Reinforcing identities? Non-Japanese residents, television and cultural nationalism in Japan

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Abstract

Between 1997 and 2007 the foreign population of Japan increased by more than 45 % making it the largest at any time in the postwar period, constituting 1.69 % of the overall population. At the same time, the trans-border flows of people, capital and media increased at an unprecedented rate. In the Japanese media, there has been a marked increase in the number of television programs featuring non-Japanese. This paper focuses on the phenomenon of non-Japanese residents of Japan on variety television programs and shows that the increase of foreign faces on Japanese television is significant as non-Japanese residents are used here to reinforce ideas of Japanese cultural identity. These programs, while usually advertised as opportunities to look at issues from an international perspective, instead highlight perceived differences which exist between Japan and the outside world as a form of entertainment, rather than to seriously examine the issues Japan faces as it becomes more international. Employing a discourse analysis of recent programs as well as interviews with program participants, this paper examines media mechanisms which create an image of the foreign "other" that is employed to create, perpetuate and strengthen the idea of a unique Japanese cultural identity.

Keywords: non-Japanese residents; cultural nationalism; variety television programs; Nihonjinron; discourses of Japanese uniqueness.

アイデンティティの強化?日本における在留外国人、テレビと文化的ナショナリズム

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1997年から2007年の10年間で、日本における在留外国人の数は総人口の1.69%を占めるようになり、戦後最高となった。それと同時に人、資本、メディアのトランスボーダー化もかつてない速度で進み、外国人が出演するテレビ番組が著しく増加した。

本稿は、日本の在留外国人が日本のバラエティ番組に登場する現象に焦点を当て、近年放映された番組を対象に、言説分析の手法と番組出演者に対するインタビューを通して、在留外国人がいかにしてメディアによって「他者」として映し出され、そのことがいかに日本の文化的アイデンティティを強化しているかを考察する。

在留外国人が出演する番組はしばしば、日本が抱えている問題を国際的な視点で考える機会として宣伝されているが、実際にはそうした問題を真摯に検証することなく、日本と世界との差異を一種のエンターテイメント化することで、「他者」として在留外国人を表象し、日本の文化的アイデンティティの強化に寄与しているのに過ぎないのである。

1. Introduction

It is October 1998. We are in a brightly lit television studio in Tokyo, where one hundred panelists sit in rows, numbered and wearing tags pinned to their chests. Popular film director and television personality Beat Takeshi appears, wearing a gaudy dinner jacket composed of hundreds of national flags sewn together. Lights flash, panelists clap and a heated debate begins. Whilst the flashy studio, smiling television personalities and scenario are not unusual for a Japanese variety television program, what differs in this case is the fact that the panelists featured are all non-Japanese residents of Japan, commonly referred to as *gaikokujin* or its somewhat pejorative abbreviated form, *gaijin* [foreigners]. The tags on their chests display not only their names but also their countries' flags, and when panelists are singled out to speak they are called not by name, but by nationality.

According to the Japan Ministry of Justice, in 2007 there were more than two million registered non-Japanese living in Japan, comprising 1.69% of the population, a 45.2% increase in the past ten years. Showing a steady increase over the past two decades, by 2006, 6% of marriages in Japan involved one non-Japanese partner − and the number of children born to these couples continues to rise. While such increases may seem small in comparison to other highly developed economies, in Japan, which has long been considered racially and ethnically homo-

geneous (*tanitsu minzoku*), this shift is of great significance. Whether by a conscious process or otherwise, Japan is very slowly beginning to internationalize. In the context of an increasing non-Japanese population, questions of Japanese national identity and Japanese nationalism have become increasingly important. This paper will consider the issue through the lens of entertainment television programs featuring non-Japanese residents, by examining depictions of foreign residents on television and the significance of such images in an increasingly, if reluctantly, international Japan.

1.1. Non-Japanese residents of Japan and the media

In the immediate postwar period the majority of foreigners − defined by Arudou (2006) as legal visa holders staying for more than three months − were classified as Special Permanent Residents (*tokubetsu eijūsha*), usually of Chinese or Korean heritage, having immigrated or been forcibly moved to Japan during the Second World War. While special permanent residents continued to make up the largest foreign population for a large portion of the postwar period, in the 1980s and 1990s, as Japan began a policy of accepting foreign workers, the demographics of the non-Japanese population began to change. Growing Brazilian and other Latin American communities composed primarily although not entirely of *Nikkeijin* [i.e., descendents of Japanese who emigrated to Latin America in the early 20th century] as well as influxes of South East Asian workers and foreign language teachers from the United States and Europe mean that today, for the first time, Japan could be said to have a visible foreign population, many of whom are choosing to call Japan their permanent home. There were 869,986 permanent foreign residents in total in 2007, a figure which − according to Arudou (2006) − demonstrates that foreigners in Japan are, "graduating from `temporary guest' to immigrant."

As the foreign population has grown, the number of foreign faces in the media has also increased. Once relegated to television commercials (Creighton 1997) or shows featuring *gaijin tarento* [foreign media personalities] (Hagiwara and Kunihiro 2004), it is now common for "ordinary" non-Japanese residents to appear on television, expressing their views on everything from Japanese food to politics. Programs featuring non-Japanese panelists came to prominence with the broadcast of the phenomenally successful variety show *Koko ga hen da yo, Nihonjin* [*This is what is strange about you Japanese*]. Hosted by the internationally well-known Takeshi Kitano (better known outside of Japan as Beat Takeshi) the program featured foreign residents of Japan commenting on aspects of Japanese culture they found strange or difficult to under-

stand. Aired from 1998 to 2002 on the TBS network, this show featured a panel of 100 foreign residents of Japan, "facing off" against Beat Takeshi and four other Japanese *tarento*. Although the theme varied from week to week, one aspect remained constant − the animated and often antagonistic debate between Japanese and non-Japanese participants.

It has been ten years since *Koko ga hen da yo, Nihonjin* was first broadcast and the genre of variety shows with foreign panelists at their core remains popular. *Sanma's koi no karasawagi gaikokujin supesharu* [*Much ado about love foreigner specials*] *Ai chiteru!* [*I love you*] *Generation Y*, *Cool Japan*, and many other recent programs have featured panels of non-Japanese and demonstrate how the "foreigner panel show" has become a regular part of the Japanese television scene. However, despite an initial slew of research into the *Koko ga hen da yo, Nihonjin* phenomenon (Hagiwara and Kunihiro 2004; Iwabuchi 2005), very little work has focused on recent programs of the genre and their significance, despite the fact that the foreign population continues to increase. Although the shows themselves claim to be contributing to international understanding by creating a space for dialogue between Japanese and non-Japanese, this paper will argue that upon deeper examination, programs featuring non-Japanese residents are in fact vehicles of cultural nationalism which, rather than providing a space for dialogue, instead provide a platform upon which ideas of Japanese national identity and even nationalism may be enforced.

1.2. From Japanese nationalism to "banal" and "cultural" nationalism in Japan

Much research has been dedicated to understanding mechanisms of national identity, national character and nationalism. Gellner (1983: 7) offers two definitions of the nation: first, that "Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture" and, second, if those two men "recognize each other as belonging to the same nation." In other words, an idea of a shared identity and culture is paramount. Similarly, Burgess (2010) draws on the concept of an imagined national identity created through discourses and narratives of a community with a shared history and culture. Concepts of nationalism in the postwar period continue to widen. As Karasawa (2002: 647) explains, "modern forms of nationalism, particularly in the post-Cold War era, are not limited to a political or militaristic nature," but instead are played out in the everyday. To explain such everyday nationalism, Billig (1995: 6) coined the term "banal nationalism" to refer to the "ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced."

This paper focuses on one particular form of banal nationalism, termed by Yoshino (1992) as "cultural nationalism," as a lens through which to examine depictions of non-Japanese in the Japanese media. While different forms of nationalism remain mutually dependent and deeply intertwined, cultural nationalism is somewhat different to political nationalism in both purpose and aim and is described by Yoshino as aiming to "regenerate the national community by creating, preserving or strengthening a people's cultural identity when it is felt to be lacking, inadequate or threatened" (Yoshino 1992: 1). Cultural nationalism underwent somewhat of a resurgence in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, Yoshino points out, adding that during this period Japanese nationalism was expressed in a new form of literature commonly known as Nihonjinron, which can be translated as "theories of the Japanese" or "discussions on the Japanese."

Nihonjinron writings cover a vast range of topics, but almost all are examined in a particular fashion − through comparison with other countries and cultures. In fact, Nihonjinron draws almost exclusively on comparisons with the outside world, in particular the West, in order to maintain its argument of Japanese uniqueness. Wallman's explanation of the creation of the boundary perspective of ethnicity − namely that "the process by which `their' difference is used to enhance the sense of `us' for the purposes of organization or identification" (Wallman 1979: 3) − is one way to understand the way in which the "other" is used as a category to understand and demarcate an "us." As de Bary explains, "the image of the nation as an organic unity always relies on the configuration of that nation's cultural `other'" (de Bary et al. 2005: ix).

Some studies have focused on elements of Nihonjinron theory found in the Japanese media without mentioning Nihonjinron directly. In one such study, Creighton (1997) describes the way in which foreigners in television commercials are used to circumvent Japanese social conventions and reinforce homogeneity, explaining that media portrayals of foreigners in Japan usually show them as nothing more than *misemono* [i.e., something to be displayed or put on show] in order to sell an image. Creighton draws on the concepts of *uchi* [inside] and *soto* [outside] to explain how images of the foreign are "part of the process through which Japaneseness is constructed as normative in contrast to foreigners who represent universal `Otherness'" (Creighton 1997: 212), adding that while *uchi* and *soto* are concepts that have previously applied to the definition between networks and groups within Japan, there is also a general sense that all of Japan constitutes an *uchi*, as opposed to the *soto* of everything that lies outside of Japan. Creighton thus concludes that television commercials using the image of the for-

eign "help construct and perpetuate an imagined Japanese self-iden-tity" and reinforce a cultural "other." While the process of "othering" is by no means limited to the media, or even to Japan, when it appears in the Japanese media it fits very well with the intentions of Nihonjin-ron-style cultural nationalism in Japan, presenting the image of a very different "other" in order to re-examine Japanese cultural identity, a process continually played out in the national media.

1.3. Media effects, stereotyping and ideology

Of all popular media consumed today, television exerts one of the greatest, if not the greatest influence on people's perceptions of the outside world. Yoshimi (2006) goes so far as to call television "the national medium" and claims that television programs play to a na-tional consciousness (in Japan) now more than ever before. Chun (2007) similarly argues that television played an important role in the construction of a postwar national identity and came to fill the void left after the collapse of national pride in the wake of World War II. As Japan has faced increasing contact with the outside world, social relations and identities have become more complicated, and "TV has continued to play a central catalytic role in social change" (Yoshimi 2006: 483). The mediascape of the 21st century may have begun a rapid transformation, but as Gerbner et al. (2002: 43−44) explain, "televi-sion's mass ritual shows no signs of weakening, as its consequences are increasingly felt around the globe," adding that television maintains its place as the "primary common source of socialization and everyday information", information that is "usually cloaked in the form of enter-tainment."

Television programs of all genres contain ideological messages. Fiske (1987: 14) stated that "the dominant ideology is structured into popular texts by the discourses and conventions that inform the practices of productions and that are part of their reception." Whilst this research focuses particularly on the texts themselves, it cannot be overlooked that media, even entertainment television has a large, if ultimately un-measurable impact on audiences and their perceptions of the world around them. The images television projects to audiences are signifi-cant because, as Hagiwara (1998: 222) explains, "[i]n constructing social reality, mass-mediated information generally plays a greater role in do-mains where we do not have direct experience or other means to test its veracity." Hagiwara et al. (2004: 77) sum up the issue concisely, pointing out that most people garner information via the media regard-ing situations with which they do not have direct contact themselves and that in Japan's case this is especially true, particularly in the case

of countries where few Japanese visit. Burgess (2010) mentions that less than one in ten Japanese have opportunities to speak or interact with foreigners, meaning that the media plays a great role in the formation of Japanese perceptions of non-Japanese even within Japan. The media's role in creating an image of worlds that viewers have no opportunity to experience firsthand cannot be disregarded.

2.   Research focus and design

2.1. The programs

Two programs representative of the foreigner panel program genre were selected, one from commercial broadcaster TBS, one from the national broadcaster NHK, and subjected to detailed analysis. Appearing ten years after *Koko ga hen da yo, Nihonjin* first aired on NHK, *Ai chiteru!*[1] featured a large panel of foreign residents and a confrontational style similar to its predecessor. However, *Ai chiteru!* differed from *Koko ga hen da yo, Nijonjin* in two important ways. First, the panelists were all foreign women. Second, rather than focusing on discussing Japan directly, the women were called upon to give "unscripted" advice to weekly guests about love and dating in a Japanese context, but from their own cultural perspectives. Although the focus was not exclusively on critiquing Japanese culture, the fact that panelists spoke from their own cultural perspectives in relation to dating in Japan meant that an overarching theme of comparing "outside countries" to Japan was sustained throughout the show. Reference to the TBS-run *Ai chiteru!* website gives some insight into the type of program the producers were aiming to create.

> This is a program featuring foreigners who are worried about love! However, the main focus of the show are the "very experienced foreign women from a variety of countries and with a variety of views about love who provide advice about love." What kind of advice will they give? There is no doubt that they will provide many strange answers that Japanese could not even imagine!! (TBS Terebi *Ai chiteru!* 2005)[2]

As the above passage demonstrates, *Ai chiteru!* appeared to be deliberately controversial. Female panelists were dressed in a provocative manner, often more closely resembling bar hostesses than "ordinary" foreign residents, and weekly discussions included such topics such as homosexuality, difficulties dating Japanese men, cheating and affairs (i.e., dating married men and women), *otaku* and men with strange hobbies, sadomasochistic practices, and other sexual practices.

The second program analyzed was NHK's *Cool Japan*.[3] The program's main objective is to present an apparently "unscripted" discussion of various aspects of Japanese culture and to predict what the next "cool" thing to come out of Japan would be. Similarly to *Koko ga hen da yo, Nihonjin* and *Ai chiteru!*, this program features confrontation and debate between the non-Japanese panelists and the Japanese hosts and weekly guests. Fronted by a middle-aged Japanese male host and a younger Japanese-American bicultural female co-host, *Cool Japan* also features a weekly guest, usually a Japanese with experience living overseas who is described as "having an international career." The program invites eight non-Japanese panelists to discuss the coolness of Japan, sending them on fact-finding missions before playing the pre-taped segments on the show and debating the culture or broadly defined topic that was presented in the tapes with input from the three Japanese representatives in the studio. Previous episodes included titles/topics such as song, idols, Japanese men, Japanese women, underground, agriculture, railroads, appliances, sightseeing, and alcohol.

The participants were from a variety of backgrounds, and the program website requests that applicants wishing to appear on the show have lived in Japan for less than a year.[4] At the beginning of the program, as the panelists are shown taking their seats, a voice-over announces that eight foreigners who have only been in Japan a short while will be participating in "heated discussions" (*atsui tōku batoru*) about the topic of the week.

2.2. Methodology

Both programs were subjected to what Baldry and Thibault (2006) term a "multimodal transcription and text analysis" in which they were broken down shot by shot in order to examine the visual and audio components that come together to create a unique discourse. Baldry et al. (2006) and Deacon et al. (1999) utilized similar methodologies in order to examine how shot type, framing, scene content and soundtrack come together to create a story and meaning in television programming. This methodology, adjusted to suit the style of Japanese variety television, was employed with each shot divided into time, shot (i.e., wide, mid, close, zoom), shot content (i.e., action), music/sounds, speaker, dialogue, screen drops/subtitles, symbols/graphics, and the viewing window.

There are some particular features commonly used in Japanese television that are rarely seen on television in either Europe or the United States. The first is the viewing window, used to show studio panelists' reactions to pre-recorded videos featured on the program. Second is

the screen drop (*teroppu*), which frequently subtitles speakers or adds graphics to emphasize what is being said. Another particular feature of the Japanese variety show is the high rate of shot change, up to once a second in some cases. Although Baldry et al. (2006) recommend that an extra "meaning" column be added to the analysis set, due to the extremely high shot change rate of both programs, I decided that meaning would be better examined not shot by shot, but in the context of the flow and narrative of each segment, and the show as a whole.

With the categories selected, the next task was to submit the two programs to a shot-by-shot transcription and create data sets to be analyzed and examined for common patterns, including both visual and linguistic symbols. Trends visible throughout both programs and the mechanisms employed to create images of and ideological messages about non-Japanese could then be identified. Finally, interviews were conducted with program participants which offered insights into aspects of these panel programs, insights that a simple text analysis could not provide.

3. Results

Preliminary viewings of each show chosen for analysis could well have revealed that they were indeed providing a platform on which exchange between Japanese and non-Japanese could take place. However, upon conducting a detailed discourse analysis of both programs and interviews with participants, it could be seen that the issues at play were much deeper and that the shows did indeed create images of and messages about non-Japanese residents that were problematic.

3.1. From the perspective of the panelists

In addition to the discourse analysis of *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan*, three panelists from *Cool Japan* were available for interview. They had, despite the program's requirements, lived in Japan for more than one year; two of the three were studying at Japanese universities and spoke very high levels of Japanese. Despite this, as the three interviewees explained, it is an "unspoken rule" on the show that foreign panelists only speak English and do not use Japanese, even if they are able to. When Japanese is used, either accidentally or because a concept is difficult to express in English, the dialogue is either edited out or the director orders that the scene be reshot. Participants in the program are not allowed to demonstrate detailed knowledge of the Japanese language and are often asked to pretend to be ignorant of other aspects of life in Japan. One interviewee spoke of her reluctance to express

surprise and joy at a Japanese husband doing what she perceived to be a minimal share of housework. Similarly, all three interviewees relayed the story of an Italian panelist who was asked to pretend not to know what a train sounded like so that the program could feature a segment demonstrating that such a well constructed and organized train system is unique to Japan.

Although *Cool Japan* portrays an image of non-scripted, spontaneous discussion, in fact both the studio discussion as well as filming of the pre-recorded "fact finding'" video sections were controlled to some extent. During fact finding recording, despite panelists being told by directors that they were free to discuss the topic anyway they wished, when discussion failed to move in intended direction, the director would step in and make suggestions for the next take. Similarly, the studio discussion sections were actually rehearsed and an outline or script of the discussion was prepared beforehand. Panelists were made aware of their lines and should they forget to participate in the discussion at the required moment, they would be singled out by the hosts for their opinions with the expectation that they would reply as requested. Even answers to seemingly unimportant questions, such as about a favorite Japanese dish, were controlled by producers. One important aspect of control occurred before the shooting of each show even began. Panelists explained that they were selected for certain programs on the basis of answers given to detailed questionnaires prepared by the production company. Only regular panelists deemed appropriate for each panel were selected; and from those eight, another three or four were sent out to film fact-finding videos before the taping of the panel took place.

When asked what they thought the aim of *Cool Japan* was, interviewees provided a range of responses. In the episode analyzed, host Kōkami explained that he believed that one reason for making *Cool Japan* was to discover how Japanese were able to take culture from all over the world, combine it with traditional Japanese culture and turn it into something new and "uniquely Japanese." The interviewees however had very different ideas. One went so far as to suggest it was a form of Nihonjinron, using non-Japanese residents to judge and value Japanese culture so that it may be re-discovered and appreciated by younger generations of Japanese. The theme of "rediscovery" was important to all three interviewees, who believed that the program was primarily made to "sell" the virtues of Japanese culture to a generation of young Japanese raised on Disney. As one interviewee explained, producers told her that they marketed the program to NHK as a show about encouraging the youth of Japan to be interested in their own culture once again.

Panelists' motivations for appearing on the program were varied; financial reasons were not of primary concern. One hoped it would be the start of a career in media, either in Japan or back in his country of birth. The other two female *Cool Japan* panelists expressed that appearing on the show was more of a hobby, something to do when they had time to earn some extra money. The three panelists interviewed all expressed that they were not particularly concerned with the way in which they were portrayed in the program, and did not feel a heavy burden to represent their countries of birth single-handedly. Despite noticing that the Japanese subtitles added to the final cut could differ from their comments in English considerably, panelists did not seem worried. What did concern panelists, however, was how they may be portrayed to lack knowledge about even basic aspects of Japanese life. While the male interviewee was happy that he was always shown to be the "knowledgeable one" when shooting the fact-finding videos, the two female interviewees expressed that although they were happy to play up for the camera to a certain extent, at times they had told the director that they were only willing to go so far. One even said that she felt that the editing out of what she perceived to be good shots, and the use of shots in which she made mistakes or was laughing a lot, had created an image of her as being something of an imbecile. Nevertheless, all three interviewees were quite happy to continue appearing on the program as long as it remained fun and did not make them think that it posed any problems for their lives in Japan in the long term.

Interestingly, interviewees seemed aware that *Cool Japan* does not offer an accurate picture of the demographic of foreigners in Japan. Due to the English proficiency requirements of the program, despite apparent efforts on the part of producers to find more panelists from Korea, China and other Asian countries, panelists from Europe, North America, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand tended to dominate the discussion. Interviewees believed that this led to a lack of balance on the program and projected an inaccurate image of the types of non-Japanese who call Japan their home. The final point of note mentioned by interviewees was the way in which − despite the program purporting to be a "heated talk battle" − issues of real controversy were off limits during the studio discussion. The most notable of these was any mention of World War II, but topics such as drugs were also disallowed.

3.2. Program analysis: Creating the "other"

The original research design was created with the aim of gaining insight into images and portrayals of non-Japanese on variety television pro-

grams. However, during the course of the analysis it became apparent that rather than focusing solely on the image of these foreign panelists being created, in fact it is the dynamic between the foreign panelists and the Japanese hosts and studio guests which gives the greatest insight into the messages conveyed by the two programs. Similarly, the way in which foreign behavior and culture is contrasted with that of Japan contributes to the great image of "difference" built up by the programs. By flagging the foreign and reiterating stereotypes, the two programs served to strengthen stereotypical ideas of foreigners from various countries, and in the process, re-examine and reiterate what it is to be "Japanese." Thinking back to Wallman's perspective of ethnicity (1979: 3), "the process by which `their' difference is used to enhance the sense of `us' for the purposes of organization or identification," it can be seen that the two programs do just that.

3.3. Symbols of the foreign: Flagging the "other"

Examining the analysis of the visuals employed in both programs, it can be seen that flags play an important part in defining the non-Japanese residents and connecting them with the "foreign" countries from which they come. Panelists featuring in *Koko ga hen da yo, Nihonjin*, *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan* all appear wearing name tags with their name, country of origin and their national flag clearly visible. As Iwabuchi (2005: 110) explains, in *Koko ga hen da yo, Nihonjin*, panelists are often referred to by either their country name or nationality, not by their actual names. Similarly, whenever a panelist is shown speaking in *Ai chiteru!*, a graphic featuring their name, age, country of birth, flag and a short "catchphrase"-style statement about the speaker is screened. These catchphrases usually center on stereotypical assumptions about the panelists' countries of birth. For example, Egyptian born Fifi is shown with the Egyptian flag and the catchphrase "The pharaoh's heaven-sent child" and Chinese participant Chen Chu is described as "An innocent Chinese princess." In *Cool Japan*, when the panelists are introduced at the beginning, a graphic is screened with each panelist's face and their nationality underneath. Panelists are constantly linked with their countries of birth. Similarly, throughout *Cool Japan*, the red and white colors of the Japanese flag are highlighted both in the studio set design and the graphics employed between segments. The flag is an omnipresent symbol throughout both programs. Billig (1995) has discussed in detail the place of flags in contemporary life. He concludes that the national flag has a symbolic function, as a focus for sentiment about society and as an unquestioned symbol of "banal" nationalism. This paper concludes that in the case of Japanese television programs

featuring foreign residents, the display of national flags plays a different role − highlighting the foreign "other." The red and white colors of the *Cool Japan* logo may comprise a routine employment of a usually unquestioned national symbol of Japan, but the constant display of foreign flags ensures that viewers are constantly reminded that the panelists represent specific countries. As Iwabuchi (2005: 106) explains, "[w]hat is crucial here is that ordinary foreigners are explicit about where they are from." The constant linking of foreign "others" to their countries of birth serves as an implicit reminder to the Japanese audience that they too are bound by an unbreakable link to their country of birth.

The second function of such symbols is to allow the diversity within each nation to be overlooked. Each foreign panelist is required to represent their entire country. In *Ai chiteru!*, when one of three Chinese-born panelists begins singing in Chinese at an inappropriate time, the two other Chinese panelists stand and apologize for her behavior, asking viewers not to see her behavior as "destroying China's image." By asking participants to speak as members of their country rather than as individuals − something that is referred to by Iwabuchi (2005: 116) as the "burden of representation" − the diversity within each nation is overlooked, an image of "one nation, one culture" is re-affirmed and ideas of national identity are oversimplified. Any differences within a nation's borders, as well as any similarities between Japan and other cultures are unseen and, as McVeigh (2006: 142) explains, "the assumption is that all people have natural `national' boundaries." This assumption underpins both programs as they clearly demarcate cultural boundaries and legitimize claims of Japan's own homogeneous culture.

Linking foreign panelists to their countries of birth achieves one final aim, namely the disconnection of foreign residents from Japan and any idea that they may become permanent residents. This is particularly the case in *Cool Japan*, where foreign panelists are depicted only as short-term residents − they will spend a short time in Japan, learn about its culture but eventually return permanently to their own countries. By reinforcing the idea that each foreigner is enduringly attached to their country of birth, its culture and language, viewers are not required to consider the idea that foreigners appearing on the show may be seeking a long term life in Japan and that Japan is indeed becoming an increasingly international country. In fact, despite many *Ai chiteru!* participants actually being married to Japanese men and, therefore, highly likely to remain in Japan long term, the women featured in *Ai chiteru!* are required to behave in *such* an outlandish manner − constantly highlighted by the male hosts − that the audience cannot possibly forget their foreignness, thus cementing them as outsiders, no mat-

ter what their visa status is. Programs featuring foreign residents thereby represent them in a manner that does not threaten the concept of a culturally, linguistically and racially homogeneous Japan. Ghassan Hage (13 March 2008) provides a very good description of the difficulties of multiculturalism when he defined multiculturalism as a relationship of encompassment, explaining that in a multicultural society, the entering "outside culture" is required by the host country to remain in a safe place or sphere and not bleed into the surrounding space, thereby preventing it from changing the host country's culture or values. Similarly, Iwabuchi (2005) refers to this phenomenon as "them within us" and describes how foreigners in the Japanese media are depicted in such a way as to be confined to certain areas of society and thus remain unthreatening. Both *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan* contribute to this process, presenting foreign residents without any acknowledgement of the problems which may arise as the result of an increasing foreign population. The dominant discourse of a homogeneous Japan is able to remain intact despite the foreign spectacle on display.

3.4. Emotions, gendered discourse and the "voice of reason"

It is not only through the use of symbols that the image of foreign residents as undeniably "`different" is created. Creighton's (1997) idea of foreign *misemono* [show, spectacle] is very much present in both *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan*. Both programs are spectacles with foreign panelists on display as the television studio becomes a circus of comparison. This spectacle also revolves around the issue of gender, constructing an image of foreign women as the ultimate "other." While an in-depth discussion of gender in Japanese popular culture is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief examination is needed, however, as both *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan* contain strongly gendered ideologies.

Darling-Wolf (2004: 331) mentions that "[t]he Japanese popular cultural scene is quite segregated along gender lines" but she also notes that there has been very little research into how consumers might negotiate representations of gender. Yuval-Davis (1997) explains how women are commonly used as signifiers of traditional culture. Freedman (2001: 85) describes them as "the key actors in the transmission of the community's values […] and active participants in national struggles." Thereby, the process of presenting women from "outside" cultures aids the creation of a strong image of a foreign "other" to which one can compare and contrast one's own culture. Such female others are often portrayed as highly-sexualized, over-emotional, exotic and irrational, and allow the "inside" culture to feel a sense of superiority (Yuval-Davis 1997). The analysis of *Ai chiteru!* demonstrates this to be

very much the case as female panelists are presented as being extremely emotional as well as prone to angry outbursts and sexual displays. Although, within the program, such behavior may only be explicitly compared with the calm voices of the male hosts and guests, taken within the context of wider society the image of the irrational foreign female may contrast strongly with the images of Japanese women as protectors and signifiers of traditional Japanese culture.

The portrayal of women is highly gendered not only in *Ai chiteru!* but also in the pre-recorded video segments of *Cool Japan*, segments that feature male panelists teaching the female panelists and thus depicting them as hapless and unable to survive in Japan without such assistance. Similarly, the male host and male guests are in command of the requisite knowledge and they control the flow of discussion. The male Japanese "voice of reason," which appears in both programs, plays an important role in legitimizing claims of a homogeneous Japan, contrasted with outside cultures. Ultimately, the power rests with the Japanese hosts, who are able to make themselves heard over the panelists and are given the role of moderating the debate and helping make sense of the situation for the audience at home. The assigned role of Japanese men to return the debate to one that is "rational and calm" centers the discussion clearly from the standpoint of the Japanese audience. Despite claims of seeking an intercultural perspective, the Japanese hosts ultimately have the last word and put things into "perspective" so that no significant changes are required of society. Homogeneity remains the unquestioned status quo. Audiences are invited here to dally with and even participate in an international society, but only from afar, because the spectacle ultimately reminds them that their loyalties lie with Japan.

3.5. The global battle: Naturalized differences and the avoidance of meaningful debate

Both *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan* are billed as heated discussions (*atsu tōku batoru*). In fact, both programs emphasize the "war of words" between foreign panelists and Japanese hosts throughout, and hint at greater battles outside the studio. Throughout *Ai chiteru!*, the battle appears to be between foreign women and Japanese men, as difference is emphasized. In the case of *Cool Japan*, however, the battle is for recognition from the foreign panelists of the uniqueness and value of Japanese culture, despite the implicit message that it is this very uniqueness that means that they will never be able to fully comprehend and appreciate the culture entirely. The simplification of complex issues

of identity and culture into binaries of "us" and "them" means that any opportunity for meaningful discussion and debate is lost.

The concept of the "them and us" battle is further legitimized by the apparent "naturalness" of the discussions that take place. In *Ai chiteru!*, hosts and panelists face off against each other in a round, coliseum-like set. However, as panelists and hosts only address each other, never the camera directly, and the emotion of the discussion is paramount, such friction is made to appear unscripted and spontaneous. Although the *Ai chiteru!* panelists are dressed provocatively and asked to comment on seemingly scripted adult topics, the emotional ways in which they present their arguments and the constant use of close-ups invites audiences to share their emotions — a strategy which, in turn, constructs the image of a "natural" outpouring of frustrations. Similarly, although *Cool Japan* panelists explained to me in interviews that they were given explicit instructions about what to say during the show and unscripted comments were edited out of the final version, the program itself still presents the discussion as a spontaneous debate, thus "naturalizing" the opinions of its foreign panelists and reinforcing the legitimacy of the spectacle.

The symbolic flagging of panelists' nationalities, the highlighting of their over-emotional states and the constant reference to "battle" mean that the show is turned into an extended and heavily controlled media spectacle. It must of course be acknowledged that variety television is created primarily as entertainment rather than as a sphere in which real debate about the issues that Japan is facing can take place. Nonetheless, against the backdrop of an increasing foreign population in Japan, the showing of non-Japanese residents on television as *misemono* and ultimately as an "other" that is very different, while simultaneously "naturalizing" this image by constructing programs that appear to be "unscripted" debates, any genuine debate about emerging social issues and problems can be avoided and issues conveniently neglected.

4. Implications for cultural nationalism

Cultural nationalism is the process of regenerating a national community or identity when it is perceived to be under threat, and can be seen in behavior as simple as displaying the national flag, or in more complicated performances such as the examples described in this paper. *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan* both clearly contain elements designed to strengthen Japanese viewers' national identities. The reasons for this, however, are less clear.

As the number of foreign residents in Japan continues to increase, the concept of a homogeneous Japan with a unique culture, history and

language may appear to be under threat. As the foreign population of Japan continues to increase, a reexamination of what it means to be Japanese and the reassertion of Japanese identity are not unexpected phenomena. Highlighting the difference between the "foreign other" and the Japanese, as well as discussion on the part of non-Japanese about unique aspects of Japanese culture reinforce and legitimize the Nihonjinron theory of Japan's uniqueness (Dale 1986). Just as television was linked to the Japanese national identity in the postwar period, in the last decade, programs featuring foreign residents have continued to contribute to the creation of an "essentialized identity" (Weiner 1997).

The variety television programs analyzed above play a role in creating, sustaining and strengthening ideas of Japanese cultural identity. Employing a Nihonjinron-style discourse of comparing Japan with the outside world, they conclude that Japan is indeed "uniquely unique" and depict foreign panelists in such a way that they become a spectacle, rather than a threat to the dominant ideology of a homogeneous Japan. Both *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan* can therefore be described as vehicles of Japanese cultural nationalism. Befu (2001) speculates that Nihonjinron-style culturally nationalistic discourses have come back into focus in Japan as the country's identity comes under increasing threat from outside influences. Similarly, Iwabuchi (2005) describes the way in which an increasingly international Japanese society may create a perceived need for reassessment of cultural identity. Such reassessment is visible in both *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan*, most likely in response to the perceived threat of an increased foreign population within Japan as globalization advances.

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the phenomenon of cultural nationalism in Japan through the lens of variety television programs featuring foreign residents. Detailed analysis of two programs, *Ai chiteru!* and *Cool Japan*, and interviews with participants have revealed that by utilizing a number of conventions of representation, the programs create a discourse of "them" and "us." This, in turn, allows a "foreign other" to be compared with a Japanese "us." The conventions employed throughout the programs ensure that the nationalities of foreign panelists are constantly "flagged" as a device to construct an image of them as unbreakably tied to their countries of birth. Foreign panelists are represented as over-emotional and irrational and the spirit of an ongoing "battle" is invoked. The entire spectacle is given legitimacy and an air of apparent truth via the strategies that each program employs to ensure that

the debate appears as unscripted and spontaneous as possible. These methods combine to create a seemingly "international" spectacle in which the non-Japanese participants, despite their presence in Japan being acknowledged and superficially celebrated, are depicted in a way that never threatens the dominant ideology of a homogeneous and unique Japan. In other words, the programs can be read as a form of visual Nihonjinron. Whilst it may be hoped with Beck (2005: 36) that "the nation and state are decoupled" as social circles open transnationally and flows of information increase beyond national borders, in the case of the Japanese media, a great reluctance to embrace true internationalization and the preference of maintaining the non-threatening status quo are clearly apparent. Burgess (2010) explains that a large proportion of news featuring non-Japanese residents of Japan centers on an inaccurate reporting of crime statistics. Such reporting contributes to the creation of a culture of fear regarding non-Japanese. Although entertainment programs may not be quite so blatant in their treatment of non-Japanese residents, Iwabuchi (2005: 117) explains his disappointment in *Koko ga hen da yo, Nihonjin* by expressing his desire "to create a more egalitarian and democratic public media space". In this context, examining entertainment media offers further insights into the implicit social imbalances and biases that may not be immediately visible. As McVeigh (2006: 142) argues, within Japan "the discourse on `internationalization' is a tactic for discussing Japaneseness, thereby reinforcing nationalism." This paper has shown that despite purporting to be a place for international dialogue between non-Japanese and Japanese, variety television programs actually further marginalize and stereotype foreign residents, removing the possibility of open dialogue and debate about their place in Japanese society.

In any examination of a media text it must be remembered that viewers of television programs come from diverse backgrounds, have differing ideas and interests in foreign countries and foreign people, and pay differing amounts of attention to programs they see on television. Stuart Hall's (1974) work on the encoding and decoding process highlighted the impossibility of reading a media text in a singular manner. As a result, the level of influence that such programs may have varies widely from person to person and text analysis does not allow the researcher to delve into the complexities of reception. As Deacon et. al suggest, "textual analysis is in the end no substitute for audience analysis" (1999: 244), as one can never truly know how an audience has chosen to read and interpret an image, message or ideology. An examination of audiences reactions to television programs featuring foreign residents would be of great interest in future research.

Finally, my hope for future research is that it will step away from a consideration of cultural nationalism in Japan through the narrow window of Nihonjinron instead allowing an acknowledgement of forms of nationalism in Japan similar to Billig's "banal" nationalism or at the very least Befu's "cultural" nationalism. It must be remembered that cultural nationalism is in no way an exclusively Japanese phenomenon. Research of this kind must be careful not to be critical of Japan, or the Japanese, as a single or collective entity. As Befu (2001: 1) explains, such a response "assumes the same monolithic approach" in so far as "irrespective of variations within Japan and regardless of differences among the Japanese, Japanese culture is said to have certain uniform characteristics, and the Japanese are supposed to behave and think in a certain monolithic manner." Similarly, citing Nihonjinron discourse presents many dangers, the first of which is the possibility that by discussing Japan in a context of cultural nationalism, authors themselves become guilty of participating and/or perpetuating this discourse. John Dower (1999) warns against viewing Japan hermetically, and this paper has not set out to describe Japanese cultural nationalism as "different" or "special" in any way. Cultural nationalism is not unique to Japan; rather it is simply one phenomenon visible in a country that is facing increasing demographic shifts due to both internal and external pressure. No media text can be removed from the context in which it is produced and consumed. Variety television programs featuring non-Japanese residents of Japan and the resulting representations of the "foreign" provide insight into just one of the many complicated processes involved in creating, perpetuating and strengthening national identity in Japan. It is an area that will remain of importance as the number of foreign residents continues to increase and Japan struggles with increasing internationalization within its borders.

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Notes

1. *Ai chiteru!* was broadcast on the TBS network from October 2005 to September 2007 on Wednesday nights from 11.55 pm. Running for half an hour (including commercial breaks), its late-night time slot allowed the program to cover topics

not usually discussed on prime time television. Hosted by the male comedy duo Ameagarikesshitai and billed as "a show about love by foreigners, for foreigners," the program invited a non-Japanese resident each week to ask a panel of ten non-Japanese regular panelists for their advice about love, dating or sex in Japan. The particular episode analyzed for this paper was the final episode which aired on September 26, 2007.

2. Own translation of the following text:
   Kono bangumi ni wa koi ni nayamu gaikokujin no katatachi ga tōjō! Shikashi, kono bangumi no mein to naru no wa, koi no sōdan ni kotaeru "samazama na kuni no tayō na renaikan o motsu keiken yutaka na gaikokujin joseitachi" da. Hatashite donna kotae ga tobidasu no ka? Nihonjin ni wa sōzō mo tsukanai chinkaitō ga zokushutsu suru koto to chigai nashi!!

3. Debuting in April 2006, *Cool Japan* was still on air at the time of writing. The program is broadcast weekly on BS1, BSHi and NHK World and runs for forty-five minutes examining Japanese culture from a variety of perspectives with the aim of discovering what "cool" aspects of Japanese culture can be considered "cool" from an international perspective. The episode subjected to analysis was titled "Music" and first aired on the May 12, 2007.

4. See the official website of *Cool Japan* at: https://www.nhk.or.jp/cooljapan/form/bosyu.html (last accessed 30 September 2010).

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