, such tensions have the potential to exacerbate into forms of conflict that have serious implications for the ways foreigners and Japanese relate to one another. Hostile sentiments, such as those directed towards long-term and indigenous minorities in Japan, may be repackaged and levied in more aggressive forms, which would affect the ability of foreigners to integrate into Japanese society.

On the other hand, foreign communities may play a role in exacerbating these tensions. As foreign communities make claims to space in ways that Japanese view as problematic, there also emerges a greater likelihood that tensions will compound. One fact that is often taken for granted, in scholarly and public discourse, is that most foreign communities in Japan emphatically do not partake in serious efforts to undermine Japanese conventions and fight for their rights as do minorities in other places. For the most part, there are no organized resistance movements that mobilize foreign populations in seriously disruptive ways. There are some rights organizations that support long-term residents and Brazilians, but these do not cause the same disruptions as do resistance movements elsewhere. However, this does not guarantee that this trend will continue. If foreigners, particularly their children, continue to encounter
marginalization and half equal status, there is a greater likelihood that some voices within this population will collectivize and seek to gain further rights and recognition, as well as to decrease the stigma that is associated with being mixed. To date, foreigners have aimed to integrate into Japanese society and many see their efforts to integrate as proof that they are serious about living in Japan. They do this knowing that they will never be accepted as Japanese because of their difference, but they do so anyway. There is no guarantee this trend will continue into the future and if anti-immigrant and populist voices strengthen, the probability of these changes happening becomes even greater.

These efforts by foreigners are closely tied to their ability and ambition to “make place” in Japan. These efforts have thus far been largely limited to certain locations in Japanese space, which are often conceptually detached from mainstream Japan. While vibrant ethnic communities may exist in such places, they are so far quite marginal. Those Japanese who may frequent such places often tend to be more interculturally minded and enjoy the experience of engaging with foreigners in these settings. Problematic examples, such as the YouTube video of Brazilians occupying a park (Chapter 3) and the historic example of Iranians occupying parks and using them to sell fraudulent products (Chapter 2), have been very much contained to isolated incidents. However, there is again no guarantee that this trend will continue into the future. How newcomer foreigners make place in Japan will also affect Japanese-foreigner relations. Because place making is closely tied to identity, the strength and resistance of the identities tied to these made places will potentially affect the identities and willingness of different groups to integrate and make efforts to incorporate into Japanese life.

It is therefore important that we consider, and further investigate, the different techniques that foreign communities use to “make place” and position themselves in Japanese society, as
well as what are the material results of this place making. Looking at immigrant and minority positionality from a macro-perspective, there is certainly no one size fits all model. This is true both historically and today. The Germans and Scandinavians came to be positioned very differently in American society than did the Irish, Nigerians are positioned very differently in the United Kingdom than are Somalis, and Hui Muslims maintain a very different relationship to the Chinese state than do Uighurs. It is therefore imperative that we continue to drill down into the local “places” that foreign communities make out of Japanese space in order to more clearly understand their patterns of incorporation. Are these places of resistance? Or are they places of communality? Do they function as tangible, law-abiding migrant support networks? Or do they operate as places of criminality and facilitate illegal acts within Japan? These are questions that are better answered at localized levels. Understanding their outcomes will better help us to ascertain what the future trajectory may hold for foreign positionality within Japan.

**Power of Communication**

In this setting, it is important not to overlook the role of language and communication in facilitating these changes. It is easy to conceptualize Japan’s impending changes as occurring in a vacuum, in which language and communication are taken for granted. However, I argue that it is crucial to carefully consider their roles in facilitating these changing relationships. Together, change patterns of language and communication are catalyzing new forms of social relations between Japanese and foreigners and mixed people, which have heretofore not been possible. If it were not for the particular role of language and the cross-cultural contexts in which language is being used, it is questionable whether the changes discussed in this dissertation would have unfolded as they have been.
The entire argument put forth in this dissertation centers around the changing communicative encounters and wider patterns of interpersonal and intergroup communication that are unfolding between Japanese and foreigners. The demographic changes that Japan is experiencing are essentially pushing foreigners and biracial people into closer interactions with Japanese people than ever before and with greater frequency than ever before. The result is that Japanese people are now engaging foreigners and non-Japanese people more regularly, which are challenging existing notions of Japan as a homogenous society in new ways and is disrupting the myth that foreign Otherness must be relegated to the social margins of society. Intercultural communication, not merely the presence of foreign difference within Japan, causes these changes to occur as they do. Thus, the functions, channels, and impacts of intercultural communication need to be recognized as mechanisms for understanding foreigner-Japanese relations in the twenty-first century.

Several studies have already explained how changing relationships between Japanese and foreign actors are compelling novel forms of personal relationships to develop. Specifically, these new types of interpersonal encounters allow Japanese actors to conceptualize foreign difference in new and often times more positive ways (Burgess 2008; Capobianco 2017; Faier 2009; Lopez 2012; Świtek 2016). These changes are happening because Japanese and foreigners are forming meaningful relationships, using the medium of the same language, which is compelling changes to identities and interpersonal relations. As scholars of intercultural communication and applied linguistics have noted, these often taken for granted processes play formidable roles in shaping interpersonal dynamics.

Green and Kadoya (2015) recently observed that Japanese who have knowledge of foreign languages conceptualize foreigners more positively. From a larger perspective, this
suggests that more serious language education initiatives and more genuine interests in foreign cultures can facilitate the integration of foreigners in Japanese society. This essentially involves cultivating a greater cultural sensitivity within Japanese actors. This can be a practical strategy to help promote attitudes towards diversity.

As noted in the ethnographic data above, the encounters that are unfolding between Japanese and foreigners are yielding new outcomes. These outcomes are both positive and negative, and impact Japanese-foreign relations in more diverse ways than have previously been documented. It is therefore important once again to drill down into these interactions and communicative encounters to more precisely understand how these changes are unfolding in this volatile climate. It is precisely because these encounters are so qualitatively different that they possess the power to enact dramatic changes in the Japanese who have them. And it is only through a fine-grained analysis of encounters and their implications that we can begin to understand how these changes are unfolding and truly impacting Japanese society. This dissertation has aimed to highlight some of the early ways that such changes are unfolding but there remains more work must be done. In particular, the material effects of these encounters need to be further identified and expounded upon. Understanding these changes and the ways that interpersonal communicative encounters affect interpersonal relations will be important to understand the trajectory of Japanese-foreign relations and constructions of Japanese identity as they progress.

The Macro-Micro Connection

In concluding this dissertation, I would like to say something about the way this thesis has aimed to link the macro and the micro. In discussing changing dynamics of Japanese-foreigner relations and the uncertainty surrounding constructions of Japanese identity in the
contemporary context, this dissertation has jumped between the micro and the macro. In essence, it has sought to uncover how micro-level encounters can potentially impact macro-level ideas and realities. Some may raise issue with this approach, so I would like to say a few things about why such an approach is justified and necessary.

In adopting such an approach, I have aimed to use the micro as a lens through which the macro can be anticipated. Specifically, the data ascertained from foreigners and Japanese on the ground are meant to be used as indicators into the ways larger social, cultural, and structural changes may develop in the forthcoming years. Admittedly, this is a difficult task because gathering data from different sources at a local level can produce idiosyncratic findings that may or may not be true on a larger scale. However, this approach also provides more nuanced data than macro-level surveys can provide, as well as more generalizable data than can a localized ethnographic approach. For example, my original research project intended to examine the experiences of Africans living in Japan. While this would have provided detailed insights into the conditions surrounding Japan’s African communities, it would have been very hard to seriously use such data to say something about wider social trends in Japan. By incorporating a more diverse range of foreign voices that speak to the changing conditions foreigners experience, this research has looked to provide new insights into Japanese-foreigner relations as a whole. And, as I have hopefully demonstrated, understanding foreigner experiences in Japan is a very idiosyncratic process that is difficult to generalize, which is why such an approach is valuable. It essentially uses qualitative data to identify different pathways and concepts through which the macro-level changes Japan is experiencing can be further investigated and understood.

Furthermore, underlying these arguments is a more general call for a renewed framework for conceptualizing Japanese-foreign relations. To date, most of the academic literature on
Japanese relations and Japanese identity have discussed the problematics of such encounters and the ways that both parties leave these encounters with animosity towards one another. Efforts to understand the more diversified outcomes of these encounters are scant to non-existent and only recently have some scholars touched upon these variegated outcomes. Previous qualitative scholarship from the 1980s onwards rightfully sought to highlight and deconstruct notions of Japanese identity that were based on essentialist and racialist ideas. These works provided important contributions to scholarly and mainstream discussions about minority rights, the harmful nature of Japanese identity as it pertains to foreign and minority groups, and the material effects of these identity conceptions. Most would agree that these previous works have succeeded in raising attention to the problematic attributes of Japanese identity and Japan in general. Although actual progress related to these issues has been slow, we are indebted to these authors for their contributions.

That being said, the context of Japan has changed dramatically since these studies were conducted and even more so since the research and ideas these studied critiqued were produced. Japan is currently in a state of rapid change that can impact the nation’s future dramatically. New problems are emerging that Japanese society has never before encountered. It is not merely the emergence of one particular social change – say for instance an aging society – but rather it is a convergence of many significant changes that provides a new and more complex context in which Japan is grappling with these problems. Evidence has also indicated that it is not merely negative outcomes that emerge from such encounters (as has been emphasized in previous literature) but instead there are a multitude of different outcomes, including those of which are positive and neutral, as well as those that are negative. This is why it is important for us to
approach Japan’s changes with a new framework for thinking about Japanese and foreign relationships in the twenty-first century.

When presenting some of the findings from this research at a conference in Japan, one of the audience members questioned how generalizations can be drawn from this type of research. Since I did not conduct ethnography with one grounded community, this scholar asked how it would be possible to reconcile this fact with the conclusions that I have drawn. In my answer, I recognized the validity of his question and thanked him for his critique of my research. However, I also explained that through the ethnographic data I collected, I believe that we can recognize patterns of social interaction between Japanese and foreigners, which have heretofore not been emphasized in scholarly studies. Thus, the outcomes of these patterns of interaction have been left dangerously underexplored. The new patterns provide a diversified perspective from which scholars can approach these problems. At the same time, I emphasized that these new patterns of interaction are not limited to the informants mentioned in my study alone. They are instead emblematic of wider changes in social relations that are happening in Japan and as Japanese society continues to diversify via these demographic and sociocultural changes, these types of relations and patterns of interaction will become increasingly common. Whether or not they will produce similar or different outcomes than have been observed here is anyone’s guess. However, it is vital to recognize that these changes will happen – to some extent at least – and that the outcomes as indicated in the data above will become increasingly commonplace in twenty-first century Japan. This is true of the negative and positive outcomes. And the only way that we can really understand the changes that are happening in Japan is to try to bridge the micro with the macro in a way that captures the dynamics of both. I have sought to achieve this, to some extent, through the research conducted here and the analysis provided in this dissertation.
Japanese Identity in the 21st Century

This research has ultimately shown that Japan is approaching a crossroads in its history. The nation is about to arrive at a juncture that will profoundly shape not only the nation’s identity in the twenty-first century, but also its political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics. The country’s demographics are changing and this reality cannot be ignored, as many public officials, members of the general public, and politicians have done thus far. In this concluding section, I would like to tie up a few loose ends and offer a few thoughts about what lies ahead for Japan.

Most obviously, Japan is going to have to come to terms with its relationship to foreign Otherness one way or another. Whether this involves incorporating foreigners and their biracial offspring and a privileging of cultural over racial characteristics, or if it involves further marginalizing foreign Otherness and igniting social strife, Japanese society will need to address the fact that foreigners are going to comprise greater proportions of the nation’s population. As suggested in this dissertation, the reality will probably fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, with different actors adopting different perspectives. But the truth is, for Japan’s labor shortages and struggling economy, the solution is foreigners or robots, and the robotics field is not quite advanced enough to satisfy all the needs of the labor market and stimulate the economy the way foreign workers can (and are). Japan is going to have to come to terms with the foreign issue earnestly and sooner than many anticipate.

Coming to terms with foreignness and the emergence of a more pluralist society also means dealing with the social and cultural issues that emerge with them. Thus far, foreigners have remained relatively marginal in Japan; they are usually limited to isolated segments of Japanese space and besides coming into contact with Japanese in select (but increasingly
common) contexts, they are by and large not a commanding presence in Japanese society. This fact, however, is quickly changing, with several implications for Japan. First, foreigners are going to become more normalized in Japanese society than they are now. This is an important pillar of this dissertation because the whole premise of my argument is based on these increasingly normalized encounters. In other words, foreign Otherness will no longer be marginal but instead it will become part of the mainstream. This is the sphere in which Japan’s renegotiation with foreign Otherness will take shape.

Additionally, large numbers of foreigners in Japan means that there will be louder calls for foreign support institutions within Japan. Again, this is something that has thus far been limited. Besides a few localized support groups and ethnic community organizations, there have been few groups of foreigners who have mobilized in effort to gain rights and recognition in Japanese society. This will change as the numbers of foreigners increases. The problems foreigners face in Japan will no longer be so limited in scope and there will be greater need to answer these calls for assistance. If and how Japan actually does so, remains to be seen. However, this is something that is inevitable as the raw number of foreigners in Japan increases.

It is curious to consider who this might actually look like in practice. We can envision foreigners and their biracial offspring playing an increasingly prominent role perhaps in corporate and public positions. There may be a larger number of foreigners and their offspring participating in traditional Japanese festivals at a local level. Both acts would increase the consciousness of foreigners in Japan. Foreigners and biracial half-Japanese persons have already come to represent Japan on national sports teams, win national beauty pageants, and be assimilated into the national body when possible and convenient. This conspicuous presence of foreigners in Japanese society will likely continue whether the nation proceeds down a course of
radical assimilation or radical xenophobia. In other words, this growing public presence cannot be avoided. This will have implications for Japan both domestically and internationally, for the imagined entity that is Japan will be increasingly reshaped in both spheres. As noted, it would be hard to walk through Tokyo or Osaka and not soon find foreigners living there and working within the urban landscape. This phenomenon will soon permeate deeper into Japan, commercially, culturally, and geographically. This is significant in that it will reshape how things are discussed, how life is conceptualized, and how Otherness is engaged.

From the outside, people will realize that Japan is not simply a nation of Japanese people, much like I realized on my first trip to Japan in 2009. Having an anthropological mindset, I noticed this diversity on my first trip and pursued it the end point of this dissertation. Not everyone who visits Japan is as anthropologically curious as me, but in the near future they won’t have to be. I cannot imagine what the first-time traveler to Japan in 2019 might feel when their notions of mine were shattered upon arrival. As more and more visitors to Japan recognize Japan’s plurality, discourses about Japan will subsequently change accordingly. This brings up an entirely different question that in itself would require a dissertation to address: How will Japan’s demographic changes affect discourses about Japan from outside perspectives? This question is important because history is filled with examples of cases in which exogenous pressures and ideologies have influenced domestic matters in different places. To cite just a very simple example, imagine if the presence of foreign workers in Japan becomes so pervasive and conspicuous, that socially conscious foreign visitors to Japan become interested in the rights of said workers. This could lead to novel forms of pressure levied against Japan that forces the nation to more seriously address its immigration policy. While realistically getting Japan to make
meaningful changes to its immigration policy is likely a pipedream, it is not impossible that outsiders’ perceptions of what Japan is changes in significant and meaningful ways.

When considered together, all of these factors produce a very uncertain trajectory for Japan moving forward. The nation will have a lot of serious questions to deal with, all of which will carry profound social, political, economic, and cultural implications. This dissertation has aimed to show how the relationship between Japanese and foreigners in contemporary Japan is changing and how it is changing in novel ways that have implications for notions of identity in a wider sphere. Unlike other countries in which a history of immigration is well-established and is recognized as part of the nation’s history, the phenomenon of contemporary migration is still very new to Japan. This is not to suggest that Japanese identity has never been historically contested, but rather that it is now becoming contested in qualitatively different ways and in ways that have profound implications on the trajectory of Japanese society. We are only now witnessing the start of many of these processes. We cannot say for certain how things will develop, but considering the data presented here, we can obtain a slightly fuller picture of what lies ahead.
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