

*Marginalization and Veneration:*  
*The Contradictions in Perceptions of Japanese Biracial*  
*Celebrities*

Erina Aoyama  
Honors Thesis  
Jackson School of International Studies  
University of Washington  
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## *Note on the use of Japanese names*

In most cases, I will use the Japanese order – surname first – when referring to Japanese individuals. Exceptions are made for individuals who are commonly known by the Western ordering of their name (for example, singer Angela Aki), individuals known outside of Japan by the Western ordering of their name (for example, Prime Minister Taro Aso), and scholars who publish in English and therefore adopt the Western order.

Macrons are used to indicate long vowels, though not in words and place names commonly used in English (for example, Tokyo).

## *Preface*

As a child visiting my father's hometown in rural Japan, I always knew that I somehow did not fit in. Even mundane activities such as grocery shopping became a showcase for my sister and me, when we would run into my father's former neighbors or classmates. Looking back, I could chalk up the initial comments of "Oh, they are so cute!" to our young age; these were comments made toward any young children. As I got older, however, and the comments shifted more towards questions of "Is that her real hair color?", I realized that these commentaries were directed at my biraciality. It was not by virtue of being raised outside of Japan (though this may have been a part of it), but the fact that my physical features were different that separated me from the ethnically Japanese.

Only years later did I see someone who looked like me in Japan. I had returned, this time for a year-long study abroad program, and was visiting my grandmother for the New Year's holiday. I was watching a television program featuring performers in the annual *Kouhaku Utagassen*<sup>1</sup> (Red and White Song Contest) and a face stuck out: Angela Aki. Watching further, I learned that she was the daughter of a Japanese father and an American mother, and had spent her childhood in Japan before moving to the US for high school and college. Bilingual in English and Japanese, Aki sings in mostly Japanese with a few English phrases, a trend common among Japanese singers. In this segment, she spoke about the inspiration for her first single, "Home," her *furusato* (hometown) on the island of Shikoku.

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<sup>1</sup> On New Year's Eve every year since 1951, NHK (a state-sponsored station) has held a live show featuring both contemporary and classical performers. Female singers make up the "red" team while male singers make up the "white" and compete before a panel of celebrity judges representing a wide range of fields in the arts. Selection for the *Kouhaku Utagassen* is indicative of a certain degree of popularity and is thought to be a measure of success in the music industry. Carolyn S. Stevens, *Japanese Popular Music: Culture, authenticity, and power* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 97.

Angela Aki was the first biracial Japanese celebrity I was introduced to, but once I was aware of this subset of entertainers, I began to notice them more and more. I saw biracial individuals appear in all segments of Japanese popular culture: music, movies, television shows, and other media. Why, in recent years, were these individuals, previously noted for their differences, being accepted into an industry notoriously critical in its evaluations of physical appearance and personal conduct? This initial curiosity has led me through an examination of many facets of modern Japanese society, from which I have gained an understanding of the nebulous connection between ethnicity and national identity and the rise of the biracial Japanese celebrity.

# Chapter One

## *Introduction: Japan's Demographic Crisis*

Japan's rapidly aging population has been at the forefront of societal concern in the past two decades, but has become a subject of particular disquiet within the last several years. The country currently has one of the world's lowest birthrates: as of October 2007, the population 15 years and younger numbered 17.3 million, just 13.5 percent of the population, the lowest number on record.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the figure for the US is 21 percent.<sup>3</sup> 2009 estimates predict a decline in the Japanese population from 130 million to fewer than 90 million in approximately 50 years. Even more daunting is the estimate that the population over age 65 could reach 40 percent by this time.<sup>4</sup>

A diminished birth rate and longer life spans mean that Japan faces a future in which fewer workers struggle to support a growing population of retirees. Not only will there be a greater need for geriatric health care, but "the strain will grow because retired people continue to consume even as they cease to produce in the conventional sense of the word."<sup>5</sup> Japan's shrinking workforce will have to support this rising elderly set in addition to themselves, their children, spouses, and perhaps their own parents. Already these demographic shifts are

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics Bureau, Director-General for Policy Planning (Statistical Standards) & Statistical Research and Training Institute, "Statistical Handbook of Japan," Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/c02cont.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> James Brooke, "A Tough Sell: Japanese Social Security," *The New York Times*, 6 May 2004, Online Edition <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/06/business/a-tough-sell-japanese-social-security.html?scp=3&sq=japanese%20demographics&st=cse>

<sup>4</sup> Masaru Tamamoto, "Japan's Crisis of the Mind," *The New York Times*, 1 March 2009, Online Edition [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/02/opinion/02tamamoto.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/02/opinion/02tamamoto.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)

<sup>5</sup> Milton Ezrati, "Japan's Aging Economics," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no.3 (1997): 97.

adversely affecting social services, including pension plans and medical insurance services.<sup>6</sup> In a March 2004 article, the Mainichi Newspaper forecasted “a \$4 trillion gap between the government’s future pension obligations and its future contributions.”<sup>7</sup> As of July 2008, half of the health budget was devoted to caring for the elderly, which contributed to Japan’s large financial deficit.<sup>8</sup> While the declining birthrate and aging population can be tied to many factors, including the trend toward later marriages or not marrying at all, the low percentage of children born out of wedlock, and a very high life expectancy, the most critical point here is that Japan’s population is permanently and significantly declining, and this has grave consequences for the future of its society.

Economists predict that without large-scale immigration in the next several decades, and massive changes to the current economic system, the Japanese will not be able to sustain current standards of living, nor will they be able to support their rapidly aging population. Tetsufumi Yamakawa, chief economist at Goldman Sachs in Tokyo, “believes immigration, combined with efforts to draw more women and elderly people into the labour market, could lift growth above the annual one per cent or less forecast by many analysts.”<sup>9</sup> In a recent *New York Times* opinion piece Masaru Tamamoto elaborated,

If we want to survive as a nation, we must shed our deeply rooted resistance to immigration. Contrary to widespread prejudices in favor of keeping Japan ‘pure,’ we desperately need to dilute our blood. Our aging nation will need millions of university-educated middle-class immigrants with high productivity, people who will put down roots and raise families, whose pride and success will be the affirmation of new Japanese values.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Yosuke Sakurai, “Will declining birthrate hurt Japan?”, Global Action on Aging website, 19 August 2003, <http://www.globalaging.org/ruralaging/world/japanaging.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Brooke, *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Branwen Jeffreys, “Japan wrestles with ageing problem,” *BBC News*, 1 July 2008, Online Edition <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7472140.stm>

<sup>9</sup> Isabel Reynolds, “Japan gets serious about immigration,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 9 August 2008, Online Edition <http://www2.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/bustech/story.html?id=1411c27a-1983-474a-9865-59037a27ecde>

<sup>10</sup> Tamamoto, *ibid*.

Due to the fact that historically, Japan has been seen, from within and without, as ethnically and culturally homogenous, and immigration is often viewed with deep suspicion, Tamamoto's call for action could easily be dismissed as idealistic. Japan does not even have a unified agency to handle issues related to immigrants. Rather, general immigration concerns go to the Justice Ministry, labor issues to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, and general livelihood matters to the International Affairs and Communications Ministry.<sup>11</sup> Many administrations have heatedly debated issues surrounding immigration and foreign workers, however, recent policy proposals suggest that the country may be warming to the idea of immigration.

In June 2008, eighty Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lawmakers, led by former secretary general Hidenao Nakagawa, proposed a revolutionary new immigration plan that would loosen Japanese borders and allow for the intake of at least 10 million immigrants by 2050 so that the immigrant population in Japan would make up at least ten percent of the total population.<sup>12</sup> Currently, the foreign population in Japan is a mere 1.57 percent.<sup>13</sup> The increase proposed in the new plan would radically alter Japan's demographics, but could potentially alleviate some of the economic difficulties resulting from the growing older population. The message is strong: "The only effective treatment to save Japan from a population crisis is to accept people from abroad. For Japan to survive, it needs to open its doors as an international state passable to the world and shift toward establishing an 'immigrant nation' by accepting immigrants and revitalizing Japan."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Masami Ito, "Will Open-Door Immigration Plan Die After Fukuda?" *The Japan Times*, 19 September 2008, Online Edition <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080919f2.html>

<sup>12</sup> Peter Taberner, "An Immigration Conundrum in Japan," *Asia Times*, 16 July 2008, Online Edition <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/JG16Dh01.html>

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Coleman, "Japan Mulls Importing Foreign Workers," *CBS News*, 20 January 2007, Online Edition <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/01/20/ap/world/mainD8MP5VG00.shtml>

<sup>14</sup> Ito, *ibid.*

Nakagawa's plan proposes extending student and worker visas from three years to five, and establishing Japanese language and cultural institutions abroad.<sup>15</sup> It would also increase education and job training services for foreign workers as well as promote stronger measures to protect the rights of such workers, who often work under poor conditions for long hours and little pay, victims of employers who take advantage of their lack of language skills and knowledge about social services. Not only would the proposal allow for the integration of foreign workers into Japanese society, but it would also invite the workers' families into Japan, with the goal to both ease the worker shortage and create a vibrant multicultural society.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the proposal would create a central immigration agency to assume all border duties and to handle the affairs currently handled by several different, independent ministries.

While this proposal suggests hope for new immigration policy in Japan, the latest series of political turnovers may put it in jeopardy. The country has had an unsteady succession of prime ministers in the last several years, each of whom has lasted no longer than one year. This latest handoff of power featured the transition from Fukuda Yasuo to Aso Taro. Fukuda was relatively open-minded in his views towards immigration, and was instrumental in getting the new immigration proposal off the ground. Hirohiko Nakamura, a lawmaker who helped draft the proposal, said "We got this far because it was Fukuda.... Fukuda was willing to listen to the proposal and it was about to move forward."<sup>17</sup> Now, however, with the confirmation of right-wing conservative Taro Aso as Prime Minister in September 2008, there is concern about the likelihood of the proposal moving forward. Uncertainty at the leadership level is compounded by the economic downturn, which has led to the loss of 125,000 jobs for non-regular Japanese

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<sup>15</sup> Taberner, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Ito, *ibid.*

workers between October 2008 and March 2009.<sup>18</sup> Labor unions will likely oppose the competition that more open immigration will bring to protect their members, and these groups are among the strongest supporters of the Democratic Party, which may very well topple the unpopular ruling LDP in the upcoming 2009 general elections.<sup>19</sup>

While the new immigration proposal is currently in limbo, there is no guarantee that, should the plan be implemented, new foreign workers and their families could be effectively integrated into Japanese society. Historically, Korean and Chinese populations have been socially marginalized; a more recent example is the case of *Nikkei* (Japanese heritage) Brazilian immigrants. A revision in Japan's immigration law in the late 1980s made it much easier for individuals of Japanese ancestry to immigrate to and work in Japan. This law was targeted mainly at *Nikkei* populations in South America, the largest of which is in Brazil. The effect is clear even in the earliest years of the law's implementation, when the number of Japanese visas issued in Sao Paulo jumped from 8,602 in 1988 to 61,500 in 1991.<sup>20</sup> The rationale behind this law was that *Nikkei* immigrants, through their blood ties, have a different relationship with Japan than those of non-Japanese background, and that based on this shared lineage, they might be better suited to working in Japan. This derives from the assumption that one feels "a sense of affinity...with *Nikkei* since they are supposed to be closer to Japanese than other foreigners."<sup>21</sup> However, the *Nikkei* Brazilian experience during the past two decades has made it all too clear that this is not the case.

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<sup>18</sup> Lam Peng Er, "Internationalization and Immigration: Coping with the Ageing Population Problem," *East Asia Institute*, 20 March 2009 <http://www.eai.nus.edu.sg/BB442.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Yoko Sellek, "*Nikkeijin*: The phenomenon of Return Migration," in *Japan's Minorities*, ed. Michael Weiner (New York: Routledge, 1997), 189.

<sup>21</sup> Angelo Akimitsu Ishi, "Between privilege and prejudice: Japanese-Brazilian migrants in 'the land of yen and the ancestors'" in *Transcultural Japan*, eds. David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu (New York: Routledge, 2008), 118.

The most common complaints among Japanese communities with large populations of *Nikkei* Brazilian immigrants include: “The outsiders don’t speak enough Japanese. They don’t recycle their trash properly. Their kids don’t get along with their Japanese classmates.”<sup>22</sup>

Brazilians make up the third-largest minority community in Japan (after Koreans and Chinese), numbering nearly 400,000 in 2007.<sup>23</sup> Despite the high hopes for integration of *Nikkei* immigrants, as journalist Joseph Coleman writes,

[s]peaking poor Japanese, they tend to be cut off from their neighbors, unable to - or critics say, unwilling to - communicate with policemen, file tax returns or understand notices to separate plastic garbage from burnables. Schooling is compulsory in Japan until age 16, but only for citizens. So foreign kids can skip school with impunity. Arrangements such as special Japanese classes for newcomers are ad hoc and understaffed. Many of the foreigners aren’t entitled to pensions or the same health benefits as Japanese workers because they’re hired through special job brokers. Above all, the differences are cultural and rife with stereotypes: Latinos playing music late on weekends; teenagers congregating in the streets at night, alarming police.<sup>24</sup>

The experiences of these immigrants illustrate the difficulties in adjustment for foreign workers, particularly in a society that has high expectations for assimilation yet exerts minimal efforts towards integration. Immigrants, too, feel the sting: “they’re isolated, looked down upon, cold-shouldered by City Hall.”<sup>25</sup> Despite their Japanese faces and blood, they face prejudice and discrimination, leaving even less hope for the acceptance of non-*Nikkei* immigrants.

In spite of Japan’s historical closed-door policy toward immigrants and immigration, the country has slowly become more open in the past several decades, as numbers of foreign residents have risen from around 700,000 in 1970<sup>26</sup> to over 2 million in 2007.<sup>27</sup> As discussed previously, the first wave of new immigrants was comprised mostly of Brazilians of Japanese

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<sup>22</sup> Coleman, *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Ishi, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Coleman, *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Yamamoto Masayo, “Japanese Attitudes Towards Bilingualism: A Survey and Its Implications” in *Studies of Japanese Bilingualism*, ed. Mary Goebel Noguchi and Sandra Fotos (Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, Ltd., 2001), 26.

<sup>27</sup> Coleman, *ibid.*

heritage. However, there have also been a slowly increasing number of non-Japanese heritage foreigners living in Japan. This increase has been accompanied by a slow, but noticeable, increase in the number of international and interracial marriages from approximately 5,500 (or roughly 0.5% of all marriages) in 1970 to just under 30,000 (or nearly 4% of all marriages) in 1998.<sup>28</sup> The products of such marriages, biracial Japanese children, have long been relegated to the margins of society.<sup>29</sup>

Much of this has to do with the fact that the earliest significant population of biracial children was the result of the post-World War II US occupation, and the relationships between American servicemen and Japanese women. The children were thus negatively associated with the occupation and the US presence. In later years, as the number of mixed race children in Japan continued to increase (with births more than doubling from approximately 10,000 in 1987 to over 21,000 in 1996<sup>30</sup>), stigmas associated with biracial identities continue to be perpetuated. Those whose physical appearances differentiate them from mainstream Japanese are often treated as foreign, and face assumptions that they do not speak Japanese, nor understand Japanese customs. This treatment leads many to feel excluded from those with whom they identify and isolated from the only home they have ever known.<sup>31</sup>

In the past decade, however, biracial Japanese have become more and more visible through the media and entertainment industries, as actors, models, singers, and *tarento* (entertainers). In fact, scholars have noted the contradiction between discrimination against

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<sup>28</sup> Tomoko Sekiguchi, "Nikkei Brazilians in Japan: The Ideology and Symbolic Context Faced by Children of This New Ethnic Minority" in *Exploring Japaneseness On Japanese Enactments of Culture and Consciousness*, ed. Ray T. Donahue (Westport, Connecticut: Ablex Pub., 2002), 204.

<sup>29</sup> See Murphy-Shigematsu, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Goebel Noguchi, "Bilinguality and Bicultural Children in Japan: A Pilot Survey of Factors Linked to Active English-Japanese Bilingualism," in *Studies of Japanese Bilingualism*, 237.

<sup>31</sup> See Oikawa and Yoshida, 2007 and Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu, 2008.

biracial individuals denoted as un-Japanese and the rise of the biracial star in popular culture.<sup>32</sup> The increasing popularity of individuals who look different from historic conceptions of what is Japanese is particularly significant in a society that has traditionally viewed itself as monoracial and which has long branded biracial individuals as outsiders.

Biracial singers claim spots on top record charts, mixed race actors receive top billing in movies and television dramas, and magazines and commercials regularly feature faces and bodies that do not fit the conventional mold of “Japanese.” The entertainment-consuming public is hyper aware of the ethnic background of biracial stars, and in fact, this quality is very much a part of their celebrity persona. Discussions focus on biracial celebrity parentage, particularly noteworthy physical features (everything from milky skin and hazel eyes to tall height), and foreign language skills and time spent abroad. Thus, the world of biracial celebrities opens an area for the discussion of nationality, race, language, culture, and what it means to be uniquely *Japanese*.

Examining the current discussions surrounding Japanese biracial celebrities offers several benefits. First, the media coverage surrounding such individuals can be a telling indicator of not only how particular individuals are viewed, but also of how ethnic and cultural differences within Japan are viewed and examined. Further, the acceptance or rejection of individuals of at least partial Japanese ancestry can signal the degree of openness in contemporary Japanese society. If, for example, biracial individuals are increasingly conceived as Japanese, then there may be room for the inclusion of individuals of non-Japanese descent as such. Conversely, however, if individuals of partial ancestry are not considered to be Japanese, it is extremely unlikely that individuals of non-Japanese backgrounds would be included and fully integrated in Japanese society.

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<sup>32</sup> See Sekiguchi, 2002.

I believe that further examination of how people are discussing these issues in the context of biracial celebrities can offer an illustrative means to view current notions of identity and nationality in Japan. Such stars are uniquely positioned, as they are both venerated through popular culture and marginalized as not quite Japanese. The question I seek to address is thus, why does this simultaneous admiration and distancing exist? I suggest that understanding these conflicting views toward biracial celebrities, who are at the same time both Japanese and not Japanese, can be instructive in approaching Japanese attitudes towards the foreign, and foreigners, in Japanese society. Ultimately, I hope that my work can contribute to a better understanding of the future of immigration, and integration of immigrants, in Japanese society, and the implications for these findings on Japan's population crisis.

In the pages that follow, I will offer one way to view the potential of the new immigration proposal and the future of immigrants in Japan: through an examination of attitudes toward and discussions about biracial celebrities. To set up this discussion, Chapter Two, the Literature Review, traces the history of Japanese national identity formation, challenging the popularly held image of Japan as a monoethnic nation, and delineating historic attitudes to minorities and the foreign. Chapters Three and Four seek to examine the current discussions surrounding biracial celebrities, focusing particularly on conceptions of Japaneseness and how ethnicity, physical features, and language skills play into these conceptions. Chapter Three focuses on electronic sources of data, including websites and online discussion forums, while Chapter Four expands the discussion to include opinions and insights on biracial individuals at large, examining the results of surveys and personal interviews conducted by the author. These varied data sources allow for a well-rounded discussion of themes surrounding Japanese biracialism, popularity, and

belonging, and ultimately provide insight into notions of race and national identity in contemporary Japanese society.

## Chapter Two

### *Formations of Japanese Identity: A Review of the Literature*

#### I. The Historical Evolution of Japanese Culture: A Brief Look

Japan is often recognized for its distinctive homogeneity – ethnically, culturally, linguistically, developmentally – and most, both inside and outside Japan, accept this theory of Japanese uniqueness. However, Japanese culture has a long history of importation from China, thus even conceptualizing of a uniquely “Japanese” culture can be problematic. Both Buddhism and Confucianism were transported to Japan from China (though the “official” introduction of Buddhism is often linked to Japanese contact with the Korean state of Paekche in 552), and the Japanese monarchic model, as well as the 604 Seventeen-Article Constitution, both drew heavily on Chinese ideas and principles.<sup>33</sup> As Varley states, “The Japanese borrowed freely from a civilization that, at least in material and technological terms, was vastly superior to their own. Yet Japan’s cultural borrowing was sufficiently selective to bring about the evolution of a society which, although it owed much to China, became unique in its own right.”<sup>34</sup> Perhaps one of the longest lasting symbols of Japanese adoption of Chinese culture is its writing system. Archaeologists have found little evidence that the Japanese even attempted to construct their own writing system, instead appropriating Chinese characters to develop a writing system made up of those adopted characters and about 50 symbols known as *kana*, to denote, among other things, verb tenses, adverbs, and foreign names.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Varley. *Japanese Culture* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000), 20-26.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

While the Japanese, as Varley notes, did develop a culture quite separate from the Chinese, one cannot discuss the history and evolution of Japanese culture without noting the extensive role of the Chinese in that process. In fact, this heavy influence of the Chinese on formative years of the development of Japanese civilization may have been responsible for the emphasis on a distinctive homogeneity that could belie an anxiety over identity. As Harootunian discusses in his examination of nativism in Tokugawa Japan, the shadow of Chinese influence prompted an evaluation of Japaneseness. A fear of being assimilated by the Chinese “Other” worked to “authorize a theory of uniqueness and to sanction cultural and even racial exceptionalism.”<sup>36</sup> Nativists emphasized the speaking of the Japanese language as well as the importance of work (in this case, as repayment of the gods) as essential to “secure the identity of likeness for social solidarity.”<sup>37</sup> Japanese anxieties over cultural and ethnic identity may well have their roots in this tenuous relationship with the Chinese.

Much like the selective adoption of Chinese culture, the Japanese also imported aspects of Western culture after the country’s “opening” following the Meiji Restoration, even going so far as to send a group of intellectuals to Europe and the United States in 1871 to study those countries’ institutions and cultures.<sup>38</sup> However, they drew the line at blood, resurrecting the notion of ethnic homogeneity in response to the encroachment of the West on other fronts, as will be discussed further in Section II of this chapter.

This notion of distinctive Japanese homogeneity has and continues to play a critical role in the formation of Japanese identity. However, as I will discuss in the sections that follow, Japan has a long history of diversity within its domains, and it is this history that has provided

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<sup>36</sup> Harry Harootunian, “Epilogue,” *Things Seen and Unseen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 409.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>38</sup> National Diet Library, “1-7 Iwakura Mission.” *Modern Japan in archives: 100-year history from the opening of the country to the San Francisco Peace Treaty*, <http://www.ndl.go.jp/modern/e/cha1/description07.html>

many sites of ethnic and cultural contestation to the “myth” of Japanese homogeneity. The emergence of biracial celebrities can be understood as the latest in a series of challenges to this conception.

## **II. Early Years of the Discourse of Biracialism in Japan: The Eugenics Debate**

The earliest discussions of biracialism in Japan date back to the eugenics debate in the years following the Meiji Restoration, the beginnings of the modern Japanese state. This debate underscores the tensions between culture, ethnicity and Japanese national identity in the early years of the state-building period. Intellectuals in Japan were concerned with the country’s progress from a “semi-civilized” nation to a “civilized” one, as represented by the Western powers. Debate about how Japan should civilize became grounded in eugenics, and contestation arose between proponents of “mixed-blood” (*konketsu*) and “pure-blood” (*junketsu*) positions.

Keio University-educated journalist Takahashi Yoshio articulated the argument for “mixed-blood” eugenics in his controversial 1884 essay *A Treatise on the Improvement of the Japanese Race*.<sup>39</sup> He argued for the intermarriage of, and thus implicitly, procreation between, Japanese males and Anglo females. These marriages, he argued, would create a “physically superior and beautiful Japanese race, thereby making it possible for the Japanese to compete successfully with Europeans and Americans in international affairs.”<sup>40</sup> Takahashi’s main concern lay in the height and weight difference between the Japanese and the whites.

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<sup>39</sup> Jennifer Robertson, “Biopower: Blood, Kinship, and Eugenic Marriage,” In *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*, ed. Robertson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 336

<sup>40</sup> Yoshio Takahashi, qtd. in Jennifer Robertson “Japan’s First Cyborg? Miss Nippon, Eugenics and Wartime Technologies of Beauty, Body and Blood,” *Body Society* 7, no.1 (2006): 5.

Interbreeding between “yellows and whites” would be critical in creating a race of taller and stronger Japanese, one that could compete with western nations in the modern world.<sup>41</sup>

The “pure-blood” position, advocated by politician Kato Hiroyuki in his 1886 response to Takahashi, objected to the assertion that the Japanese were less civilized than the Europeans and Americans, and argued rather that Japanese blood would be tainted by mixed marriage and interbreeding. Kato further argued that the products of mixed marriages would create a “completely new hybrid category of person whose political and social ‘status’ would be unclear and perplexing.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, rather than improving the Japanese race, it would lead to the dilution of the racial and cultural essence of the Japanese. Only by ensuring that Japanese blood remain pure was there hope to maintain Japan’s distinctive culture and history.

While the “pure-blood” view quickly emerged as the dominant discourse, debate on the topic continued and moved beyond merely the Caucasian/Japanese dichotomy, driven particularly by Japan’s colonizing activities in China and Southeast Asia. By the 1930s, the offspring of Japanese males and non-Japanese females were evident throughout Japan’s colonial empire.<sup>43</sup> To combat what was perceived of as the thinning of the pure Japanese blood, the state began a program to send Japanese women to the colonies to marry Japanese men. They hoped that this would effectively put a stop to sexual relations between Japanese men and non-Japanese women in the colonies, and prevent the further dilution of pure Japanese blood.

This reference to blood “dilution” was not a new phenomenon. Rooted in a “centuries-old construction of radical otherness,”<sup>44</sup> it was previously employed in discussions of marriages between symbolically pure and “polluted” Japanese. “Polluted” individuals included the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Robertson, *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Robertson, “Japan’s First Cyborg?”, 6.

<sup>44</sup> Robertson, “Blood Talks: Eugenic Modernity and the Creation of New Japanese,” *History and Anthropology* 13, no.3 (2002), 198.

Burakumin, who were marginalized by their work in “dirty” sectors: animal slaughtering, leather work, and funerary work, among others.<sup>45</sup> Marriage between a pure and polluted person would result in the subsequent tainting of the pure person and their entire household. Pollution of the person is thus viewed as somewhat analogous to an infection or contamination that once contracted, can never be removed.<sup>46</sup> This folk theory validates pureness, and this same validation is evident in the discourse of pure blood and Japanese monoethnicity.

### **III. Japanese Monoethnicity: A State-Building Tool in the Meiji Era**

The idea of Japanese monoethnicity continued to evolve out of the nation-building movement following the Meiji Restoration. During this period, the consolidation of a definitive Japanese identity as a state-building tool began to develop. The Meiji government came into being at a time when large portions of Asia had been colonized by European powers. As Japan scholar Nanette Gottlieb argues, in order to avoid colonization, “it was imperative, therefore, that the construct of a modern nation-state with a cohesive national identity, at least on the surface, be formed without delay.”<sup>47</sup> Underlying the idea of a unified nation was an assumption of a nationalism based on ethnicity, articulated by historian Sandra Wilson:

it is a largely static phenomenon, relatively coherent and monolithic, in that it is exclusivist, and centred on a set of core ideas about what constituted the Japanese nation and the essence of Japanese identity, including the assertion that the Japanese had always existed as a separate people, that the imperial house had continued

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<sup>45</sup> John Lie. *Multiethnic Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 85.

<sup>46</sup> In Japanese folk theory, the polluted individuals are labeled “black stock” (kurosuji) and the pure “white stock” (shirosuji). “White stock” is irrevocably rendered “black” by miscegenation among the two groups. Robertson, “Biopower,” 336-7.

<sup>47</sup> Nanette Gottlieb, “Japan,” In *Language & National Identity in Asia*, ed. Andrew Simpson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 188.

unbroken for over two thousand years, that the Japanese people possessed unique attributes and pure blood, and had a unique mission to lead Asia<sup>48</sup>

This sense of national identity was put forth by political and bureaucratic leaders, an elite minority, who sought to consolidate the country and its people in the face of the threat of western colonization.

Beyond this assumption of an ethnically homogenous nation, construction of a cohesive Japanese identity lay in the standardization and adoption of a unified culture, particularly through the consolidation of one national language and history. The new government used these tools to create a unified identity in place of the regional and local loyalties that characterized the previously decentralized state.

The formation of the perception of a shared culture was critical to the discourse of national identity, yet at the same time, deeply problematic. The construction and explication of uniquely *Japanese* traits contributed to the demarcation of what exactly it meant to be Japanese. Writers such as Haga Yaichi (1867-1927) sought to identify the concept of national character, describing Japanese as being “patriotic, practical, realistic, fond of nature, and humorous in temperament,” among other things.<sup>49</sup> By singling out traits that were unique to Japan and that set the Japanese apart from other peoples, the idea of a culturally unique Japan played a role in the establishment of a unified Japanese identity. However, as noted above, this notion of a singular, unique Japanese culture is wrought with contradictions, not the least of which is the fact that many aspects of Japanese culture and society were adopted from China.

One of the tools the state used in its quest to homogenize Japanese culture was the standardization of language. Recognizing and adopting this official Japanese language meant

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<sup>48</sup> Sandra Wilson “Rethinking nation and nationalism in Japan,” *Nation and Nationalism in Japan* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “The Invention and Reinvention of ‘Japanese Culture,’” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 54, no.3 (1995), 761.

stamping out other languages, such as Ainu and Okinawan<sup>50</sup>, and subsequently, the standardization of both written and spoken Japanese. Intellectual and political elites viewed language as equivalent to the nation's lifeblood, underscoring the importance of both the standardization and the suppression of local dialects. The effects of the implementation of the new official language on nationalism can be seen best through the country's universal compulsory education system as well as the national conscription army, which were "designed to lift loyalties to the national level and eventually both became vehicles for purposeful nationalist indoctrination."<sup>51</sup> The effective homogenization of language was a tool to establish one Japanese national identity and one nationalism throughout the archipelago.

In addition to stressing Japan's unique linguistic features, Meiji elites also deployed a narrowly conceived notion of history to create a sense of shared belonging. Skimming over Japan's multiethnic origins, these leaders concentrated on emphasizing the descent of all Japanese from the Yamato nation. Not only did they claim one lineage, but they also propagated the "notion that Japan and the Japanese were of divine origin, and hence different from and superior to others."<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, "the nation became to be conceived of as an extended family, with the Emperor as the supreme father to the national community and head of the family state."<sup>53</sup> This shared history, emphasizing a *shared* and superior Japanese blood through the national family, resulted in a national identity staunchly entrenched in ethnic and cultural unity.

This single, shared national identity, delineated through the assertion of common qualities, was enhanced and enforced through the state and new forms of communication. Newly

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<sup>50</sup> These are the languages spoken by the Ainu and Okinawan minority populations, respectively. The history of these two groups will be outlined in more detail in Section IV of this chapter.

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth B. Pyle, "Introduction: Some Recent Approaches to Japanese Nationalism," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31.1 (1971), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Wilson, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Mikiko Ashikari, "The memory of the women's white faces: Japaneseness and the ideal image of women," *Japan Forum* 15, no.1 (2003), 57.

constructed railroads, the telegraphic system, the postal system, as well as newspapers and other mediums of mass communication, helped to overcome local isolation and mobilize national consciousness.<sup>54</sup> By spreading this discourse through the realm of everyday communication and interaction, the state sought to impose upon the people a sense of their new national identity.

However, in the new state's haste to establish a single ethnic, cultural, national identity, it conveniently overlooked Japan's minority populations, and effectively established a myth of Japanese monoethnicity that, despite challenges to the contrary, has remained relatively intact until recent years. As historian Kevin Doak argues:

Just as there is no objective reality behind racial categories, neither did ethnic nationalism require any underlying 'real' ethnicity to have a political usefulness for Japanese intellectuals...these ethnic visionaries were rarely concerned with the actual existence of minority ethnic groups in Japanese society, nor did the fact of the multi-ethnic origins of the Japanese people give them any pause in raising claims of ethnic national identity in Japan.<sup>55</sup>

Through Doak's analysis we can understand the use of the myth of the monoethnic nation as a state-building tool. By ignoring both the history of minority populations in Japan and the multiethnic origins<sup>56</sup> of the Japanese state, these political elites created a one-dimensional view of the modern Japanese nation.

In this period, Japan's largest ethnic minority populations included the Ainu, native to the northernmost island of Hokkaido, and the Okinawans, of the southern Ryukyu archipelago. In

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<sup>54</sup> Pyle, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Kevin M. Doak, "What Is a Nation and Who Belongs? National Narratives and the Ethnic Imagination in Twentieth-Century Japan," *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 288.

<sup>56</sup> This new discourse also disregarded the diverse origins of the people who came to be known as Japanese. While Japanese are generally recognized to be of Mongolian descent, there are at least two distinct groups from which modern Japanese have descended: peoples of central Asia and the region of South China. A more controversial theory claims that a third group of Japanese are descendants of inhabitants of Malaysia and Polynesia. However, this is often discounted by the fact that travel between the South Pacific and the Japanese islands, without navigational aids, would have been impossible. Nonetheless, this shows that even those considered to be ethnically "Japanese" emerged from diverse ethnic origins. William Scott Morton and J. Kenneth Olenik. *Japan: Its History and Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill Professional, 2005), 4-5. See also: Kosaku Yoshino. *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan* (New York: Routledge, 1992)

addition, Chinese and Korean immigration, which had begun in the fifth century, resulted in significant populations of those groups in the Japanese state.<sup>57</sup> The presence of these groups of diverse individuals was completely ignored by the state's discourse of Japanese monoethnicity.

The fact that Japanese ethnic diversity was overlooked in the post-Meiji Restoration state-building process set the stage for later contestation and challenge of what it meant to be Japanese and to belong to the Japanese nation. It is imperative to understand this "history of imagining the nation itself as an ethnic body" in order to understand the continued tension between the ethnic nation and the political state, which remained despite state propagation of the monoethnic Japanese myth.<sup>58</sup>

#### **IV. Continued Tension: Japanese Monoethnicity and Nationalism in the Post-World War II Era**

From the discussion above, we can see that the establishment of a homogenous Japanese national identity was a long process, but was most effectively consolidated and used as a state-building tool in the post-Meiji Restoration period. Nonetheless, Doak observes that while the origins of the Japanese nation-state (and thus Japanese nationalism and national identity) are often traced back to the Meiji Constitution of 1889, this event "does not so much reveal the solid foundations of the Japanese 'nation-state' as the historical conditions for a specific contestation of ethnic-national identity and state citizenship... [that was] not resolved by the postwar 1947 constitution but [has] reemerged in recent years in Japan."<sup>59</sup> The upheavals of the postwar period created confusion about traditional values, and earlier "ways of organizing and viewing

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<sup>57</sup> Varley, 25.

<sup>58</sup> Doak, 284.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 285.

social and political life became problematic and controversial.”<sup>60</sup> While the modern Japanese nation-state had been established by the Meiji Constitution, and was subsequently reaffirmed by the 1947 constitution, it failed to answer questions of how to define Japanese nationality and identity. Culture and ethnicity remained at odds and these uncertainties have driven tensions of identity in Japan in later years.

### ***The Monoethnic Myth***

The end of World War II and the Japanese defeat signaled a major landmark in the evolution of Japanese (ethnic/cultural) national identity. Japan’s colonial and imperial legacy was inextricably tied to the idea of Japanese national superiority and predicated on notions of cultural and ethnic singularity. Yet after the horrors perpetrated by the Japanese in the name of Japanese nationalism, how could people speak of the country in such terms? In fact,

the disestablishment of the imperial state after the war left many Japanese with a sense that the state was a thoroughly corrupt agent for social change, but it did little to temper a broader, popular sense that national cultural identity, invested in the concept of *minzoku* [ethnicity or race, but can refer to an ethnic community or nation], remained untrammelled by the sins of the militarized, Westernized state.<sup>61</sup>

While the Japanese lost faith in the institution of the state itself, the instrument through which these horrors were propagated, national *cultural* identity remained relatively unified and intact. It is during this time that the word ‘homogenous’ began to be associated with the Japanese state. Oguma Eiji has suggested that “Japan’s defeat in World War II and its loss of empire were the

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<sup>60</sup> Pyle, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Kevin Doak, “Building National Identity through Ethnicity: Ethnology in Wartime Japan and After,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 27 (2001), 3.

preconditions for a postwar myth of national identity that was rooted... in a myth of the Japanese as an ethnically ‘homogenous nation’ (*tan’itsu minzoku shinwa*)”<sup>62</sup>

Marilyn Ivy’s work, which theorizes the etiology of this monoethnic myth in terms of a crisis of identity in the wake of World War II and modernity, provides a lens through which to view culture, ethnicity, and Japanese identity formation in this period. Japan emerged from World War II having perpetrated extensive destruction outside its borders as well as having experienced significant loss at home. The post-war period began a process of western-imposed modernization, implemented primarily by the US. The renunciation of supreme power by the emperor, coupled with a new constitution, created uncertainties in national and cultural identity for many Japanese. Dissenters and reactionary elements were subdued, making way for a new “purified democratic modernity.”<sup>63</sup> Here, Ivy argues, we see concentrated efforts toward building this singular Japanese identity.

However, the cohesive drive toward democracy and economic buildup were not enough to entirely sustain acceptance and assurance of this new identity. During the 1960s and 1970s, Ivy observes a return to personal and intimate “traditions” through public methods of dissemination, from advertising to mass culture. Ivy specifically examines the surge in popularity of tourist attractions with folkloric origins, such as the town of Tōno, made famous by the 1910 *Tōno Monogatari (Tales of Tōno)*, and dubbed the “eternal rural city” (*eien no den’en toshi*).<sup>64</sup> The sense of an eternal rural city resonated with the increasing emphasis on the hometown or *furusato*<sup>65</sup>, as Japan became more urban and more Japanese migrated to the cities.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Marilyn Ivy. *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 15.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 110-111.

<sup>65</sup> Here I defer to Ivy (1995): “*Furusato*, as the term is commonly used today, means one’s hometown, one’s native place – the place where one was born and raised, a place where one used to live and with which one is deeply

The return to traditions signified a return to origins in a process of self-discovery which implied that individuals were seeking out and ascertaining their common *Japanese* identity.<sup>66</sup> The public nature of this discourse meant that it was spread to a wide audience, and the return to tradition in the context of the modern further contributed to the construction of a singular, monoethnic Japanese identity.

The trauma of World War II prevented the reevaluation of the Japanese monoethnic identity established in the previous decades. This return to tradition in the face of that trauma suggests that a comparison between postwar Germany and Japan is appropriate. The horrors perpetrated by both countries during the war required a postwar mourning process, described in Germany by Jeffrey Herf as “a totalizing drive to reunite its disunities within an archaic, continuous, and harmonious culture.”<sup>67</sup> In the aftermath of the war, both nations sought a unification of identity through a return to cultural traditions.

This return attempted to “‘conquer the modern’ by returning to an ‘age of culture’” untainted by history or conflict.<sup>68</sup> What is noteworthy about this return to traditions was its emphasis on turning back to one’s origins, and looking inward to understand the Japanese identity. Not only did this turning inward involve a personal re-identification, but also internalization of a collective identity. Thus, according to Ivy, the meaning of the “Discover myself” campaign of the 1970s became equivalent to “Discover Japan,” equating internal, individual identity with that of the nation.<sup>69</sup> This “turning inward” represents a repeated return to

familiar, or simply the place one identifies as home. Other meanings refer to historic ruins, ancient sites of human habitation, old and dilapidated villages.” (103)

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 33-4.

<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Herf, qtd. in Ivy, 14-15.

<sup>68</sup> Ivy, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 41.

the notion of Japanese cultural unity to avoid recognizing and grappling with the anxiety of the postwar period.

This notion of Japanese cultural unity was further propagated through the literature of *Nihonjinron* (literally, discussions of Japanese people). This body of literature, produced not only by academics but also by journalists, critics, writers, and business elites, promotes a theory of Japanese ethnic and cultural uniqueness, and seeks to articulate what it means to be Japanese.<sup>70</sup> While *Nihonjinron* had its roots in the Meiji state-building era, it emerged as a distinct ideology in the post-World War II period, a tool to reform Japanese collective identity, as Ivy might argue. Its three main premises center on Japanese homogeneity (ethnically, culturally, and linguistically); the deep, unbreakable tie between the land and people of Japan; and the vertically constructed group orientation of Japanese society.<sup>71</sup>

Sociologist Kosaku Yoshino terms the first of these premises “The invention of the ‘Japanese race.’”<sup>72</sup> This notion is predicated on the idea that certain immutable characteristics of Japaneseness are passed down through blood, and emphasizes the homogeneity of the Japanese people. Second, the connection between the land and the people is tied to language and communication. As Japan scholar Rotem Kowner explains, “*Nihonjinron* writers maintain that Japanese culture, as manifested by language and social customs, can be carried only by Japanese who are the result of the specific amalgam of the Japanese archipelago.”<sup>73</sup> Highlighting Japan’s position as an isolated island nation, this idea contributes to the conception of Japanese singularity, accessible only to those possessing the requisite, uniquely Japanese characteristics. Finally, Japan’s vertically stratified society is the oft-cited reason for the country’s unique social

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<sup>70</sup> Yoshino, 9.

<sup>71</sup> Rotem Kowner, “Deconstructing the Japanese National Discourse: Laymen’s Beliefs and Ideology” in *Exploring Japaneseness*, 170.

<sup>72</sup> Yoshino, 24.

<sup>73</sup> Kowner, 170.

culture. The group-oriented, hierarchical nature of Japanese society is positioned in opposition to Western emphasis on individuality and independence.<sup>74</sup>

The *Nihonjinron* literature thus sets up a distinct insider/outsider contrast between the Japanese and the foreign, which scholars have noted manifests itself in contemporary Japanese nationalism. Kowner even argues that it is the hegemonic ideology in modern Japan, endorsed by the political and economic elite, and unchallenged by any other ideology. He quotes *Nihonjinron* thinker Yamamoto Shichihei as labeling it “‘Japanese religion’ (Nihonkyō). Regardless of their religious affiliation, he argued, all Japanese subscribe to the cultural theology of Japan because they invariably accept the basic tenets of Japanese culture.”<sup>75</sup> Such commentaries illustrate the degree to which *Nihonjinron* precepts have permeated Japanese society since the post-war period.

In the formation of this post-World War II Japanese identity, what were ignored were the country’s minority populations. The myth of monoethnicism offered a simple, clean option to which the Japanese could turn after the experience of the ugliness and atrocities of war, and thus eliminated an opportunity to reconcile the tensions between ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship. Such contradictions are most clearly delineated in the historical treatment of minorities in the country. Some, such as the Ainu, are ethnically distinct from Japanese but are considered Japanese nationals as well as citizens. Others, namely Koreans, were considered to be Japanese nationals, despite their ethnic differences, in the colonial period. However, in the post-World War II era, these individuals were stripped of their rights as nationals because of their ethnicity. The following section will trace the history of several significant minority groups in Japan, and

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<sup>74</sup> Yoshino, 17.

<sup>75</sup> Kowner, 172.

will identify some of the tensions and contradictions in Japanese ethnic and national identity and citizenship.

## ***Minorities in Japan***

Despite the state-centered movement to establish a unique Japanese national and ethnic identity, both in the Meiji and post-World War II periods, Japan has in fact been home to an ethnically diverse people throughout its history. The Ainu and Okinawans, inhabitants of the outlying islands of Hokkaido and Okinawa, respectively, are ethnically, linguistically, and culturally different from mainland Japanese, and were alternately ostracized and exploited by the latter before their official consolidation under the Meiji state.<sup>76</sup> Through Japan's colonial activities, large numbers of Koreans migrated to Japan, created communities and, in the case of a significant minority, stayed long past the Japanese occupation of their home country. In more recent years, Japan has seen the increased immigration of *Nikkei* Brazilians, whose journeys to Japan were aided by changes in immigration laws in the late 1980s. Finally, and especially critical for the current examination, is the increase in biracial individuals, both due to increased immigration as well as a rise in international marriages.

In the first years of the Meiji government, the Ainu were systematically brought under the control of the Meiji state; the annexation of Okinawa followed soon after, in the wake of Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese War. In both regions, this entailed a process of linguistic

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<sup>76</sup> While the Ainu are recognized to be ethnically different from Japanese, discourse about the Okinawan difference has often focused on culture and language. However, there is evidence that the indigenous people of the Okinawan Islands do comprise a distinct ethnic group, and many Okinawans themselves consider themselves to be different from mainland Japanese. Therefore, for the purposes of comparison in my research, I will consider them to be ethnically different.

and cultural assimilation: the teaching of standard Japanese in schools, prohibition of traditional clothing, and outlawing of traditional religious ceremonies.<sup>77</sup>

The contradiction of the Japanese narrative of monoethnicity lies in the treatment of these groups subsumed under the umbrella of Japanese national identity. While they underwent a process of “Japanization” to wipe out their traditional languages, customs, and traditions, the Ainu and Okinawans still faced discrimination and marginalization vis-à-vis the continued suppression of their customs and history along with sustained emphasis on assimilation.<sup>78</sup>

Japanese imperialism began after the establishment and consolidation of the Meiji state, and it was through colonization efforts that modern Japan’s largest minority group, Koreans, came to the country. Japan’s colonization of Korea lasted from approximately 1910 until the end of World War II. During that time, hundreds of thousands of Koreans were forced to migrate to Japan, many as slave laborers in mining, construction and civil engineering, and manufacturing industries.<sup>79</sup> By the end of World War II, 600,000 Koreans remained in Japan, and continued to face discrimination in aspects of society from citizenship<sup>80</sup> to employment and education.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Lie, 99; Katarina Sjoberg, “Positioning oneself in the Japanese nation state: The Hokkaido Ainu case,” in *Transcultural Japan*, 200.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Siddle, “Ainu: Japan’s indigenous people, in *Japan’s Minorities*, 28; Koji Taira, “Troubled national identity: the Ryukyuans/Okinawans,” in *Japan’s Minorities*, 163.

<sup>79</sup> Sonia Ryang, “Introduction,” *Koreans in Japan: Critical voices from the Margin*, ed. Ryang (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3-4.

<sup>80</sup> With the end of Japanese colonization and the institution of the 1947 Alien Registration Law, however, these individuals, “hitherto classified as Japanese subjects, were legally classified as aliens, although they would retain Japanese nationality until the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1952.” (Andrea Vasishth, “A model minority: the Chinese community in Japan,” in *Japan’s Minorities*, 132) This treaty assured Korean independence from Japan, but for those Koreans living in Japan, it meant the formal loss of rights of political participation and other opportunities, such as licensing of businesses, national health insurance, and social security, which required Japanese citizenship. (Ryang 3) This decision to exclude Koreans from Japanese citizenship “reflected the Japanese government’s contention that having ethnic minorities among Japanese nationals was problematic.” (Chikako Kashiwazaki, “The politics of legal status: The equation of nationality with ethnonational identity,” in *Koreans in Japan*, 23.) Therefore, equality in citizenship was dependent upon a common national identity.

<sup>81</sup> Discrimination against Koreans continues in other areas of society as well. Employment opportunities, particularly in public and government service, are very limited, and even in more liberal areas with larger Korean populations, Koreans find their options limited to clerical jobs. Furthermore, Koreans face a higher degree of unemployment than the general population, and these economic challenges, coupled with ethnic prejudices, prevent the children of Korean residents from accessing “opportunities in state sector higher education, either through overt

The experience of Koreans in Japan provides a particularly interesting case to examine Japanese national identity in the context of ethnicity because, unlike the Ainu and Okinawans, they do not have a Japanese regional ethno-cultural identity, nor do they have (unless naturalized) the rights of Japanese nationals. This paradox illustrates the tenuous and contradictory connection between ethnicity and nationality in Japan.

While the historic minority communities in Japan have long been ignored to propagate the myth of Japanese monoethnicity, the group that began to challenge this myth and open up discussion on this topic was foreign migrant workers in the 1970s and 1980s. Between 1970 and 1988 there was a threefold increase in the number of foreign workers in Japan, thus, “the Japanese debate in the late 1980s crystallized the presumption of an ethnically homogenous Japan and defined the new foreign workers as a major problem.”<sup>82</sup> Their presence both contradicted and reinforced ideas of Japanese monoethnicity.

Particularly illustrative of the selective definition of “Japanese” is the 1989 Immigration Control Law, which, while opening up immigration opportunities for skilled labor, also “granted formal status of residence to *Nikkeijin* and their spouses...thus enabling them to work in Japan legally.”<sup>83</sup> Most of the *Nikkeijin*, or individuals of Japanese ancestry, who returned to Japan as foreign workers through the provision in this law were from South America.<sup>84</sup> The privileging of *Nikkeijin* over other foreign workers is a clear signal of Japan’s correspondence of ethnicity

discrimination on the part of the government, or by covert institutional practices.” (Michael Weiner, “The representation of absence and the absence of representation: Korean hibakusha,” in *Japan’s Minorities*, 83) As a result, many Koreans, who are indistinguishable from Japanese aside from name, adopt Japanese names in order to maintain the façade of Japanese ethnicity and nationality.

<sup>82</sup> Lie, 23, 25.

<sup>83</sup> Sellek, 184 (emphasis original).

<sup>84</sup> The majority came from Brazil, but also from Argentina, Peru, and Paraguay.

with nationality.<sup>85</sup> However, while the *Nikkeijin* maintained a connection to Japan via their blood, the “naïve notions of cultural similarity due to a common ethnic (racial) background are repeatedly challenged as their Latin socialization clashes with Japanese cultural ways.”<sup>86</sup>

*Nikkeijin* had very little contact with Japan once they had left the country, thereby creating a significant cultural divide despite their ethnic Japanese-ness. They too, provide an interesting challenge to the dominant discourse of Japanese monoethnicity: can one be Japanese by blood, but not by language or culture?

Through this brief history of minorities in Japan, it is clear that the country has a long multiethnic history that continues, growing increasingly diverse, until today. As a result of growing diversity, rising rates of immigration, and the subsequent increase in marriages between Japanese and non-Japanese, there are more and more children born to interracial or intercultural couples. By looking at the patterns of international marriages, which have increased seven fold between 1970 and 2004, we can ascertain that the number of biracial individuals is significant and increasing.<sup>87</sup>

Biracial Japanese individuals are positioned at a critical juncture in Japanese identity formation. Like the *Nikkeijin*, they have Japanese blood, though they are not ethnically “pure” Japanese. Unlike these immigrants, however, they have grown up in Japan, speaking Japanese, immersed in Japanese culture, and on the whole, consider themselves to be Japanese.<sup>88</sup>

Nonetheless, given the very narrow ethnic definition of “Japanese” that so many ascribe to, these

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<sup>85</sup> Japanese citizenship is granted on the basis of *jus sanguinis*, or the ‘law of blood,’ rather than the American practice of *jus soli*, or ‘law of soil.’ Therefore, citizenship must be passed down through parental nationality, and cannot be granted based on place of birth.

<sup>86</sup> Murphy-Shigematsu, “Diverse Forms of Minority National Identities in Japan’s Multicultural Society,” in *Japan’s Diversity Dilemmas*, eds. Soo im Lee, Murphy-Shigematsu, Harumi Benu (New York: iUniverse, 2006), 87.

<sup>87</sup> Sara Oikawa and Tomoko Yoshida, “An Identity Based on Being Different.” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 31 (2007), 642.

<sup>88</sup> While there are many biracial individuals who have been raised outside Japan, with differing degrees of exposure to Japanese language and culture, I am most interested in those individuals born and raised in Japan, who speak Japanese, and identify themselves as Japanese.

individuals are often not considered Japanese by those around them, and many have experienced discrimination because of their mixed-race background.

The first well-documented population of biracial individuals is associated with the post-World War II period and the US occupation of Japan. During this time, a number of American servicemen married and/or fathered children with Japanese women. As such, this first generation of biracial individuals in Japan was often linked with the US military and the requisite negative associations of that linkage. As a result of Japan's then-patrilineal nationality law, children born in Japan to interracial couples were required to take the citizenship of their father.<sup>89</sup> Thus, children born to an American father and Japanese mother were American citizens, setting a legal divide between biracial and ethnically "pure" Japanese. In 1985, the nationality law was revised to allow children of a Japanese mother *or* father to receive Japanese citizenship. This marked a major legal change in the treatment of children born to interracial couples; however, in other aspects of society, the treatment of these individuals is not so clear.

Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, born to an American father and a Japanese mother, who later naturalized to become Japanese, and a particularly prolific writer on the biracial experience in Japan, details several instances in which he has faced incredulousness surrounding his identity:

When I showed her my passport, the young employee at the airline's counter was so surprised that she couldn't stop herself from blurting out, "You're Japanese?" I just looked at her and let the document speak for itself...At a baseball game, all my Japanese friends got programs in Japanese, while I was given one printed in English, along with a friendly "Haro."<sup>90</sup>

Beyond mere curiosity as to his ethnicity and identity, he has also faced outright discrimination:

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<sup>89</sup> Murphy-Shigematsu, "'The invisible man' and other narratives of living in the borderlands of race and nation," in *Transcultural Japan*, 298.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 283.

...it did bother me when the real estate agent in Tokyo simply crossed his arms and blocked the entrance to his office refusing to even speak with me. I became angry when another who did allow me in told me that an apartment I was interested in was not available because the landlord would not rent to foreigners. I told him that I was Japanese. He smiled and said that I might be Japanese in *ancestry* and *nationality*, but I didn't look Japanese and therefore might upset the neighbors.<sup>91</sup>

It is clear from Murphy-Shigematsu's experiences that the long-standing equation of ethnicity with Japanese identity often results in marginalization of biracial individuals, excluding them from Japanese society.

Participants in a study done through Keio University echo Murphy-Shigematsu's experience as an outsider, and discuss being stared at, pointed at, and even having their ethnicity discussed in front of them. Individuals who were Japanese-Korean or Japanese-Chinese and were not immediately identified as biracial recall being treated differently when others discovered they had one non-Japanese parent. Others, who were distinguished more quickly by their appearance, relate experiences of being called *gaijin* (foreigner), and the associated assumptions: that they do not speak Japanese and do not understand Japanese customs, when, for many, Japanese is their first and only language and Japan is the only home they have known.<sup>92</sup> Biracial individuals also found that they were more harshly criticized when their actions differed even slightly from the norm. These differences were immediately linked to their ethnic differences, and as such, their Japanese parents often felt the need to ensure that their children behaved *more* properly to compensate for their perceived lack of ethnic "Japaneseness."<sup>93</sup>

Due to the fact that the Japanese census does not include an ethnicity portion (further contributing to the myth of monoethnicity), it is difficult to determine exactly how many biracial individuals live in Japan. However, based on the aforementioned increase in international

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 283-4 (emphasis added).

<sup>92</sup> Oikawa and Yoshida, *ibid*.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 643.

marriages we can conclude that this minority population is growing. Concurrent to this rise in interethnic/interracial marriages, we see the rise of the biracial celebrity.

Names that indicate a cross-pollination of Japanese and non-Japanese jump out on game shows. Faces with larger eyes, longer noses, and light brown hair (not procured from a box) peer out from magazine covers. In the streets of Tokyo's trendy Shibuya district, songs blaring from loudspeakers on trucks advertising musical groups reveal excellently accented English *and* Japanese. While many of the aforementioned biracial individuals have felt exclusion in their daily lives, "being *hāfu*<sup>94</sup> in today's Japan is not so stigmatic as it used to be; rather, it has become almost fashionable, in that the viewing public is not exposed to numerous good-looking *hāfu* entertainers and models in the mass media."<sup>95</sup> The Japanese public has increasingly embraced these biracial singers, actors, and models, who have risen to fame at least in part through their ethnic background.<sup>96</sup>

The visibility of biracial entertainers has caused some to assert that biracial individuals are, in fact, overrepresented in the entertainment industry.<sup>97</sup> Paradoxically, what appears to make these individuals so popular are, at least in part, the physical features which distinguish them from the ethnically "pure" Japanese population (and which single out other biracial Japanese for marginal treatment): lighter hair or eyes, and longer limbs. Some modeling and talent agencies even advertise their work with biracial models and *tarento* (television

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<sup>94</sup> Transliterated from the English word "half," to mean "half foreigner and half Japanese," this word is the most commonly used term to refer to biracial individuals in contemporary Japanese society. In the past, words such as "*ainoko*" (meaning half-breed) or "*konketsu-ji*" (meaning "mixed blood child") were used to describe the children of US servicemen and Japanese women, but are now considered to be derogatory. Some prefer to use the term "*daburu*," transliterated from the English "double" to describe the positive aspects of double heritage, but it is not in common usage. (Sekiguchi, 214-215).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>96</sup> These individuals, like those interviewed in the Keio study, have generally been raised in Japan and speak Japanese.

<sup>97</sup> Music: Angela Aki, Arashiro Beni, Ito Yuna, Crystal Kay; Film/Television: Kato Rosa, Sawajiri Erika, Shirota Yu, Tsuchiya Anna; Other Entertainment: Becky, Wentz Eiji; and more.

personalities and entertainers) under a separate category from their mainstream counterparts.<sup>98</sup>

One particular agency, Sugar and Spice, claims that their “many business affiliations, particularly with foreign and biracial infant and child models, as well as child actors, are top-class.”<sup>99</sup> The romanticized image of biracial individuals positions them “as having the ideal physical attributes plus being bilingual, bicultural, and intelligent.”<sup>100</sup> However, these assumptions can be problematic, because, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, very few of the most prominent biracial celebrities are in fact bilingual and bicultural.

While little research has been conducted on biracial celebrities in Japan, Mary Beltrán and Camilla Fojas’ compiled volume *Mixed Race Hollywood* sheds light on the phenomenon in the United States. Though the US has a long history as a multiethnic nation, and Japan will likely never rival its ethnic diversity, it can be instructive to examine the rise of American multiracial celebrities with an eye towards the Japanese case. Not only are the numbers of biracial and multiracial stars growing in the US, as in Japan, but “mixed race actors also are increasingly likely to foreground their mixed ethnic background as an element in their publicity today, a sign that biraciality and multiraciality are taking on new meanings.”<sup>101</sup> In the American entertainment context, multiraciality has begun to be equated with ethnic ambiguity. In the case of actor Vin Diesel, for example:

[He] isn’t being coy, he’s being clever. He’s not hiding from the public, he’s courting it. By stripping away all the identifying marks, presenting himself as a blank slate – particularly when it comes to his racial background – he’s found a way to market himself to the broadest possible audience. He’s selling himself as a multiethnic Everyman, a movie star virtually every demographic can claim as its own.<sup>102</sup>

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98 “Ayaka Wilson Sugar and Spice [Child Actor Production],” Child Actor Information, Child Actor Auditions, Production Information, <http://koyaku.livedoor.biz/archives/64657245.html>.

99 Ibid. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

100 Sekiguchi, *ibid.*

101 Mary Beltrán and Camilla Fojas, “Introduction,” in *Mixed Race Hollywood*, ed. Mary Beltrán and Camilla Fojas (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 2.

102 Benjamin Svetkey, “Vin at All Costs,” *Entertainment Weekly*, August 2, 2002.

Such appeal across widespread demographics contributes to the recent surge in interest in biracial and multiracial actors, models, and other entertainment stars. According to Ron Berger, chief executive of Euro RSCG MVBMS Partners, an advertising agency and trend research company in New York, “Today what’s ethnically neutral, diverse or ambiguous has tremendous appeal. Both in the mainstream and at the high end of the marketplace, what is perceived as good, desirable, successful is often a face whose heritage is hard to pin down.”<sup>103</sup>

In her article “Generation E.A.: Ethnically Ambiguous,” Ruth La Ferla even goes so far as to suggest that the popularity of multiracial stars, such as Diesel, Lisa Bonet and Jessica Alba, “seems due in part to the tease over whether they are black, white, Hispanic, American Indian or some combination.”<sup>104</sup> While the American situation is vastly different from that of Japanese biracial stars, understanding the fascination with this vagueness surrounding the ethnic identity of these stars can be useful in examining the case of Japan. Though most biracial Japanese stars are not ethnically ambiguous, rather, their ethnic makeup often contributes to their celebrity status; the same fascination with their ethnicity persists and is often linked with their success, as with American multiracial celebrities.

### ***Stardom, Notions of Beauty, and National Identity in Japan***

Beltrán and Fojas’ work described above illustrates the utility of examinations of celebrities and popular culture. There is, in fact, a rich literature on celebrities and stardom, which positions these topics as means through which to understand and think about modern society. According to Film Studies scholar Richard Dyer, “Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society, ways that have been socially, culturally,

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<sup>103</sup> Ruth La Ferla, “Generation E.A.: Ethnically Ambiguous,” *New York Times*, December 28, 2003.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

historically constructed.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, through stars we can identify a society’s accepted norms and seek to understand more about the ways in which these norms have been constructed.

Further, stars act as a force that allows people to make sense of the social world.<sup>106</sup> They are “embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which they have to make sense of their lives, and indeed through which we make our lives – categories of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on.”<sup>107</sup> Celebrities and stardom provide a stabilizing force for conceiving of and establishing identities within society. As James Donald, scholar of Films Studies, notes:

This...involves not just the bricks and mortar of Hollywood studios and chains of cinemas, but also certain cultural orientations and competencies (shared language, for example, and shared conceptions of time, personality, and aesthetic value) and the psychic processes whereby we enter culture and negotiate shifting, insecure positions within it...The implications of this argument are that, in investigating the phenomenon of stardom, we are not dealing with a person or an image with particular characteristics (talent, beauty, glamour, charisma, etc.) but with a rather complex set of cultural processes.<sup>108</sup>

Donald provides a compelling argument for viewing stars not merely for the image they maintain as icons in modern society, but for recognizing the complex cultural processes that contribute to the making and consuming of celebrities. An understanding of these processes then allows us to better comprehend the way members of the society at large are conceiving of their identities. As Stephen Hinerman articulates, stars are “the ‘faces’ who help us to form our social and personal identities...Through stars we learn to trust our own ideals, determine where we ‘fit’ in the global milieu, and formulate our social and cultural identities.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, stardom and celebrities offer a constructive mode for examining ideas of national identity in contemporary Japanese society.

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<sup>105</sup> Richard Dyer. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 15-16.

<sup>106</sup> P. David Marshall. *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 51.

<sup>107</sup> Dyer, 16.

<sup>108</sup> James Donald, qtd. in Stephen Hinerman, “Star Culture,” in *Culture in the Communication Age*, ed. James Lull (New York: Routledge, 2001), 205.

<sup>109</sup> Hinerman, 209.

Biracial celebrities in particular provide a lens through which to analyze the role of ethnicity as a critical factor in shaping this identity.

Stardom can serve as a method for understanding cultural processes within societies far beyond the stereotypical superficiality of glamour and beauty. However, because such a large part of the entertainment business, and success within it, is founded on appearance and physicality, it would be remiss to completely dismiss notions of beauty and physical attractiveness from this discussion. Standards of beauty, particularly in how they relate ideas of national identity to the physical (an important component of which is ethnicity), offer important insight into the way certain physical traits are considered to be uniquely Japanese, and suggest ways of including and excluding individuals from this category. Beauty pageants, as a venue for standardizing national ideas of representative beauty, guide and reinforce the ways in which beauty is understood as an indicator of national characteristics.

The discussion of beauty in this thesis can be validated by the argument for recognition of the social implications of beauty pageants. “Beauty contests are places where cultural meanings are produced, consumed, *and* rejected, where local and global, ethnic and national, national and international cultures and structures of power are engaged in their most trivial but vital aspects.”<sup>110</sup> The study of beauty pageants and of notions of beauty allow for an examination of the forces of ethnicity, culture, and power, and as Sarah Banet-Wiser argues, “Pageants create a national field of shared symbols and practices that define both ethnicity and femininity<sup>111</sup> in terms of national identity.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Colleen Ballerino Cohen and Richard Wilk, with Beverly Stoeltje, “Introduction,” in *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power*, ed. Ballerino Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje (New York: Routledge, 1996), 8 (emphasis original).

<sup>111</sup> Though this thesis will not focus on femininity, looking at both male and female biracial Japanese celebrities, much of the literature on beauty pageants understandably focuses on women, and many authors look specifically at the gendered nature of these pageants.

In Japan, the 1931 Miss Nippon<sup>113</sup> Contest reveals the link between beauty pageants and national identity. In part a response to the eugenics movement of the turn of the century, the contest sought to find “Japanese females who have the ideal bodily proportions” and promote their eugenic superiority.<sup>114</sup> However, what is perhaps most notable about this contest is evident merely from its name: it tied a physical figure to the image of the modern nation-state. As Jennifer Robertson notes, “All the finalists and semi-finalists in the Miss Nippon contest were regarded as unprecedented exemplars of the modern eugenic nation.”<sup>115</sup> Physical attributes were directly linked with the conception of the Japanese nation. Contest organizers even described the pageant as “culture work” (*bunka jigyo*), “implicitly recognizing that the body is a central symbolic resource of and for a national culture.”<sup>116</sup>

The role of beauty pageants within contemporary national consciousness is evident through the recent shifts in the Miss Japan Universe Pageant. In 1998, the Miss Universe Japan Organization was created to replace the lagging Miss Japan Organization, under the direction of Inés Lignon, a successful French modeling agent.<sup>117</sup> She was charged with modernizing the organization to raise Japan’s standing in the world of international beauty pageants. Lignon brought sweeping changes to the program, by moving the selection away from long-recognized Japanese “cuteness” toward global standards of “healthy beauty,” “intelligence,” “strength,” and “communication ability,”<sup>118</sup> and in 2007, Miss Japan Riyo Mori was crowned Miss Universe.<sup>119</sup> She was the first Japanese Miss Universe winner since Akiko Kojima in 1959; this victory was

<sup>112</sup> Banet-Wiser. *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 6-7.

<sup>113</sup> Japan is referred to as *Nippon* or *Nihon* in Japanese.

<sup>114</sup> Robertson, “Japan’s First Cyborg?”, 11.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>117</sup> “First Miss Universe Victory in 48 Years Due to Acclaimed Director,” *Asahi Shimbun*, June 20, 2007, Online Edition [http://www.asahi.com/culture/news\\_entertainment/TKY200706200329.html](http://www.asahi.com/culture/news_entertainment/TKY200706200329.html)

<sup>118</sup> “First Miss Universe Victory in 48 Years Due to Acclaimed Director”

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

critical in raising Japan's status in the arena of international beauty pageants.<sup>120</sup> Ligron's changes suggest not only the continued importance of beauty pageants in Japan, but that global forces are at play in the selection of the Japanese representative to the international competition. This idea of shifting notions of beauty, responding to outside influences, is evident in the history of Japanese admiration for skin "whiteness," as will be further discussed below.

Japanese notions of beauty have long been associated with skin color, or more specifically, skin "whiteness." An old Japanese proverb states that "'white skin makes up for seven defects'; a woman's light skin causes one to overlook the absence of other desired physical features."<sup>121</sup> Beginning in the Nara Period (710-793), court ladies would use white powder on their faces; this whiteness is heralded as a marker of beauty in literature from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries onward.<sup>122</sup>

While beauty practices included application of white powder, "natural" skin color became another category with which the Japanese marked their ethnic "uniqueness." Japanese skin, which is considered to be white, is thought of as completely distinct from other types of white (i.e. Caucasian) skin. More specifically, it is believed that "the Japanese as a race share the same skin tone, and the notion of Japanese skin works as one medium to express and represent Japaneseness."<sup>123</sup> One of the many contradictions within this characterization, however, is that variation in tones of Japanese skin is often chalked up to regional differences.

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<sup>120</sup> Rey Agapay, "Japan becomes a powerhouse in international beauty pageants," *The Manila Times*, May 30, 2007, Internet Edition <<http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2007/may/30/yehey/life/20070530lif1.html>>

<sup>121</sup> Hiroshi Wagatsuma, "The Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan," in *Racism: A Global Reader*, ed. Kevin Reilly, Stephen Kaufman, and Angela Bodino (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 28. In Japanese, "*iro no shiroi no wa shichi nan kakasu*"; "shichi nan" literally means "seven defects" though this can also be translated as "many defects" (Daniel Crump Buchanan, *Japanese Proverbs and Sayings* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 264-5.

<sup>122</sup> *The Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki and *The Tale of Genji*, presumably written by Akazome Emon, a court lady, among others. Wagatsuma, 28-29.

<sup>123</sup> Ashikari, "Cultivating Japanese Whiteness: The 'Whitening' Cosmetics Boom and the Japanese Identity," *Journal of Material Culture* 10, no.1 (2005), 76.

For example, it is not unusual to link lighter skin to those living in the snowier, more overcast northern regions of Japan, or darker skin with those living in the warmer, sunnier southern areas.<sup>124</sup>

Although variation is accepted and even rationalized, those categories are all included under the umbrella of a “Japanese” ethnic identity. This is significant because, as found by anthropologist Mikiko Ashikari’s 1996-97 survey, “it emphasizes that different skin tones among the Japanese are just due to the different weather of each region, and that *we Japanese* originally share a common Japanese skin color. According to this theory *nihon-jin* (the Japanese), whether from the north or the south, constitute a unified race.”<sup>125</sup> Notably, however, survey respondents excluded Okinawans, Ainu, and Koreans from the theory of skin tone and birthplaces. That is, these minority groups were considered different regardless of their skin tone, further complicating the notion of skin color and ethnonational identity.<sup>126</sup>

This historic emphasis on Japanese whiteness as an indicator of beauty, however, is not without western influence. Wagatsuma writes, “In the early Meiji period, the Japanese began their self-conscious imitation of the technology of the West. Less consciously, they also began to alter their perception of feminine beauty.”<sup>127</sup> Writers noted the beauty of western white skin, but were careful to preserve a Japanese notion of beauty as “Japanese women’s faces were reformed to be closer to the ideal image of beauty in the West, but were not allowed to assimilate completely into Western women’s faces.”<sup>128</sup> This carefully crafted understanding of Japanese beauty in the context of Western ideals provides context through which to examine the development of these notions in the face of globalization.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 79-80 (emphasis original).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> 36.

<sup>128</sup> Ashikari, “The memory of the women’s white faces,” 63-4.

The effects of globalization on Japanese notions of beauty are particularly well illustrated by the market for cosmetic “whitening” products. According to Ashikari, the popularity of whitening products stemmed from the introduction of Shiseido’s “*Whitess essence*” in 1989. Despite the high retail price, two million packages were sold in the first year, and 12 million in the following five years.<sup>129</sup> Following Shiseido’s lead, many domestic companies began producing and marketing their own whitening products, and by the mid-1990s, “many major foreign cosmetics companies, such as Clinique, Yves Saint-Laurent, Christian Dior, Chanel and Helena Rubenstein, have developed their own whitening cosmetics particularly for Japanese customers, and started to sell them exclusively in Japan.”<sup>130</sup>

The products that have emerged in the last two decades emphasize the *maintenance* of white Japanese skin, as opposed to *changing* one’s skin from dark to light. As discussed above, white Japanese skin is seen as a unifying racial characteristic of all Japanese. However, most women do not use whitening products as a method to preserve their Japanese identity. Instead, they use these products as a way to look ‘pretty’ (*kirei*) and ‘proper’ (*chantoshita*)<sup>131</sup>.

This begs the question, ‘pretty’ or ‘proper’ according to whom? In Ashikari’s study, respondents claimed that their notions of beauty were influenced by domestic ideas and trends:

their preference for white skin derived from ‘traditional’ and ‘domestic’ aesthetic values or standards of beauty. In the midst of globalization, Japanese aesthetic values and standards of beauty cannot escape the influence of ‘universal’ standards of the [sic] beauty. Yet Japanese women, through the practice of whitening their faces, are aiming at being beautiful *Japanese* women, rather than merely beautiful women.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ashikari, “Cultivating Japanese Whiteness,” 86.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> These terms are borrowed from Ashikari (2005).

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 85.

Thus, while the whitening product boom has often been associated with Euroamericanization or other global forces, it is much more complex than a simple valorization of the West.<sup>133</sup> Given the historic Japanese associations of beauty and whiteness, many Japanese view these practices as a mere extension of that historic, cultural tradition. The emphasis on the ethnically Japanese nature of (this type of) white skin serves to further perpetrate the notion of a homogenous Japanese identity, based both on ethnicity and defining physical characteristics.

### ***Veneration and Distance: The Notion of “Akogare”***

The current popularity of biracial celebrities across all sectors of the entertainment industry attests to their veneration in popular culture. Yet at the same time, this veneration is coupled with a process of distancing the object of veneration, the biracial star. This distance is created through the distinction between such stars and other (monoracial) celebrities, based on their *different* ethnic background, and the additional associated differences that this background implies.

The veneration of these stars is clear: biracial models, actors, singers, or *tarento* in fact appear to be disproportionately overrepresented in these industries and are often admired for the very characteristics that set them apart from the ethnically “pure” Japanese population. There are even examples of overt favoritism toward biracial individuals. ViVi Magazine, for example, will only employ biracial models for photo shoots.<sup>134</sup> In other cases, being both biracial and bilingual (which is perhaps less common) is an asset. In Japanese popular music, many singers will employ very simple English lyrics in their songs. Biracial and bilingual singers such as

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<sup>133</sup> Laura Miller. *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 4-5.

<sup>134</sup> NET ViVi, “Vivi Models Profile,” ViVi Magazine, <http://www.joseishi.net/vivi/>.

Angela Aki can effectively use correct English and correct pronunciation in their Japanese songs, lending them a certain authenticity and endearing them to fans.<sup>135</sup>

Though popularity is a strong indicator of veneration, these same popular celebrities are often disavowed as non-Japanese. Strong emphasis is placed on their ethnic background, creating a divide between biracial and ethnically “pure” Japanese celebrities. Furthermore, biracial celebrities are held to a different set of standards. For example, many people expect biracial celebrities (as well as biracial individuals on the whole) to be bilingual; Wentz Eiji has received considerable negative attention for the fact that while he is half American, he does not speak English. This disavowal via distinction creates a sense of distance between biracial celebrities and the Japanese public.

One of the ways that this distance is created is through language. The word “*akogare*” is often used to describe the sentiment felt towards biracial Japanese, especially celebrities. It has a complex history of meanings, all which have bearings on its use today. Current English translations of the word typically include ideas of “longing” or “yearning.”<sup>136</sup> However, this understanding of the word fails to capture the nuances of its use in reference to biracial celebrities. Through a closer examination of its historical meaning, we can better conceptualize the sentiments expressed when used in these contexts.

Originally written as “*akugareru*,” (the verb form of “*akogare*” or “*akugare*”) in the Heian Period (794-1185), the word was used to describe a physical departure or separation from a location, or could be used in reference to feeling the call of something or someone and going

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<sup>135</sup> Ian Condry has discussed the complexities of language politics in Japanese popular music. The debate of English versus Japanese language in music emerged in the 1960s as rock music became popular in Japan. Some groups, such as Flower Traveling Band, adopted English to introduce Japanese to the global music culture, and as the form of the language lent itself more easily to rock. Others, such as Happy End, used Japanese lyrics to cater to their immediate audience. Condry, *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization*. (Stanford, California: Duke University Press, 2006), 148.

□ “憧れ (*akogare*).” *Genius Japanese-English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. 2003.

out to it. During the Kamakura Period (1185-1333), the contemporary pronunciation “*akogareru*” emerged, and “*akogare*” and “*akugare*” began to be used concomitantly. The meaning began to shift in the Tokugawa, or Edo, Period (1600-1867), giving rise to a sense of worry or anxiety. Following the Meiji Period (1868-1912), the word evolved a meaning closer to its contemporary usage: to be captivated or enthralled.<sup>137</sup>

The etymological evolution of the word “*akogare*” reflects the contradiction within Japanese veneration and distancing of biracial celebrities. These celebrities are captivating and enthralling, as indicated by their popularity, but there is also evidence that they are kept at a distance. This distancing derives from their perceived differences from mainstream Japanese. One way of distancing is through highlighting these aspects of difference, which clearly mark the spaces between groups. Biracial Japanese are at a crossroads of ethnic and cultural characteristics which mark them as both Japanese and non-Japanese, according to historical definitions of Japaneseness. Ethnicity, linguistic skills, and beliefs and values, all assumed to be uniquely Japanese, are among the traits which, according to mainstream society, brand these individuals as not quite Japanese. The sense of push and pull that the word “*akogare*” implies provides a frame through which to view the public’s positioning of the Japanese biracial celebrity: pushing away those aspects of foreignness while pulling closer the *Japanese* qualities and characteristics possessed.

## **Introduction to the Analysis**

The notion of “*akogare*” and the sense of push and pull that it implies will be a useful concept for framing my analysis. Through electronic media sources, as well as surveys and

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<sup>137</sup> “憧れる (*akogareru*).” 日常語の意味変化辞典 (Dictionary of the History of Everyday Word Meanings). 2003.

personal interviews, this theme recurs consistently in describing the position of biracial celebrities, and biracial Japanese at large. This term will also provide a way to consider Japanese attitudes towards the foreign and future immigration in Japanese society.

I have separated my analysis into two chapters based on my data collection strategies. Chapter Three will examine online fan sites, entertainment articles, and online forum discussions surrounding six biracial celebrities. Additionally, this section will include an analysis of celebrities' personal websites. Through these data sources, I hope to give an understanding of how biracial celebrities are viewed by entertainment consumers in Japan as well as how they seek to promote and portray themselves in the creation of their public persona.

Chapter Four will examine data collected through online surveys, as well as personal interviews, of Japanese youth. These surveys and interviews focused on views of Japanese celebrities on the whole, biracial celebrities in particular, and overall impressions of biracial individuals in Japanese society. My specific methodologies in approaching these data sources will be outlined in more detail at the start of each chapter.

With my focus on the discussions and opinions surrounding biracial celebrities, I hope to gain better insight into Japanese attitudes towards race, Japaneseness, foreignness, and ultimately, the inclusion or exclusion of non-Japanese or partial Japanese into society. I believe that my examination here can give an indication of Japan's prospective immigration legislation, the reception of such legislation, and the future of immigrant integration in Japan.

## Chapter Three

### *Highlighting and Deemphasizing Difference: Popular Perceptions and Self Identification in Biracial Japanese Celebrities*

Studies of fan culture have long been relegated to the sidelines of academic research, brushed aside with the academy's "historical propensity to treat media audiences as passive and controlled, its tendency to privilege aesthetic superiority in programming, its reluctance to support consumerism, its belief in media industry manipulation."<sup>138</sup> Nonetheless, scholars in recent years have begun to turn to examinations of fans for many of the same reasons that popular culture is now becoming a legitimate field of study. As geographer Tim Edensor has argued, popular culture has become a site for contestations of identity, power, and values, and offers an avenue through which we can better understand social and cultural phenomena.<sup>139</sup> In the case of Japan, scholar Timothy J. Craig suggests, "To understand Japan's complex society and the ways it is changing, to get a sense of what the Japanese people are thinking and what they view as important... there maybe no better 'textbook' than the rich and often surprising world of Japan's modern pop culture."<sup>140</sup> In much the same way, fans can offer an interesting insight into the thoughts and opinions of the society of which they are a part.

With the advent of the Internet, and the concurrent potential for rapid flows of information, fans are now able to access information about their favorite stars, share opinions with other fans, and pay tribute to a particular celebrity, through online entertainment news and

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<sup>138</sup> Lisa A. Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan culture and popular media* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1.

<sup>139</sup> Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life* (New York: Berg, 2002), 13.

<sup>140</sup> Timothy J. Craig, "Introduction," in *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture*, ed. Timothy J. Craig (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 17.

official star websites, online forums, and fan-created websites. The public nature of this new form of communication “allows what might previously have been private meditations to become the basis for social interaction.”<sup>141</sup> An examination of aspects of this new form of communication can provide insights into not only the way Japanese view biracial celebrities, but also what those views suggest about Japanese understandings of national identity, attitudes toward the foreign, and ultimately, reception towards and integration of immigrants.

For this examination, I have chosen six biracial celebrities to focus on: Angela Aki, Becky, Kato Rosa, Sawajiri Erika, Shirota Yu, and Wentz Eiji. I have chosen to limit my discussion to Caucasian/Japanese biracial individuals as it is beyond the scope of my study to provide a complete analysis and discussion of historical and current Japanese attitudes towards and associations with non-white racial groups. The largest of these other groups are black/Japanese and non-Japanese Asian/Japanese biracial individuals. Though there are biracial celebrities of all the abovementioned backgrounds leading successful careers in Japan, the largest percentage are Caucasian/Japanese. For this reason, I selected these six individuals for close examination when narrowing the scope of my research.

Looking at online fan sites, entertainment articles, and online forums, I will examine how these stars are perceived by the entertainment-consuming public. I will pay special attention to references to: ethnicity, time spent abroad, linguistic skills, and roles that the actors/actresses take on in movies and television shows. These are common themes highlighted by fans when referring to the biraciality of these stars. I will contrast these views of celebrities with the way they portray themselves on their personal official websites. While fans continue to discuss and debate these celebrities and various aspects of their biraciality, by and large, the celebrities themselves do not reciprocate in this conversation. Though not made explicitly clear, this may

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<sup>141</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 58.

be due to the different expectations fans have for biracial celebrities versus monoracial celebrities, which highlight the divide and perceived distance between the former and their monoracial fans. Not living up to such expectations, regardless of whether they are realistic, can result in disappointment or criticism on the part of fans.

## **Popular Perceptions**

### ***Online Fan Sites***

In the early years of the Internet age, most websites were produced by academic, government, and commercial institutions, and “the Web was simply a medium for delivering information and online services by already established institutions.”<sup>142</sup> Few people made personal websites, as doing so required extensive knowledge of html coding; thus most personal websites were maintained by individuals who worked as website developers for institutions and already held this knowledge. In 1999, however, build your own website tools emerged and rose to popularity. These free tools allowed amateurs to create and maintain webpages, which led to the explosion of personal websites online.<sup>143</sup>

Such personal websites allow individuals to share their thoughts, opinions, and feelings on a variety of issues. Of particular interest to this thesis is the category of fan sites, through which fans can share information, photographs, links to news or magazine articles and video clips, and other news about their favorite celebrities. I have chosen to include articles from the online encyclopedia Wikipedia in this section on fan sites, as the site embraces an “open participation, communal evaluation” principle. This means that any Wikipedia user can establish

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<sup>142</sup> Oscar Bulaong, Jr., “On the Globalization of the Self: Internet Weblogs as an Identity-forming Activity,” In *East-West Identities: Globalization, Hybridization, and Localization*, eds. Kwok B. Chan, Jan Walls, and David Hayward (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 175.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

a new topic page, and anyone, regardless of whether they are a registered user or not, can edit previously created pages.<sup>144</sup> Thus, it is not inaccurate to assume that fans comprise the majority of Wikipedia posters and editors of celebrity pages.

As fan communities have continued to grow online, so have the scholarly studies devoted to these groups. These studies run the gamut from examinations of online communities of soap opera viewers to discussion forums for devoted wrestling fans, yet most return to the seminal work of Henry Jenkins, whose 1992 *Textual Poachers* made a strong case for the examination of fan communities as centers of debate and discussion that represent a unique source of cultural expertise. Fandom, Jenkins says, is “an institute of theory and criticism, a semi-structured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of mass media and their own relationship to [them].”<sup>145</sup> Though this understanding of fandom has mostly been applied to viewers of particular television programs or fans of certain sports teams, it is also applicable to other fan sites where the goal is “to exchange information, criticism, and interpretations” of a given subject.<sup>146</sup> Fan sites dedicated to biracial Japanese celebrities thus offer a glimpse not only into the ways in which the stars are viewed but also how they are positioned in relation to fans and society at large.

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<sup>144</sup> Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Producership* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006), 107.

<sup>145</sup> Jenkins, 86.

<sup>146</sup> Ann-Sofie Axelsson and Tim Regan, “Playing Online,” In *Playing Video Games: Motives, Responses, and Consequences*, ed. Peter Vorderer and Jennings Bryant (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 300.

## Ethnicity



*A hāfu<sup>147</sup> with a German-American father and a Japanese mother. His skin is white, his eyes hazel-green (light brown, green, gray, blue, etc.) However, due to the fact that he was born and raised in Japan and only speaks Japanese, he has a complex towards his Western physical appearance. Further, he is privately bothered by the fact that his nipples are pink.<sup>148</sup>*

-- ♥ ウエンツ 瑛士 ♥ (Wentz Eiji): A Fan Site—

When fan sites give short biographies of celebrities, they invariably list the same general stats: full name, birth date, hometown, height, and blood type.<sup>149</sup> Yet in the biographies of biracial Japanese celebrities, there is generally an additional kernel of information: ethnicity. Of

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<sup>147</sup> I have chosen to use the Japanese term “*hāfu*” rather than the English translation “half” because the former is used much more widely and more generally than the latter, and I feel that a translation would not adequately express the associations of this term.

<sup>148</sup> “Wentz Eiji.” ♥ウエンツ瑛士♥ EiTe 瑛徹 [http://blogs.yahoo.co.jp/wat\\_nq2/1403127.html](http://blogs.yahoo.co.jp/wat_nq2/1403127.html)

<sup>149</sup> In contemporary Japan, blood type is often correlated with personality characteristics: “type As are sensitive perfectionists but overanxious; Type Bs are cheerful but eccentric and selfish; Os are curious, generous but stubborn; and ABs are arty but mysterious and unpredictable.” This theory was first imported from Nazi race ideologues in the 1930s as a method to breed better soldiers. While it lost favor years later, it resurfaced in the 1970s with promotion by Masahiko Nomi, a journalist with no medical background. It has even been linked to national character: “Suzuki remarks that the Japanese character has not changed very much for the last hundred years because ‘blood type is hereditary... [and because] the relative proportion of four blood types for an ethnic group remains almost constant. This means that...national and ethnic character passes on in a hereditary manner from parent to child and from child to grandchild, thereby persisting indefinitely [sic].’” (Yoshino, 31). Today, blood type “horoscopes” are shown on television, matchmaking agencies offer blood type compatibility tests, and millions of books on how blood type determines personality are sold each year. While newspaper polls indicate that only 20 percent of all Japanese are convinced that blood type directly influences personality, reports of blood type discrimination in job hunting and bullying among kindergarten children underscore the seriousness with which this connection is taken. Many celebrities and other well-known officials, including the Prime Minister, include information about their blood type on their official online profiles. Natsuko Fukue, “‘Blood Types – Do they shape a personality or mere stereotypes?’” *The Japan Times*, December 31, 2008, Online Edition <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/rss/nn20081231f3.html>; Justin McCurry, “Typecast – Japan’s obsession with blood groups,” *The Guardian*, December 4, 2008, Online Edition <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/dec/04/japan-world-news>; Mari Yamaguchi, “In Japan, you are what your blood type is,” Psychorg.com, January 23, 2009, <http://www.physorg.com/news152723712.html>.

twenty total fan sites and articles on biracial celebrities examined, fifteen were found to mention the star's ethnic background. These profiles typically list the nationality of each parent, and label the individual a "*hāfu*" of those two nationalities/ethnicities.

Wentz Eiji is particularly susceptible to comments directed at his biraciality due to his perceived predominantly Caucasian features. In particular, his eyes cause particular remark, whether from a fan saying, "They look brown on television, but appear hazel with strong green" or a makeup artist from a drama, who commented that they "change subtly from blue to brown depending on the condition of the light or the angle from which you see them."<sup>150</sup> Fans make note of these genetic gifts from his German-American father in the same manner that they list off his favorite foods, careful to note that they are all traditional Japanese dishes.<sup>151</sup> It does not matter that Wentz has spent his entire life in Japan; the simple fact of his ethnicity makes it significant that all of his favorite foods are Japanese.

Similarly, actor Shirota Yu receives many comments directed at his physical appearance, and in particular, his height: 188 centimeters (6'2"), well over the average height for a Japanese male.<sup>152</sup> For example, the "gentle features bequeathed [to him] by his Spanish mother," are among the qualities that make him "cool" and "attractive" to fans.<sup>153</sup> The direct linkage of his physical features with his foreign background, and then to his attractiveness indicates a strong connection between his ethnicity and how he is identified as a popular figure.

"*Hāfu* of an Italian father and a Japanese mother": Kato Rosa.<sup>154</sup> "Japanese father and Algerian French mother, *hāfu*": Sawajiri Erika.<sup>155</sup> "Born to a Japanese father and an Italian

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<sup>150</sup> "Wentz Eiji," Wikipedia Japan  
<http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%82%A6%E3%82%A8%E3%83%B3%E3%83%84%E7%91%9B%E5%A3%AB>

<sup>151</sup> "Wentz Eiji." ♥ウエンツ瑛士♥

<sup>152</sup> "Shirota Yu @ Oshareism," Forever 4Teen (Drama, Music Television Show, and Variety Show Impressions!?)  
<http://haruna-m.jugem.jp/?eid=1801>

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> "Kato Rosa," Hatena::Keyword <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/keyword/%B2%C3%C6%A3%A5%ED%A1%BC%A5%B5>

American mother”: Angela Aki.<sup>156</sup> These celebrities are summed up quickly by their ethnic makeup, which appears in their profiles alongside other basic facts such as birth date or hometown. It is clear through these examples that ethnicity comprises a very real part of their identity in the public eye, and creates a tangible sense of difference and distance.

### *Time Abroad*



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- *Oguri Shun’s rival in the drama “Ikemen Paradaisu” (“Hottie Paradise”), 188 centimeters tall and having inherited his Spanish mother’s good looks, he has an irresistible presence and is now well known as a hot young actor.*
- *He was born in Tokyo, moved to Spain when he was three, and attended a Spanish elementary school until second grade (Cool).*
- *There’s a bit of a gap with his physical appearance, but the fact that he can speak Spanish naturally is super cool.*<sup>158</sup>

*--Shirota Yu @ Oshareism, from “Forever 4Teen (Drama, Music Television Show, and Variety Show Impressions!?)” --*

Fan sites also pay close attention to the time biracial celebrities have spent abroad.

Among the six celebrities examined here, most have either spent little time abroad, or lived

<sup>155</sup> “Sawajiri Erika,” Hatena::Keyword

<http://d.hatena.ne.jp/keyword/%C2%F4%BF%AC%A5%A8%A5%EA%A5%AB>

<sup>156</sup> “Angela Aki’s Profile,” Oricon Style <http://www.oricon.co.jp/prof/artist/364306/>

<sup>157</sup> “Shirota Yu,” Watanabe Entertainment <http://www.watanabepro.co.jp/mypage/artist/shirotau.html>

<sup>158</sup> “Shirota Yu @ Oshareism.”

overseas at a young age before returning to Japan for the greater part of their life. Nonetheless, having a non-Japanese parent is often linked with international experience, as well as language skills (to be discussed below), and these factors all coalesce to form the perceived identity of these biracial stars.

Of the entertainers analyzed in this thesis, Angela Aki has spent the longest time abroad, “moving to Hawaii at the age of fifteen, after which she lived in Washington, DC. She returned to Japan in 2003.”<sup>159</sup> This return to Japan is seen as Aki’s homecoming, as evidenced by the word used to describe her return: “*kikoku*,” which signifies a return to one’s home. The use of this word to describe homecoming in reference to Aki implies that she is considered to be Japanese, perhaps by virtue of the fact that she spent her childhood years in Japan, even if this is belied by her physical appearance or ethnic background.

Sawajiri Erika’s dual identities as an actress and a singer provide additional fodder for this question. Having established her career as an actress, Sawajiri began her career as a singer, first under the name Kaoru Amane (her character in the television drama that generated her first single), then as ERIKA. As one site notes, ERIKA lists Paris, France as her hometown. “The hometown [of ERIKA] differs from that of Sawajiri Erika, but their birthdays are the same. France, which is listed as her place of birth, is the mother country of Sawajiri’s mother.”<sup>160</sup> Though fans have no doubt that Sawajiri Erika and ERIKA are the same person, the way they distinguish between the two, particularly in details such as hometown, imply that she may be viewed as more or less Japanese based on this biographical information.

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<sup>159</sup> “Angela Aki’s Profile.”

<sup>160</sup> “Sawajiri Erika” Wikipedia Japan

<http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%B2%A2%E5%B0%BB%E3%82%A8%E3%83%AA%E3%82%AB>

## Language Skills



*With an Italian father and Japanese mother, she lived in Naples, Italy until the age of six, and while she spoke Italian then, between that period and when she began appearing in Italian Conversation<sup>161</sup>, she forgot it all. Before her debut, she lived in Kagoshima City, Kagoshima Prefecture. She shot to stardom in Recruit's Zexy commercial, when her appearance in a wedding dress caught the attention of many. Further, she holds a level seven in calligraphy<sup>162, 163</sup>.*

*-- "Kato Rosa: Profile" from Kato Rosa: A Fan Site--*

Language skills mark the most exclusive category of qualities associated with biracial celebrities. While all of the individuals have biracial ethnicity and some have lived abroad, significantly fewer hold foreign language skills. Having foreign language ability, and in some cases, not having it, is a particular marker within an individual's celebrity identity; this, too, is clearly delineated in biographies and profiles on fan sites.

Wentz, in particular, has received widespread attention, sometimes even derision, for his lack of English skills. Born to an American father and Japanese mother, both his parents and his older brother speak English. Growing up, his parents were concerned that he might not fully master both English and Japanese should he be exposed to both, and chose to raise him in Japanese.<sup>164</sup> His brother later attended ECC (a private English conversation school) and studied

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<sup>161</sup> A television program by NHK, the national television syndicate.

<sup>162</sup> There are eight levels in shodo, or the art of Japanese calligraphy.

<sup>163</sup> "Kato Rosa," Kato Rosa Fan Page <http://manex.syoutikubai.com/>

<sup>164</sup> "WaT Wentz Eiji is ReallyX2 Cool!" Capture Image Blog <http://blog.livedoor.jp/ticket1/archives/50292509.html>

abroad in the US, but Wentz showed little interest in learning the language, and confesses that his English ability is in fact quite poor.<sup>165</sup>

Wentz, however, is not the only biracial star who is not bilingual. Sawajiri Erika, whose mother is French Algerian, does not speak French; nor does Kato Rosa speak Italian, though she lived in Italy until the age of six and spoke fluent Italian before moving to Japan. However, neither of these stars receives as much attention for her lack of second language skills. This may be related to the fact that Wentz is known for his particularly Caucasian features, and may be thought to look *more foreign* than other biracial stars, and thus, in the minds of fans, should be more likely to speak a foreign language.

Conversely, Shirota is recognized for his foreign language skills. He spent four years in Spain and speaks conversational Spanish; several fan sites even list the language as one of his “special talents.”<sup>166</sup> Perhaps even more interesting is the example of multitalented entertainer Becky, whose father is British. She is also listed as speaking conversational English.<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless, she is rarely featured using these language skills, because, as one site suggests, “She does not take on any work that involves speaking English because there’s a chance it would break the image she has built as a *tarento*.”<sup>168</sup> In order to understand why this might be the case, it can be instructive to briefly discuss the word “*tarento*” and the roles these individuals play in Japanese entertainment.

Transliterated from the English word “talent,” *tarento* refers to Japanese television personalities and entertainers. As Jayson Chun writes in *Japan Pop!*, “although these individuals

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<sup>165</sup> “Wentz Eiji.” ♥ウエンツ瑛士♥

<sup>166</sup> “Shirota Yu,” Hatena::Keyword <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/keyword/%BE%EB%C5%C4%CD%A5>; “Shirota Yu Profile,” Yahoo People Directory <http://talent.yahoo.co.jp/talent/12/m04-0548.html>; “Shirota Yu Profile Television Show Appearances.” Goo Television Shows.

<http://tv.goo.ne.jp/contents/cast/84e9e9ce50b8e97691f73aa707b29266/index.html>

<sup>167</sup> “Becky,” Wikipedia Japan <http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%83%99%E3%83%83%E3%82%AD%E3%83%BC>

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

may or may not possess much talent in the ordinary sense of the word, they are famous primarily due to the frequency with which they appear on television.”<sup>169</sup> Mass communication scholars Anne Cooper-Chen and Miiko Kodama elaborate, “They appear so regularly that they nearly compete against themselves, hopping from one brightly lit set to another on different channels. A host on one show commonly acts as a panelist on another, and vice versa.”<sup>170</sup> The competition is fierce, and though *tarento* may not be talented in the traditional sense, as Chun writes, they must maintain a personality that keeps the audience entertained and engaged. If speaking English might detract from the image Becky has constructed as a *tarento*, avoiding roles that would call for such skills may be her way of maintaining her persona.

The contrast in public reception to Wentz, Shiota, and Becky’s language skills (or lack thereof) exemplifies the complex views towards biracial celebrities and their bilingualism. The expectation that biracial individuals will speak second languages is prevalent, though this may be related to the degree to which they physically resemble the “foreign” side of their heritage just as much as the amount of time they have spent abroad. Yet when biracial celebrities do speak a second language, it is recognized to be an additional skill. Perhaps most importantly, the case of Becky suggests that while language skills are sometimes expected, and can be an asset, they may also mark a divide between being a Japanese celebrity and a *biracial* Japanese celebrity, and the distance implied between the audience and the latter.

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<sup>169</sup> Jayson Chun, “A New Kind of Royalty: The Imperial Family and the Media in Postwar Japan,” In *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2000) 240-1.

<sup>170</sup> Anne Cooper-Chen with Miiko Kodama, *Mass Communication in Japan* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1997), 121-2.

## *TV and Movie Roles*



*As her father is English, she can speak conversational English, though for the most part her English is mixed with Japanese, so at this time, she cannot speak fluent English. Further, she does not take on any work that requires speaking English as this might damage the image she has created as a tarento<sup>172</sup>.*

-- "Becky" from Wikipedia Japan--

Actors are often defined and remembered for the roles they enact on screen. As such, we can understand these roles to be reflective of how the actors are perceived first by directors and casting agents who envision them in certain roles, and second, through their performance, by the public at large. As historian Richard deCordova states, an actor's identity is "essentially an intertextual one based on connections between films and between other kinds of discourse."<sup>173</sup> Thus biracial actors may not only find their choice of roles constrained by their looks and others' perceptions of them, but may also discover that the roles they are selected for increasingly define the public's perceptions of them. As will be discussed in the context of online discussion forums below, these stars are often associated with the ethnic backgrounds of the characters they portray. Therefore, by examining roles undertaken by biracial actors and actresses, we can begin to understand more about how they are perceived as actors and how this perception has affected their careers.

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<sup>171</sup> "Becky Profile," Yahoo People Directory <http://talent.yahoo.co.jp/pf/detail/pp5930>

<sup>172</sup> "Becky."

<sup>173</sup> Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 113.

Becky's filmography is perhaps most noticeable for the names of the characters she has played: Rita, Ally, Susan, Ellen, Emily, Ellie, Lily, and Tanya all appear in her list of television drama performances and these foreign names represent half of her total roles.<sup>174</sup> The fact that Becky is associated with these roles, clearly marked with non-Japanese names, suggests a way to understand the public's perception of her as biracial, and as somewhat foreign. Despite her efforts to take on roles that do not require English language skills, which might detract from her *Japanese* persona, Becky is still boxed into roles that label her as different.

A particularly telling example of one of these roles is "Nodame Cantabile Shinshun Special in Europe," the sequel to the popular drama "Nodame Cantabile." In the Special, the main characters travel to Europe, where they meet the "Russian" Tanya (Becky) and "French" Frank (Wentz). Casting the two biracial actors to play the foreigners in this drama is a clear indication of the way in which they are viewed as non-Japanese. This divide, evidenced by the casting decision, serves to further emphasize the distancing of biracial celebrities.

### ***Entertainment Articles***

Entertainment news has become increasingly consumed online, and creates another forum through which we can examine public perceptions of biracial celebrities. The entertainment articles examined here are taken from the entertainment section of the online Mainichi and Chunichi Sports newspapers. Mainichi Newspaper, which also has a print version, covers events from international news to politics to sports, and the entertainment section includes stories on the performing arts, film, and music, among other topics.<sup>175</sup> Chunichi Sports is a

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<sup>174</sup> "Becky."

<sup>175</sup> "Entertainment and Sports," Mainichi Newspaper, Online Edition <http://mainichi.jp/enta/>

division of Chunichi Newspaper that covers sporting and entertainment events.<sup>176</sup> Many entertainment articles include brief biographies of the celebrities featured, which provide a useful comparison to the profiles listed on fan sites. Additionally, as Hinerman suggests, “Stardom, as it is served up by modern telecommunications industries for global consumption, is thus a perfect trust-building, self-locating mechanism. Stardom has become a ‘glue’ that can connect individuals across time and space, create identities, and hold them together.”<sup>177</sup> It can be useful to examine the ways the media portrays stars in order to gain a deeper understanding of the ways entertainment consumers experience and internalize this information to forge their personal identities.

## *Ethnicity*

*Shirota Yu: Born in Tokyo December 26, 1985, 23 years old. Hāfu with a Japanese father and Spanish mother. Debuted in 2003 musical “Beautiful, brave young girl Sailor Moon.” In 2004, joined young actor’s group D-BOYS, and graduated last year. Has appeared in TBS drama “Rookies” among others. 1 meter 88. Blood type O.*<sup>178</sup>

*Yasuda Misako: Born in Kyoto Prefecture April 21, 1982, 26 years old. Selected as Miss Young Magazine in 2002, active as a gravure idol. CD debut in 2003 with the single “may be tomorrow.” In 2005 began acting in the film “Luna Heights.” 1 meter 61. B82, W60, H85. Blood type O.*<sup>179</sup>

Two entertainment articles announcing Shirota Yu’s relationship with entertainer Yasuda Misako each featured brief biographic profiles of the two stars and perhaps best illustrate the double standard for biracial versus monoracial stars. While both sets of profiles included basic information such as date of birth, hometown, height, and career highlights (the example listed

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<sup>176</sup> “Chunichi Sports,” Chunichi Web <http://www.chunichi.co.jp/chuspo/>

<sup>177</sup> Hinerman, 203

<sup>178</sup> “Yasuda Misako: Live Broadcast of the Proud Statement ‘I will!’” Mainichi Newspaper, 26 January 2009, Online Edition <http://mainichi.jp/enta/geinou/news/20090126spn00m200003000c.html>

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

above also included blood type), Shirota's contained the comment "*Hāfu* with a Japanese father and a Spanish mother."<sup>180</sup> By including his ethnicity, the profiles are giving equal emphasis to his ethnic background as his hometown or his date of birth in their short snapshot of the actor.

Wentz, too, has his ethnicity highlighted in entertainments news. Short references to his "German-American father" or his "*hāfu*-face" mention his ethnic background as well as its manifestations in his physical appearance. As will be discussed further below, reporters have also commented on the "gap" between Wentz's looks, which are associated with assumed foreign language skills, and his lack of English speaking ability. A similar observation was made regarding the gap between Shirota's physical features, associated with foreignness and lack of Japanese speaking skills, and his flawless formal Japanese.<sup>181</sup> These two remarks exemplify the almost contradictory expectations for biracial celebrities: in order to achieve success in the Japanese entertainment world, they must speak Japanese, but due to their physical features, are expected to speak a foreign language. Simultaneously, there is a sense of surprise when their Japanese does not differ from that of other native speakers. Japanese language skills are one aspect that brings such stars closer to the Japanese viewer, but when these are coupled with seemingly foreign features, the gap is so jarring as to nearly mitigate that sense of nearness.

### *Language Skills*

As mentioned above, Wentz's lack of English skills are often at the forefront of discussions about his biraciality. A recent entertainment news article, entitled "Kitaro<sup>182</sup> Wentz: Even though he is *hāfu*, he cannot speak English" captures the sentiments well. The article

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, "Shirota Yu and Yasuda Misako are Lovestruck!" Chunichi Sports, 13 January 2009, Online Edition <http://www.chunichi.co.jp/chuspo/article/entertainment/news/CK2009011302000151.html>

<sup>181</sup> "Shirota Yu and Yasuda Misako are Lovestruck!"

<sup>182</sup> Refers to his most recent role in the film "Gegege no Kitaro."

details his surprising “confession”: “Though he is supposedly half German American and half Japanese, he has a surprising weakness.” Wentz responded firmly, saying “This is Japan. English is irrelevant,” drawing laughs from the audience.<sup>183</sup> Though he turned the negative revelation into a joke, Wentz’s blunt response suggests that this is not the first time he has encountered assumptions about his language skills. An entertainment writer analyzed the situation: “Wentz uses the gap with his looks [and his speaking ability] well. He appeals with his *hāfu* face yet his inability to speak English at all.”<sup>184</sup> Part of Wentz’s attraction is due to the seeming mismatch between his superficial physical appearance and his personality underneath; that is to say, his Japanese way of speaking. This apparent disconnect is intriguing and contributes to his draw for fans. Yet despite having been born and raised exclusively in Japan, like many monoracial Japanese celebrities, he nonetheless faces different expectations about his linguistic skills due to his ethnic background.

Aki and Shirota fall closer to the other end of the spectrum. Aki, who spent twelve years in the US, and whose father is president of the AEON chain of English conversation schools, is fluent in English.<sup>185</sup> While she does not widely flaunt this skill, it is evident in her songs, where she employs occasional English lyrics. On several television variety programs, Shirota has been asked about his Spanish speaking skills. He describes his Spanish level as that of daily conversation,<sup>186</sup> but mentions that when speaking with his mother, she will usually use Spanish and he will respond in Japanese.<sup>187</sup> On a different show, the male host persuaded Shirota to say a

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<sup>183</sup> “Kitaro Wentz: Even though he is *hāfu*, he cannot speak English,” Sankei News, 30 July 2008, Online Edition <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/entertainments/entertainers/080730/tnr0807301310008-n1.htm>

<sup>184</sup> “WaT Wentz Eiji is ReallyX2 Cool!”

<sup>185</sup> “Singer Angela Aki is the Daughter of AEON President,” Performing Arts/Sports News, Seesaa Blog <http://geinounews.seesaa.net/article/22308151.html>

<sup>186</sup> “Interview: Shirota Yu Playing Kunimitsu Tezuka,” Close Up Prince of Tennis Musicals [http://www.mmv.co.jp/special/tennis\\_musical/play/winter\\_yamabuki/closeup/01.html](http://www.mmv.co.jp/special/tennis_musical/play/winter_yamabuki/closeup/01.html)

<sup>187</sup> “It’s Okay to Laugh: Shirota Yu,” Telephone Shocking – Still TV 25 August 2008 <http://blog.livedoor.jp/soredemotv/archives/55128830.html>

few romantic phrases in Spanish to the female host, and when he complied, responded with sounds of admiration, even suggesting that his language skills make him attractive to women.<sup>188</sup> Tying foreign language skills, a quality seen as unique to biracial celebrities, to attractiveness suggests the origin of one aspect of veneration – the same traits that drive the divide between these stars and their Japanese fans.

### *Time Abroad*

Shirota was born in Tokyo but moved to Barcelona with his family at the age of three. He lived in Barcelona for four years before returning to Japan, resuming elementary school there.<sup>189</sup> Shirota's time in Spain is a recurring theme in fan sites and other commentary on the star. In an interview on a television variety show, in response to Shirota's explanation of his early years in Spain, the host responded with "That's so cool, that's really cool. I never left Hakata<sup>190</sup>." <sup>191</sup> Shirota's time in Barcelona is directly linked with his "coolness," both on the television show as well as on fan sites, which suggests at least one of the sources of his popularity.<sup>192</sup> The fact that he has lived abroad is clearly a part of his identity as a celebrity, and impacts the way others view him.

### *Online Forums*

Online forums are a way for fans to ask questions and share thoughts and opinions about everything from a star's recent appearance on a television show to the latest news about an

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<sup>188</sup> "Shirota Yu Interview Clip Part 2 – English sub," 5 May 2008, Online Video Clip, Youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4i7LR2y-O1w&feature=related>

<sup>189</sup> "Interview: Shirota Yu Playing Kunimitsu Tezuka."

<sup>190</sup> Hakata is a city in Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands. Kyushu is often thought to be rather rural, even backward, compared to the metropolises of Tokyo and Osaka.

<sup>191</sup> "It's Okay to Laugh: Shirota Yu."

<sup>192</sup> "Shirota Yu @ Oshareism."

upcoming CD release or film role. The speed and ease with which fans can communicate makes such forums an ideal place to begin to discover what these fans are saying about their favorite actor or entertainer.<sup>193</sup> Further, because “it is the audiences – and not the famous themselves – who are the final arbiters of who will or will not win fame...celebrity status depends so much on currents of time, space, and audience involvement [and] any changes in the ways time and space are experienced by the public will also change the specific nature of fame.”<sup>194</sup> Thus, understanding audience views of celebrities will not only allow for a better grasp of how fans perceive stars but will also shed insight on time and space, and the culture in which these conceptions are formed.

In order to maintain a manageable selection of data, I narrowed my search terms on the Yahoo Japan forum site Chiebukuro to Celebrities/Entertainers within the Entertainment category. Further, I chose to focus my research on just three of the six celebrities I have examined in the previous sections: Becky, Shirota Yu, and Wentz Eiji.<sup>195</sup> I selected every fifth forum post between the dates of July 1, 2008 and January 1, 2009 for closer examination here.

## *Ethnicity*

“Am I the only one who thinks Shirota Yu looks rather foreign?” hirosima5525 asks.<sup>196</sup> The response: “It’s because he’s half Spanish and half Japanese.”<sup>197</sup> Of nineteen total forum

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<sup>193</sup> Susan Clerc, “Who Owns Our Culture?: The Battle Over the Internet, Copyright, Media Fandom, and Everyday Uses of the Cultural Commons,” (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2002) 11.

<sup>194</sup> Hinerman, 199.

<sup>195</sup> These three individuals were selected as they represent both actors and entertainers in the Japanese entertainment world. Based on my search terms, I chose not to examine singer Angela Aki, as most forum postings regarding her would be listed under the search category “Music.” I did not select Sawajiri Erika as searching for her brought up many more times the results of these other individuals, an examination of which would have been out of the scope of this thesis.

<sup>196</sup> hirosima5525, “Am I the only one who thinks Shirota Yu looks rather foreign?” 13 July 2008 [http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1217740542](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1217740542)

discussions analyzed, nine were specifically directed at Shirota (meaning he was the central subject of the post),<sup>198</sup> and of those, six explicitly focused on some aspect of his biraciality.

Much like the question posed above, other discussants asked, “Is Shirota Yu *hāfu*? What kind [of *hāfu*]?”<sup>199</sup> Perhaps even more intriguing was the comparison of Shirota and Wentz. One forum participant brought up the topic:

Even if one is to say *hāfu*, the race of the person one marries determines the child born [to that couple]. Up until now, when I heard ‘*hāfu*’ I always had a strong image of Wentz Eiji, but lately on TV, I see a lot of *hāfu* like Shirota Yu. The *hāfu* models that appear in women’s magazines also tend to look more like Shirota. Mexican? Spanish? -esque [people] tend to have slightly stronger faces and subtle darker coloring. I think they look cool, but I think Wentz is prettier. Even so, I don’t often see celebrities [who look] like Wentz; why is this? Is it just that I don’t know? Incidentally, which face (type) do you prefer? (Assuming personality is equal; please respond only with regards to face)<sup>200</sup>

The sole respondent to this posting wrote, “Personally, I like both types of ‘mix.’ Ultimately, though, this is a personal preference. Among these two, I like Shirota Yu better.”<sup>201</sup> This response, coupled with the direct comparison between two biracial entertainers, suggests that these biracial or “mixed” individuals are viewed in their own category, particularly in terms of looks. In addition to comprising a separate group, the discussants here see variation and difference within the category. *Hāfu* are not all equal, despite being simplistically grouped together; the differences among them may also contribute to public perceptions and their popularity. Furthermore, while the respondent pronounced their preference for Shirota over Wentz, the original poster’s reference to “race” and “darker coloring” hints at the history of Japanese admiration of skin “whiteness” discussed in Chapter 2. Though Japanese white skin is

<sup>197</sup> dragon\_ball\_gokou12, “Am I the only one who thinks Shirota Yu looks rather foreign?” 13 July [http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1217740542](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1217740542)

<sup>198</sup> The remaining ten forum discussions mentioned Shirota in the question or in the answers, but were not directly focused on him.

<sup>199</sup> rika2000itto31, “Is Shirota Yu *hāfu*? What kind [of *hāfu*]?” 25 July 2008 [http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1417996269](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1417996269)

<sup>200</sup> pinkpinkpi0pi0pi0, “About *hāfu*,” 4 September 2008 [http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1118907591](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1118907591)

<sup>201</sup> axkml, “About *hāfu*,” 4 September 2008 [http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1118907591](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1118907591)

viewed as entirely different from Caucasian or other white skin, it may be that biracial individuals with lighter skin are seen as more Japanese due to this shared feature.

Of thirty-nine total postings examined with references to Becky, twenty-three were specifically directed at her, and of these, seven made particular reference to aspects of her biraciality. Additionally, while not all commented directly on her ethnicity, eight mentioned aspects of her physical features and two drew comparisons between her and other biracial female celebrities.<sup>202</sup> One forum post opens with, “Is the rumor about Becky’s color contacts true? Is it true that Becky is a *hāfu*? Her foreign appearance isn’t [because she is] Ainu<sup>203</sup>? Furthermore, is she seen as *hāfu* because of her color contacts?”<sup>204</sup> These questions are noteworthy on several counts. Asking whether Becky is *hāfu* suggests first that this aspect of her background is important to the way she is viewed as a celebrity. Secondly, linking her “foreign” appearance with the question of whether she is Ainu implies that the Ainu too are considered to be foreign, though official discourse from the Meiji state-building period considers the Ainu to be Japanese. Finally, the question of whether Becky is viewed as biracial *because* of her color contacts would seem to indicate that she is seeking to emphasize, rather than hide, her biraciality.<sup>205</sup>

Many of the posts made reference to Becky’s “face” both in complimentary and critical ways. Some comments eschewed her face as too “round” and one even maligned her saying, “Her face is huge, her eyes are weird...”<sup>206</sup> Responding to this comment, the forum participant invoked her biraciality, saying, “Because she has foreign blood, she has the face of a

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<sup>202</sup> While a number of other postings compared/asked respondents to compare Becky to other female (biracial and monoracial) Japanese celebrities, those were not included for examination.

<sup>203</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, Ainu are the indigenous people of Hokkaido, Japan’s northernmost island.

<sup>204</sup> niputanineputa, “Is the rumor about Becky’s color contacts true?” 2 November 2008  
[http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1320360308](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1320360308)

<sup>205</sup> Based on the responses to this forum post, it is unclear whether or not Becky actually wears color contacts.

<sup>206</sup> ywtotwy, “Becky or whatever her name is, the annoying *tarento*” 8 October 2008  
[http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1319737893](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1319737893)

foreigner.”<sup>207</sup> It is interesting to note that this respondent remained quite neutral, perhaps overly polite, using honorifics in reference to the words “foreigner” and “face.”<sup>208</sup> Many other posts, nonetheless, were complimentary, describing Becky as having a “cute face.” One participant, who discusses seeing Becky in person at Shinagawa Station in Tokyo, said “Her face looked more foreign than on TV...her round face looked less like a baby face. Particularly, her eyes were a sparkling gray, and I thought she looked like a Caucasian beauty.”<sup>209</sup> The way this individual describes seeing Becky in person suggests that it is exactly those physical traits which distance her from the Japanese (and which others saw as *less attractive*) that make her beautiful.

## *Language Skills*

Language skills of biracial celebrities, while not as prominent a topic as in the previously examined entertainment news articles nonetheless feature in discussions in online forums. One participant asks, “It seems that Becky is a *hāfu* with a Japanese mother and British father, but have you heard her speak English? She *is* a native speaker of Japanese *and* English, right?”<sup>210</sup> The assumption that Becky, being biracial, would also be bilingual echoes similar messages on fan sites and in entertainment articles. Several respondents confirmed that while not native, Becky speaks daily conversational English, and one compared her language abilities to that of Wentz: “As an aside, Wentz’s father is American, but Wentz can’t speak English at all.”<sup>211</sup> This

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<sup>207</sup> luv\_gerbera, “Becky or whatever her name is, the annoying *tarento*” 8 October 2008  
[http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1319737893](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1319737893).

<sup>208</sup> Rather than using the slightly derogatory “*gaijin*” or commonly used “*gaikokujin*,” this respondent used the more formal “*gaikoku no kata*”; this individual also added the honorific “*o*” to “*kao*” (face), saying “*okao*.”

<sup>209</sup> tomato 3723, “Do you think Becky’s face is too round?” 27 October 2008  
[http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1220210882](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1220210882)

<sup>210</sup> kukdolady, “It seems that Becky is a *hāfu* with a Japanese mother and a British father,” 17 December 2008  
[http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1321490423](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1321490423) (emphasis mine).

<sup>211</sup> amor000iloveyou, “Is it advantageous to be *hāfu*?” 1 August 2008  
[http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q1418139849](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1418139849)

comment underscores the link, in the mind of the Japanese public, between biraciality and language ability. It is notable that while there were many forum discussions dedicated to discussing the foreign language skills of Becky and Wentz, considered to be among the more “foreign-looking” biracial celebrities, a much smaller fraction focused on, for example, Sawajiri Erika’s lack of French speaking skills.<sup>212</sup>

Two forum postings regarding Shirota also discuss his foreign language skills. “Shirota Yu of D-BOYS is *hāfu*, but does he speak English or Spanish (it is Spanish, right?)?” one poster asks. Here, it is interesting to note first that the questioner does not know the language of Shirota’s non-Japanese “half” and also that s/he asks whether Shirota speaks English in addition to this other language. This assumption echoes findings in Oikawa and Yoshida’s 2007 study of biracial Japanese, where one Italian-Japanese interviewee recalls “I studied really hard for my English tests but people thought that I did not need to study because I was Biethnic.<sup>213</sup> But I can’t speak English. I’m Italian!!!”<sup>214</sup> The idea that biracial Caucasian-Japanese speak English remains a widely held notion and many are lumped into the same category of “foreign” regardless of their parents’ country of origin. This same stereotype translates to perceptions of biracial celebrities, and the assumed distance between these stars and mainstream Japanese.

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<sup>212</sup> When searching for Becky and English, 79 forum questions appeared; for Wentz and English, 28; and for Sawajiri Erika and French, 12.

<sup>213</sup> In Oikawa and Yoshida’s study, they used the term “biethnic” to describe individuals of mixed Japanese heritage. They chose not to use the term “biracial” because their subjects included individuals of Japanese/non-Japanese Asian ancestry who may not be considered biracial in the conventional sense of the term. I have chosen to use “biracial” in my examination due to its more common usage as well as because I am looking specifically at Japanese/Caucasian individuals, who are considered to be of mixed race.

<sup>214</sup> Oikawa and Yoshida, 646.

## *TV and Movie Roles*

As previously discussed, it is not uncommon for biracial celebrities, particularly those seen as having especially “foreign” features, to be typecast in roles that explicitly mark their ethnicity. Fans are well aware of this connection between star ethnicity and character roles, as evidenced by the following question: “Is Wentz playing Kitaro? Was Kitaro a *hāfu*? I didn’t see him that way, but...”<sup>215</sup> The responses revealed that the character of Kitaro (in the film “Gegege no Kitaro”) was born to a ghost father and a human mother, making him “half” ghost, “half” human. One participant adds, “It seems they didn’t want to use a Japanese face.”<sup>216</sup> Regardless of whether the casting director took into consideration Wentz’s ethnicity and physical features, the fact that fans note this parallel between actor and character suggests that they view him as different from monoracial Japanese actors.

Other forum posters, who thought Sawajiri Erika looked too “Japanese” to be *hāfu*, asked whether she was not instead *zainichi* Korean. This idea was inspired from her break-out role in the film “Pacchigi,” where she played young *zainichi* Korean Lee Kyong-ja. In another example of ethnic typecasting, this time accurate, in “Haken no Hinkaku,” Shirota Yu took on a role as the half-Spanish, half-Japanese Ryuto Amaya who, due to his Spanish ancestry, does not understand Japanese ideas of corporate consciousness.<sup>217</sup> Through these illustrations it is clear that not only are actors associated ethnically with the roles they take on, but also that portrayals of biracial individuals in popular culture contribute to notions of difference between *hāfu* and Japanese. This emphasis on difference further highlights the perceived distance between biracial celebrities and the monoracial Japanese audience.

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<sup>215</sup> nantoka\_kangensui5000yen, “Is Wentz playing Kitaro?” 29 April 2007  
[http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q129889397](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q129889397)

<sup>216</sup> Kota1982ff, “Is Wentz playing Kitaro?” 29 April 2007  
[http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question\\_detail/q129889397](http://detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q129889397).

<sup>217</sup> “Shirota Yuu-luv Group,” Crunchy Roll, 31 May 2008 [http://www.crunchyroll.com/group/Shirota\\_Yuu-luv](http://www.crunchyroll.com/group/Shirota_Yuu-luv)

## Self-Identification

Among fans, a biracial celebrity's ethnic background is an important marker of their popular persona. In representations of themselves, however, through personal websites and entertainment interviews, biracial celebrities are noticeably silent on this subject, and it is this silence that is telling. It is likely that other stars do not draw attention to this difference for the same reasons that Becky does not take on roles that would showcase her English skills, because it might change the image they have built up in the entertainment industry. In Japanese popular culture, as noted before, a star's success is predicated on appearing just above average, but not out of reach for the viewing audience. Highlighting an insurmountable difference such as ethnicity might endanger this position.

Celebrities' tendencies to deemphasize, even ignore, this glaring dissimilarity is the best indicator of the way they attempt to position themselves within the Japanese pop culture world: as *Japanese* entertainers. However, the fact that several stars do choose to advertise their biraciality suggests that there may be a new degree of openness to their difference. An examination of their words, both through personal websites as well as direct quotes from entertainment news articles, can be instructive in considering this potential shift.

## *Ethnicity*



*Japan and America. A unique singer-songwriter who holds a double standard.<sup>218</sup> Vocals with a prominent presence. Also a dynamic piano player. Born in September 1977 to a Japanese father and an Italian-American mother. Starting piano at age three, she lived in Tokushima Prefecture and Okayama Prefecture until graduating from middle school. At the age of 15, she moved to Hawaii, and until returning to Japan in 2003, she lived in Washington, D.C.<sup>219</sup>*

*--Profile, Angela Aki Official Blog: Angela Aki's A Little Half Time--*

In stark contrast to fan sites and entertainment news articles, official celebrity sites rarely make mention of the star's ethnic background. In fact, only one of the six celebrities discussed here includes her mixed ethnicity on her official website. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is Angela Aki. As noted in the above epigraph, she is very upfront about her ethnic background in the profile on her official blog, and has even titled it "A Little Half Time," a play on her biraciality. Here Aki highlights not only her ethnic background but also her experiences living both in the US and Japan. Through an official website, a star can control the information being disseminated about them. Thus, the discourse of official websites is very different from that of fan sites. Aki's forward representation of herself and her identity seems to mark the way she wants to be perceived by her audience. Perhaps the reason that Aki so strongly conceives of her dual identity is related to her significant time in the US. Among the six individuals, Aki has

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<sup>218</sup> Transliterated from English, "double standard" here does not refer to a negative set of different standards for different individuals or groups but likely seeks to emphasize the benefits of her two ethnicities and backgrounds.

<sup>219</sup> "Profile," Angela Aki Blog: Angela Aki's A Little Half Time <http://blog.excite.co.jp/angelaaki/>

spent the longest time abroad, and it is perhaps her experiences there that have influenced her strong identification as both Japanese and American.

Among the other five celebrities examined, none include any information surrounding their ethnic background on their official website. Typical information includes: full name, birth date, hometown, blood type, astrological sign, and height. Additional information can sometimes include hobbies or special skills.<sup>220</sup> For instance, Sawajiri Erika's official website at Stardust Promotions, her management agency, includes the following information:



*Sawajiri Erika*  
*Date of Birth: 4/8/1986*  
*Blood Type: A*  
*Hometown: Tokyo*  
*Height: 161 cm*  
*Hobbies: Human observation*  
*Skills: Swimming, dance, horseback riding<sup>221</sup>*

The official websites seem to indicate that despite the fact that fans are attuned to their favorite star's ethnic background (something that those same stars would be hard-pressed to ignore), celebrities seek to play down their biraciality. Rather, like other Japanese stars, they associate themselves with additional identifying characteristics, such as blood type or astrological sign, perhaps in an attempt to bridge the distance between them and their monoracial audience. This gap in representation between official websites and fan sites illustrates the divergence in how biracial celebrities seek to portray themselves and how they are perceived. Despite this gap,

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<sup>220</sup> Examples include, "Shirota Yu," Watanabe Entertainment; "Becky," Sun Music Group <http://www.sunmusic.org/becky/index02.html>

<sup>221</sup> "Sawajiri Erika's Profile," Stardust Promotions <http://www.stardust.co.jp/section3/profile/sawajirierika.html>

Aki's openness about her background might indicate that at least some stars may be reconsidering the way they present themselves to their audience.

### *“Face Complex”*

Looks, from larger eyes and a longer nose to lighter hair color and unusual height, are often the most striking difference between biracial and monoracial Japanese celebrities. In an industry where physical features are very much intertwined with popularity and success, this provides a fascinating aspect through which to examine biracial stars' images of themselves and how they fit into the Japanese entertainment world.

“Shirota Yu ‘My Face was My Complex’” reads the title of one entertainment article. The article begins by detailing the success of the rising star, but emphasizes that up until recently, he held a complex about his face. “I am 189 centimeters tall.<sup>222</sup> My selling points are my height and my strong features,” Shirota says.<sup>223</sup> Yet while he has come to accept his physical traits, this has not always been the case. “As a child in Spain, I was called ‘Chino’ (Chinese); when I came back to Japan, in contrast, I was called ‘foreigner’ and I faced bullying. At thirteen, I entered the entertainment world, but my face and my height proved to be obstacles and I couldn't find work.”<sup>224</sup> Shirota describes auditioning for parts as the character's younger self in flashbacks and being told that it would not work because he was taller than the “older” character. While now recognized and admired for his distinctive looks, as recently as ten years ago, Shirota faced hurdles both in the entertainment world and in mainstream society.

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<sup>222</sup> Shirota's official website lists his height at 188 centimeters.

<sup>223</sup> “Shirota Yu: ‘My Face was My Complex,’” Nikkan Sports, 24 September 2007, Online Edition <http://www.nikkansports.com/entertainment/p-et-tp0-20070924-260523.html>

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

Wentz has also held a “complex” about his physical features. The “gap” between his physical features and his linguistic abilities, and others’ expectations of him, has caused him anxiety about his belonging. As a child, he was called “Blondie” or “Foreigner” in school, and while he does not often discuss this prejudice, it is clear that his looks were not always a source of positive recognition for him. Nonetheless, he later describes his transition as “[turning] my complex into a weapon. In life, one never knows what one will be successful in.”<sup>225</sup> Wentz, recognizing his unique position in Japanese society, chose to transform a perceived disadvantage into a marketable commodity, previously described by an entertainment writer as using well the gap between his looks and the public’s expectations for him.

Shirota’s story illustrates the shifts within the entertainment industry, in just the past decade, which have paved the way for acceptance, even veneration, of biracial entertainers. The experiences he and Wentz relate indicate the difficulties of entering the entertainment world, as well as integrating into society at large, as biracial. Nonetheless, their willingness to openly discuss these experiences not only shows the degree to which the industry itself has changed in recent years, but also suggests that the category of the biracial celebrity is alluring on several counts. The attraction stems not just from exotic looks or particular language skills, but also from the stories behind these unusual faces.

## Conclusions

From this examination, it is clear that there is a significant difference in the way biracial celebrities are viewed by the general public, through fan sites, entertainment articles, appearances on television shows, and online forums, and the ways they seek to promote

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<sup>225</sup> “Wentz Eiji.” ♥ウエンツ瑛士♥

themselves through their personal official websites. This suggests that while the individuals themselves do not actively seek to identify themselves as anything other than Japanese, the audiences for which they perform perceive them as particularly biracial, and that this is part of their popular appeal. From the ways in which biracial celebrities are being portrayed and discussed through these different mediums, there is evidence that part of the appeal of such stars are the perceived traits associated with their biraciality. Among these are physical appearance, foreign language skills, and time spent abroad. Through examples such as the expectation that *hāfu* celebrities will speak foreign languages (exemplified especially well in the cases of Becky and Wentz) to admiration and envy for Shirota's experiences living abroad, it is clear that these associations contribute to their allure. Even when individuals such as Wentz do not live up to expectations, the gap that stems from the difference between that expectation and the reality further contributes to his mystique. The overall theme, however, is that despite veneration for numerous aspects of the biracial celebrity, many of those traits that contribute to their allure are also factors that contribute to a sense of distance from the consuming Japanese public.

This chapter, through the online data sources, established biracial celebrities as a unique group within Japanese popular culture. In the next chapter, through data collected via personal interviews and surveys, I seek to determine the position of this group, somewhere between the Japanese and the foreign. The discussions here provide a set up for the forthcoming examinations. Already there is evidence of distancing biracial celebrities through characteristics from ethnicity to language skills. The celebrities themselves seem to be aware of this practice, and many make a concerted effort to exclude ethnic information from their personal websites. Yet there are examples that suggest distancing may not be the only directional push at play. Referring to Aki's return to Japan in 2003 as a return "home" implies that despite her long

absence, Japan is in fact her home. The next section will further explore these shifting views of biracial celebrities and how they fit within Japanese society, ultimately putting them, and biracial Japanese individuals at large, in a sort of middle ground between the Japanese and the foreign.

## Chapter Four

### *From Big Screen to Mainstream: Celebrities and Mainstream Biracial Japanese*

The media analyses from the previous chapter provide a strong basis for understanding Japanese perceptions of biracial celebrities and how they fit, or do not fit, within conventional definitions of Japaneseness. Building on this analysis, this chapter examines data collected from surveys and personal interviews. While fan sites and online discussion forums provided excellent fodder for understanding fan perceptions of biracial celebrities, my interview and survey questions allow me to examine the ways that mainstream Japanese perceive these stars. Further, by specifically framing my questions to ascertain such topics as what contributes to the popularity of biracial celebrities, who and what constitutes Japaneseness, and how biracial individuals as a whole fit into Japanese society, I was able to focus discussion on themes raised in my analysis of media sources.

By conducting surveys and personal interviews of Japanese young adults, I sought to supplement my understanding of how biracial celebrities are viewed, how their popularity is constructed and rationalized, and how this may translate to general perceptions of biracial Japanese. To this end, in this chapter I will specifically examine how survey respondents address biracial celebrities' ethnicity, physical features, "Japaneseness," and language skills, looking particularly at their use of the word "*akogare*" to describe mainstream feelings towards biracial celebrities. I will then analyze how non-celebrity biracial individuals are viewed in comparison, assessing references to ethnicity and language skills, and how these factors contribute to their overall acceptance into mainstream Japanese society.

To investigate prevailing perceptions of biracial celebrities and biracial Japanese in general, I conducted electronic surveys in September and October of 2008. Due to time constraints, participants were not randomly selected but were solicited via email among my contacts in Japan, as well as through the Japanese social networking site Mixi. I used two versions of the survey, one long and one short.<sup>226</sup> The original long survey was made up of 19 questions, which included questions about current fashion trends as well as about biracial celebrities and individuals. I received twelve complete responses to this survey.

After determining that I needed to narrow the scope of my research, I shortened the survey. The short survey consisted of six questions: three to determine demographics (gender, age, occupation, all of which were included in the original survey) and three short-answer questions, which asked respondents their opinions of Japanese celebrities and *tarento* in general, biracial Japanese celebrities, and biracial Japanese. I received nine complete responses to this survey. In my analysis, I have compared responses only to the questions that appeared on both surveys. There are two exceptions. One is in my two Case Studies, which examine perceptions and opinions of two celebrities further in depth. For these analyses, I have used data from the first survey which included questions about both specific individuals, but which was left out of the second survey. The second is in regards to a question included on the second survey but not the original. This question was directed at perceptions of Japanese celebrities in general, and will be useful in my discussion of the notion of “*akogare*” below.

In addition to my electronic surveys, in September 2008, I spent two weeks in Tokyo conducting interviews with Japanese young adults. My informants consisted of contacts made through university networks, and all were either in college or immediately post-college (less than one year out). The eight interviews took the form of semi-structured conversations centered on

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<sup>226</sup> For a list of survey and interview questions, see Appendices A and B.

questions about biracialism in Japan as a whole, but with a specific focus on biracial celebrities and popular views of them. Through these interviews, I was able to further explore the themes that appeared in both my surveys and the media sources. Using follow-up questions, I had the opportunity to continue to probe and clarify their responses, and thus these conversations provide an additional depth to the themes found my other data sources.

As alluded to in the previous chapter, survey and interview participants identified many of the same prerequisites for being considered as Japanese (or that prevented certain biracial individuals from being considered Japanese), including ethnicity and language skills. However, they also articulated the notion of a middle ground, a place somewhere between the Japanese insider and the foreign outsider, for biracial Japanese. Though only implicit in most of the media sources, many survey and interview respondents clearly articulated this notion of a third social category, which moves away from previous binary conceptions of Japanese and non-Japanese. This chapter is divided into two sections, the first of which examines prevailing perceptions of biracial celebrities, and the second of which then shifts to views of mainstream biracial individuals.

## **Perceptions and Popularity of Biracial Japanese Celebrities**

My first set of survey questions focused specifically on biracial celebrities. The responses here echoed many of the themes of the media sources; ethnicity and physical appearance, as well as language, remain critical to conceptions of an individual as Japanese or non-Japanese, though time abroad and roles in films or television shows played a smaller role. This is likely because while fans may be familiar with an actor's filmography, the average individual may be less informed. Additionally, a third theme that appeared in survey and

interview responses was the notion of *Japaneseness*. Echoing much of the *Nihonjinron* literature discussed in Chapter 2, this idea is centered on the premise that certain traits, characteristics, and values are uniquely Japanese. Respondents differed in the degrees to which they saw biracial celebrities as possessing this quality, a prerequisite for being considered Japanese.

### *Ethnicity, Physical Features, and “Akogare”*

*Mariko*<sup>227</sup>, *Megumi*, and *Keiko* are all recent university graduates. *Mariko* and *Megumi* are currently working full-time, while *Keiko* just started graduate school. I met all three while studying abroad in Japan, and we have met up for dinner in the busy Shinjuku area of Tokyo. As we settle into our booth at the *izakaya* (Japanese-style restaurant/bar), I broach the subject of Japanese biracial celebrities, mentioning that I saw *Wentz Eiji* (a singer and comedian of Caucasian American and Japanese descent) on TV recently. It was surprising to hear such fluent Japanese coming from someone who looked, quite frankly, rather foreign. The three nod in agreement.

Recently, there are increasing numbers of celebrities who are *hāfu*, *Mariko* tells me. When I ask why she thinks this is, she is quick to point to Japan's longstanding love affair with the West. “For a long time, Japan has held the West in high regard, while at the same time looking down on China and Southeast Asia. Look at the mannequins in department stores: they are white. Many models are white as well.” *Mariko* suggests that Japanese admiration and longing (“*akogare*”) for Western technology, styles, and even faces, might be at the root of the current success of biracial celebrities.

Yet while *Mariko* sees Japanese desire for the foreign, and particularly for the West, in the rise of the biracial celebrity, she is quick to note that foreigners themselves are often thought of as scary. Biracial individuals, while appearing foreign, are not entirely alien, and occupy a particular space between the foreign and the Japanese. By the same token that they are not foreign, however, these individuals are also not Japanese. *Mariko*, *Megumi*, and *Keiko* all agreed that, regardless of their own opinions of biracial Japanese, they did not see Japanese society as welcoming or accepting of that demographic, nor did they anticipate any such acceptance in the near future. Rather than future widespread acceptance of biracial individuals as Japanese, they predict the creation of biracial Japanese communities: spheres in which biracialism is the norm, and to which biracial individuals can belong, having been rejected from mainstream Japanese society.

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<sup>227</sup> All names have been changed to protect the identities of interviewees.

For the majority of respondents, ethnicity, and physical features as a manifestation of ethnicity, were clear markers of difference between biracial and monoracial Japanese celebrities. Most labeled these biracial celebrities as “*hāfu*” rather than decidedly Japanese or foreign, and saw them as falling somewhere in the gray area between those two categorizations. One respondent perhaps summed it up the best, saying “Even if they are Japanese citizens, I find myself thinking that they are different from *normal* Japanese...ultimately if their physical appearance is a little different, I think of them as ‘*half Japanese*.’”<sup>228</sup> The creation of this third category of individuals, separate from the purely Japanese or foreign, suggests that the nuances with which society perceives biracial individuals are slowly shifting. Murphy-Shigematsu, who has conducted research on individuals of mixed ancestry since 1989, contends that the long-held binary opposition of Japanese and foreign stems from historic notions of Japanese monoethnicity:

This ideology of homogeneity labels mixed people as different from other Japanese (Befu 2001). These persons confront the accepted wisdom that the individual’s conception of the self needs to be in tune with society’s perception of the individual. In the case of those phenotypically similar to the mainstream, they are encouraged to pass in normal social situations as mainstream Japanese. Those whose appearance makes passing impossible often find it easier to live as foreigners, going along with the common perception of them as different.<sup>229</sup>

While Murphy-Shigematsu’s interviewees (all of whom were Korean-Japanese or American-Japanese<sup>230</sup>) found themselves categorized by their physical appearances as either Japanese or foreign, my survey responses indicate that there may be room for a third category of “*hāfu*.” Murphy-Shigematsu predicted this development, suggesting that “The appearance of more individuals who do not fit in with popular racial and cultural images is potentially leading to new attitudes. These include persons who don’t ‘look Japanese’ but speak Japanese and possess

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<sup>228</sup> Respondent #3224615 (emphasis added); a listing of respondents can be found in Appendix C

<sup>229</sup> Murphy-Shigematsu, “The invisible man,” 299.

<sup>230</sup> “American-Japanese” include individuals of Caucasian and Black ancestry.

cultural knowledge.”<sup>231</sup> This exact situation is being played out on television sets and in movie theaters across Japan, with the increased visibility of biracial celebrities who may not fit traditional images of “Japanese” but possess the necessary linguistic and cultural skills to actively participate in Japanese society.

These differences in physical features which divide biracial and monoracial Japanese celebrities were among the most common factors listed in delineating the popularity of biracial entertainers. While the overwhelming majority of respondents viewed biracial celebrities neither as more nor less popular than their monoracial counterparts, they did see physical appearance as an indicator of popularity among the former. Several survey participants even went so far as to suggest that Japanese view biracial Japanese individuals as “prettier” than monoracial Japanese.<sup>232</sup>

Perhaps it is because the types of features that Japanese think are pretty are more common in *hāfu*.<sup>233</sup>

In Japan, there are a lot of people who think that *hāfu* are prettier than Japanese and they are seen with an envious gaze.<sup>234</sup>

Among *hāfu* celebrities, in the case of males, they are seen as ‘cool, due to their strong facial features’ and in the case of females, ‘cute, due to their large eyes.’<sup>235</sup>

These examples clearly illustrate the degree to which their *different* physical appearance plays into the popularity and perceived attractiveness of biracial celebrities.

Nonetheless, while biracial features are generally considered to be a positive trait for celebrities, these same features often prevent such individuals from being considered Japanese, by virtue of creating distance between the stars and their monoracial audience. “*Hāfu* are *hāfu*” was a common theme among respondents, echoing the idea that biracial individuals are different

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<sup>231</sup> Murphy-Shigematsu, 300.

<sup>232</sup> Respondents #3230827, #3231252

<sup>233</sup> Respondent #3230827

<sup>234</sup> Respondent #3231252

<sup>235</sup> Respondent #3290285

from Japanese, though one pointed out that “Among Asian *hāfu* there are some who are more Japanese-like, though among Caucasian *hāfu* if I had to choose, I would have to say that I have a stronger sense that they are foreign.”<sup>236</sup> Asian *hāfu* (meaning biracial individuals with one Japanese parent and one parent of non-Japanese Asian descent) are considered more Japanese-like than Caucasian *hāfu* (biracial individuals with one Japanese and one Caucasian parent), likely due to the fact that the latter are perceived to look more different (than Japanese) in their physical appearance. This opinion is underscored by a comment from another respondent regarding Japanese and Korean American singer Ito Yuna: “Physically, Ito Yuna is no different from Japanese, so I consider her to be Japanese.”<sup>237</sup> The fact that this respondent considered Ito to be Japanese purely due to her Asian features, despite the fact that she was raised in the US, illustrates the degree to which physical features are considered to be a marker of identity. At the same time, this respondent considers those of Caucasian and Japanese descent, due to their physical features, to be fundamentally different from Japanese and therefore not Japanese: “Even if they are Japanese, I end up thinking that they are different from normal Japanese.”<sup>238</sup>

### *Akogare and Miryoku*

*Akogare* is a word that several individuals brought up in discussing Japanese attitudes toward biracial celebrities. As explained in Chapter 2, *akogare*, while initially representing a physical distance from a location, in current usage has a sense of something that is enthralling or captivating. Among survey respondents, two described the “*akogare*” toward biracial celebrities as akin to Japanese admiration of the West (namely, Europe and the US) and Caucasians, much like Mariko’s comment at the beginning of this chapter.<sup>239</sup> “In regards to Caucasians, Japanese

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<sup>236</sup> Respondent #3222029

<sup>237</sup> Respondent #3224615

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Respondents #3219436, #3116108

both have *akogare* for their physical features but also feel inferior, which explains the draw of biracial celebrities.”<sup>240</sup> Another described *akogare* as not only a feeling of envy or admiration for their physical looks, but also because “the fact that they hold two identities is seen as cool.”<sup>241</sup> This comment hints at the assumptions often made of biracial celebrities (language skills, experiences abroad, among others) due to their ethnic background.

Though use of the word *akogare* with regard to biracial celebrities was not as prominent as I had initially hypothesized, the word was not used once in responses to the question “What are your impressions of Japanese celebrities and *tarento*?” I posed this question before asking “What are your impressions of Japanese *biracial* celebrities and *tarento*?” and the two questions were intended to solicit answers that would allow me to determine which qualities were associated with the biraciality of mixed race celebrities, rather than with celebrities as a whole.<sup>242</sup> The use of *akogare* in discussions of biracial celebrities suggests that the sense of distance associated with early uses of *akogare* may contribute to current usage of the word. Though not all respondents used the word, it can be useful to conceive of the relationship between the monoracial Japanese viewer and the biracial celebrity as one of admiration, yet distancing. Though not explicit in the media sources, this idea of distancing through difference was a common theme in the data.

Similarly, several participants introduced another word to describe the popularity of biracial celebrities: *miryoku*.<sup>243</sup> “*Miryoku*” is used to describe a sense of charm or attraction. Here, it may also be helpful to use several additional definitions, including allure and appeal. The use of this word suggests that biracial celebrities offer a certain kind of attraction for popular

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<sup>240</sup> Respondent #3116108

<sup>241</sup> Respondent #3231252

<sup>242</sup> These questions appeared together only on the second survey, which received nine complete responses. While these numbers may be small, I believe that these patterns are worth considering, particularly given my other findings.

<sup>243</sup> Respondents #3219436, #3290285, #3060960

culture consumers, and while not clear merely from the use of this word, it is pertinent to consider part of this appeal to derive from their ethnic limbo.

It is also critical to recognize that in Japanese popular culture, the ideal celebrities are those who the general public can relate to, despite the particular characteristics that make them exceptional and therefore popular. As anthropologist Hiroshi Aoyagi notes,

Most stars in Western countries are popular because of their outstanding physical or personal attributes. Japanese idols, on the other hand, typically depict images that are ‘fairly standard.’ Their appearance and ability are above average, yet not so much as to alienate or offend the audience – just enough to provide their fans with the sense that they too can be stars if they try hard enough. Japanese refer to this characteristic as *toshindai*, or life-sized.<sup>244</sup>

This concept illustrates the contradictions rife within the positioning and popularity of biracial celebrities. Their perceived differences are part of their persona and contribute to their popularity, but these differences also prevent them from being seen as just above average and may lessen their relatability. This decreased relatability is a factor in the distancing between these stars and their fans.

## Case Study 1: Angela Aki

The vast majority of respondents attributed singer-songwriter Angela Aki’s popularity and success to the quality of her voice and her music. Nonetheless, a significant number also referenced her ethnicity and other aspects of her physical appearance in their evaluations. Aki is described as “beautiful,” “cool,” “cute,” and “natural,” among other qualities; one respondent stated that “Her physical appearance is Japanese-like but a little different; she has an exotic sense.”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Hiroshi Aoyagi, “Pop Idols and the Asian Identity” in *Japan Pop!*, 311.

<sup>245</sup> Respondents #3057016, #3060960, #3071582, #3224615

This description of Aki as Japanese-like is echoed in evaluations of her personal qualities. In addition to being thought of as “individualistic,” “unpretentious,” and “confident,” another respondent said that “Even though she is *hāfu*, she has a Japanese-like heart.”<sup>246</sup> This claim that Aki has a “Japanese-like heart” is significant because the heart is at the center of the body, at the core of one’s being. Suggesting that her heart is Japanese-like is akin to claiming that at her very core, she *is* Japanese. While encompassing values and beliefs, this notion of Japanese-like qualities is an ephemeral concept, one used by a number of survey participants to describe a given celebrity’s distance from or closeness to identification as Japanese. An examination of this idea is thus critical to further understand notions of Japanese identity formation.

### “*Japaneseness*”

Many respondents used words such as “*Nihonjinrashisa*” or “*Nihonjinppoi*,” which approximate to “Japaneseness” or “Japanese-like” in English, to describe their feelings toward biracial celebrities and to what degree they consider these individuals to be Japanese. Culturally, it is not unusual to speak of abstract concepts or ideas in very general, almost vague terms, or to talk around such terms rather than speaking directly of them. “Japaneseness,” like many other abstract ideas, is not easily definable, yet is thrown around and used with relative ease. Rather than attempting to define the meaning here, I will instead analyze how people use it to evaluate the degree of others’ *Japanese* identities.

Here it is useful to recall the literature of *Nihonjinron*, the discussions of Japanese people that emerged as a strong force in the post-World War II period. The *Nihonjinron* discourse focuses on the uniqueness of Japan and the Japanese people, and is quite exclusive in

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<sup>246</sup> Respondents #3052583, #3054315, #3060960, #3106425

determining who can and cannot be considered Japanese. While most studies have focused on the prolific writers of *Nihonjinron*, and less on its consumers, Befu and Manabe's 1987 survey of adult residents of Nishinomiya (a "bedroom town" between Osaka and Kobe) offers insight into the degree to which *Nihonjinron* precepts are internalized by the general populace. For example, regarding the *Nihonjinron* claim of Japanese homogeneity, "While a great majority, or 72%, are aware of this characterization of Japanese people, when asked point blank whether they themselves believed Japanese are homogenous people, only some 38% agreed."<sup>247</sup> These numbers give a sense for the degree to which the general Japanese population may be familiar with and/or accept this discourse, and indicates how deeply it has permeated the society.

Five respondents mentioned to qualities of "Japaneseness" in their references to biracial celebrities, both as a method of distinguishing those who they considered to be Japanese as well as a measure to exclude others from such categorization. One respondent spoke of seeing a documentary about Aki, where she talked of her hometown, and thought, "...that is rather Japanese-like."<sup>248</sup> Another considered Wentz to be Japanese due to the fact that he was raised in Japan, but considered others such as Aki to be "un-Japanese-like."<sup>249</sup> Still others connected Japaneseness back to physical appearance, suggesting that those celebrities with one Japanese and one other Asian parent might be considered more Japanese-like,<sup>250</sup> while for biracial Caucasian and Japanese celebrities, the gap between their "western" physical appearance and their ability to speak in a Japanese-like manner was one of their defining characteristics.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Harumi Befu and Kazufumi Manabe, "An Empirical Study of Nihonjinron: How Real is the Myth?" *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies* 36 (1987), 99.

<sup>248</sup> Respondent #3117458

<sup>249</sup> Respondent #3057016

<sup>250</sup> Respondent #3222029

<sup>251</sup> Respondent #3060960

Thus, while this notion of “Japaneseness” is not a clearly delineated concept, the ways in which respondents use it to include and exclude people into and from the ranks of Japanese/non-Japanese are useful in this examination. In these examples, Japaneseness encompasses to varying degrees ideas of ethnicity and language as well as more ambiguous conceptions of identity (such as Aki’s references to her hometown). These same themes arose in Befu and Manabe’s study, where “Criteria for Being Japanese” included, in order of greatest to least importance: Japanese citizenship, Japanese language competence, both parents being Japanese, extended residence in Japan, Japanese family name, residence in Japan during childhood, Japanese physical appearance, and being born in Japan.<sup>252</sup> Both the Nishinomiya study and my survey results suggest the wide range of considerations used to determine “Japaneseness.”

## *Language Skills*

*I meet Toshiaki at a Korean restaurant in Shin-Okubo, generally acknowledged to be Tokyo’s Korea Town. Here, walking down the street, nearly all the signs are written both in Japanese characters as well as the distinctive Korean Hangeul, and I am as likely to hear Korean as Japanese among the mothers, students, and businessmen strolling past me. Our waitress is Korean; I can tell by her accent when she comes to take our order. While many of the Koreans in Shin-Okubo are relative newcomers to Japan – in comparison to the zainichi<sup>253</sup> Koreans who remained in the country after World War II – the location seemed apt to be discussing another of Japan’s minorities.*

*Toshiaki, a college student in his third year of university, echoes Mariko’s opinion of the feelings towards biracial celebrities. He too uses the word “akogare” to describe the way the Japanese public looks at these individuals. “People who are half are put into a separate category...they are not quite Japanese, but at the same time, they are not as different from the Japanese as foreigners are,” he explains. Further complicating this notion is the importance of language, particularly in the realm of the celebrity. Toshiaki points out that speaking Japanese is critical for a wide reception from the Japanese public. Leah Dizon, he argues, will never truly be popular because she cannot speak Japanese.*

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<sup>252</sup> Befu and Manabe, 100.

<sup>253</sup> *Zainichi* literally means residing in Japan, but is often used to refer to Koreans whose families have been in Japan for several generations and who continue to reside in Japan without the rights of citizens.

As Toshiaki's response indicates, language skills are critical to success in the Japanese popular culture world, regardless of ethnic background. What I found especially interesting was his comment about Dizon who, as an American model-actress of mixed-race (though not Japanese) heritage, might be excluded from the Japanese purely based on her ethnicity. However, Toshiaki did not refer to the fact that she is not ethnically Japanese, but instead her lack of language skills to explain her lower standing in Japanese pop culture. Language is critical to interacting with fans so it is not surprising that Japanese language skills are recognized as one marker to identify at least partial acceptance into this world, but possession of other linguistic skills, namely English, can also be used to exclude individuals from the category of "Japanese."

While language was not the most common marker listed among survey respondents, the issue did appear in several different manifestations, as discussed above. Several respondents indicated that they saw language as a deciding factor in determining whether a biracial entertainer was Japanese or not: "For *hāfu* entertainers, if they speak Japanese, then they will be acknowledged as Japanese."<sup>254</sup> Another echoed this statement, saying "If they have similar ways of thinking to Japanese, if they have similar values to Japanese, and if they speak Japanese, then I would consider them to be Japanese."<sup>255</sup> Though "speaking Japanese" is a fairly loose definition, others were more stringent: "If, when speaking Japanese, they have odd mannerisms, then I would probably not consider them to be Japanese."<sup>256</sup> While this participant does not specify what such mannerisms might include, the response suggests that one must speak completely fluent, accent-less Japanese to be considered Japanese. Such natural language skills

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<sup>254</sup> Respondent #3351442

<sup>255</sup> Respondent #3290285

<sup>256</sup> Respondent #3105212

would ostensibly be learned by spending one's early childhood in Japan or through extensive language study combined with experience living in the country itself.

Befu and Manabe's survey results for "Criteria for Being Japanese" echo the opinions of the respondents above. After citizenship (which 84% of respondents considered vital to be considered Japanese), Japanese language competence was the second most important quality to be accepted as Japanese. 82% of respondents deemed language competence to be a vital marker of Japaneseness.<sup>257</sup> Language may be seen as so critical in part because it is so closely intertwined with understanding of Japanese culture. In the same survey, assessing foreigners' cultural competence, 66% of respondents believed that Japanese culture cannot be fully understood in a foreign language.<sup>258</sup> Thus, language competence may not be seen merely for its linguistic and communicative benefits, but also as an important requirement to truly understand Japanese culture.

In contrast to those who consider Japanese language skills vital for acceptance of biracial celebrities as Japanese, others instead emphasize knowledge, or lack thereof, of other languages. For several respondents, English fluency was a marker of a non-Japanese, regardless of whether the individual spoke Japanese fluently or not.<sup>259</sup> For example, while Aki speaks fluent Japanese, her English speaking skills would preclude her from being truly Japanese. Conversely, others hold up Wentz Eiji as an example, citing his lack of English proficiency as a characteristic allowing him to be considered Japanese.<sup>260</sup> "Wentz has spent his whole life in Japan, and even he says that he's not very good at English, so he's Japanese," stated one respondent, highlighting

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<sup>257</sup> Befu and Manabe, *ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> Respondents #3054315, #3057016

<sup>260</sup> Respondents # 3052583, #3057016

the degree with which English skills are disassociated with Japaneseness.<sup>261</sup> Language is a clear marker of closeness and distance between biracial celebrities and the mainstream Japanese population; the above examples indicate the fluidity of these conceptions.

## Case Study 2: Wentz Eiji

Wentz is one of the best known biracial celebrities, considered by one of the respondents to even be “A typical *hāfu* in Japan.”<sup>262</sup> As discussed above, a number of individuals commented on his poor English skills in reference to their identification of him as Japanese. Just as significantly, however, a number of survey participants pointed to his ‘gift of gab’ as part of his television persona, which contributes to his popularity. Eight respondents referenced his “humorous banter” and found his relaxed, natural manner of speaking to be part of his appeal. The word used most often to describe this characteristic was the English word “talk” transliterated into Japanese. While most did not explicitly state this, the association of Wentz’s *Japanese* talk and banter with his popularity suggests further the importance of language in acceptance of biracial celebrities as Japanese.

As discussed in the previous chapter, entertainment reporters have noted Wentz’s ability to utilize the perceived gap between his physical features and his language skills. Several respondents described this same divergence, saying “The gap between his Caucasian physical appearance and his Japanese-like manner of speaking is interesting.”<sup>263</sup> The sense that his physical appearance is at odds with his Japanese fluency and fluidity exemplifies the commonly held perceptions of Japanese identity as consisting, at minimum, of Japanese ethnicity and

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<sup>261</sup> Respondent #3057016

<sup>262</sup> Respondent #3052583

<sup>263</sup> Respondent #3060960

speaking ability. Wentz, through his unconventional looks yet Japanese-like manner of speaking, may be pushing these preconceived ideas of the categories of Japanese and non-Japanese in society.

## **Biracial Japanese in Mainstream Society**

As discussed in Chapter Two, biracial individuals in mainstream Japanese society face a different reception than their celebrity counterparts. Oikawa and Yoshida's 2007 study on identity in biracial Japanese found that overwhelmingly such individuals experienced, if not discrimination, a certain degree of "othering." They were often made to feel un-Japanese because of their ethnic background despite the fact that they were raised in Japan, and Japanese was their first, and sometimes only, language.

In responding to questions about non-celebrity biracial individuals, survey participants identified Japanese language as the most important prerequisite to be considered Japanese. Despite a general consensus that language skills were critical for acceptance as Japanese, they are not sufficient to guarantee such recognition. The theme echoed throughout the survey results was the idea that while biracial individuals may not be completely Japanese, neither are they completely foreign. This notion of an evolving "middle ground" between the two binary opposites suggests that conceptions of Japanese society may also be evolving to make room for this third group.

### *Akogare, Discrimination, and a Middle Ground*

*Akane and I settle into the plastic chairs in a café in the middle of Harajuku's famed Takeshita-dori. On this main street, a hot spot for middle school and high school students, one can find some of the more outlandish*

*fashions in Tokyo: youngsters sporting gothic looks punctuated by heavy black eyeliner, “Lolita” girls wearing frilly pinafores and carrying parasols, and many more whose appearances belie any sort of categorization. From our table in the café, we have a good view of the fashion show unfolding in the street below us, and on this sunny Friday afternoon, the crowd features a melding of school uniforms, conventional attire, and the aforementioned eclectic styles of dress.*

*Akane had returned from a one-year study abroad at University of Washington just a few months earlier, but already seemed at ease back in her old life. Stirring her iced café mocha thoughtfully with a straw, she opens with, “To be accepted as Japanese, you have to have three things: language, physical appearance, and name. Even if only one of these things is different, there’s ultimately a sense that the person is not Japanese.” For biracial Japanese, it is usually appearance (though sometimes name) that prevents them from being considered Japanese. For zainichi Koreans, name is often the only thing that identifies them as non-Japanese, as they are usually indistinguishable from the ethnically Japanese by physical features or by spoken language.*

*However, Akane clarifies, being considered “different” from mainstream Japanese does not necessarily mean discrimination. She sees discrimination as being more prevalent among the older generations, as opposed to young people, and in certain situations, such as marriage. Parents of the future bride, for example, are often especially concerned if their daughter wants to marry a non-Japanese.*

When asked about (non-celebrity) biracial individuals as a whole, a quarter of respondents replied with references to “*akogare*” of this group. This sense of captivation stems from a number of factors, including physical features,<sup>264</sup> perceptions of an international background,<sup>265</sup> and the fact that they are thought to embody elements of both Japaneseness and foreignness.<sup>266</sup> While *akogare* is used in a positive light, it nonetheless maintains a sense of distance from the individual in question. It is interesting to note the comment of one respondent: “Due to the fact that people who are *hāfu* hold elements of Japanese and foreigners, people are able to alternately feel *akogare* and have a sense of affinity or closeness; it is this that is the peak of their allure.”<sup>267</sup> This sense of both distance and affinity speaks to the idea of an in-between space occupied by biracial Japanese, from which they can either be pulled closer or pushed away,

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<sup>264</sup> Respondents #3105212, #3071582

<sup>265</sup> Respondent #3071582

<sup>266</sup> Respondent #3060960

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

as convenient. The fact that these individuals can speak Japanese brings them closer to the Japanese as a whole, while the same “exotic” physical features that make them an object for admiration act to distance them from the monoracial Japanese.

Tomoko Sekiguchi’s 1999 study of popularly held images of mixed race individuals provides a supplement to current views of biracial Japanese. Sekiguchi surveyed 50 Japanese youth on their images of people of mixed race parentage, breaking down the groups by race, with three categories of Mixed Black, Mixed White, and Mixed Asian. The differences between the Mixed Black and Mixed White groups were subtle, with the former considered “Gentle” (24%), “Cute, cool” (18%), and Good natured (16%) and the latter “Cute, cool” (30%), Gentle (22%), and Cheerful (20%). Opinions of the Mixed Asian group centered more on traits stereotypically associated with Asians: “Gentle” (18%), Clever (14%), and Methodical (14%), among others.<sup>268</sup> References to “cute” and “cool” in the first two groups suggest feelings of *akogare*, but above all, it is interesting to note that the abovementioned traits are all positive associations.

Conversely, however, respondents to my survey speak of varying degrees of preferential treatment and/or discrimination towards this group as well. Six respondents felt that discrimination towards biracial individuals still exists, though in a less potent form than in years past. Oikawa and Yoshida’s study of thirteen biracial individuals offers examples of such negative treatment, including being called “*gaijin*” (foreigner), or having any differences between them and others attributed directly to their ethnic background.

On the other hand, some survey respondents felt that more so than discrimination, biracial Japanese were more likely to receive preferential treatment and even stand to gain from their mixed race background. “In my opinion, rather than discrimination, [biracial individuals]

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<sup>268</sup> Sekiguchi, 213.

receive more favorable treatment” commented one respondent.<sup>269</sup> Another added, “Lately, it has become less rare [to see biracial individuals], and among celebrities, the number of *hāfu* individuals is increasing, so I don’t think discrimination really exists.”<sup>270</sup> While outright discrimination may very well be dwindling, even favorable treatment illustrates the distinct divide between biracial and monoracial Japanese.

Falling between these two camps were those who saw, rather than overt discrimination, recognition of biracial individuals as “half” and not Japanese, in a neutral, not negative, sense: “I don’t think there is discrimination in the negative sense. Just the recognition that, based on their physical features, they are different from ethnically pure Japanese.”<sup>271</sup> Though seen as un-Japanese, biracial individuals are also not viewed as entirely foreign, causing them to occupy a middle ground between the two, as illustrated by the use of the word *akogare* as an indicator of simultaneous distancing and closeness.

### “*Hāfu*’ and ‘*Gaijin*’ are Different”

Toshiaki clearly articulated his view that biracial Japanese fall into their own category when he said, “People who are half are put into a separate category...they are not quite Japanese, but at the same time, they are not as different from the Japanese as foreigners are.” The sense that biracial individuals lie in a fuzzy place, in between two very distinctive groups, underscores the tensions between ethnicity and definitions of national identity. Most respondents felt similarly, asserting that biracial individuals are treated differently (though perhaps not experiencing racism in the negative sense of the word), but at the same time, there was a strong feeling that while biracial Japanese are not necessarily the same as monoracial Japanese, they are also not foreigners. “*Hāfu* are *hāfu*; they are not foreigners and they are not Japanese” perhaps

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<sup>269</sup> Respondent #3071628

<sup>270</sup> Respondent #3117458

<sup>271</sup> Including: Respondent #3224615

best sums up the feelings of the majority of survey participants.<sup>272</sup> This sense of biracial individuals as in between the Japanese and the foreign underscores the state of limbo in which they are placed. This state of limbo was clear with the concurrent distancing and embracing of biracial celebrities in the media sources as well as the survey and interview data discussed in the first half of this chapter.

The category of “*hāfu*” is evolving more and more into a free-standing grouping. One respondent comments, “Although I may recognize these people as ‘half’, I would not consider them foreigners.”<sup>273</sup> Another adds, “I just think that *hāfu* are different from foreigners. If you were to think of inside and outside, foreigners are on the outside and while *hāfu* are a part of that group, they are closer to the inside, and may even exist completely in the inside.”<sup>274</sup> This notion of an in-between space is becoming more and more a definitive location, and one which creates a new way of thinking about national identity in Japan by moving away from the binaries of insider and outsider in current conceptions of Japanese society.

## *Language Skills*

*Walking down the street in Kichijoji reveals another side of Tokyo life. The small shops dotting the side of the road feature ethnic clothing from India or Nepal, and coffee shops advertising Fair Trade coffee. In stark contrast to the Shinjuku salarymen with business suits and briefcases, or the designer handbag-carrying girls of Shibuya, the people walking through the streets of Kichijoji seem more relaxed, less hurried. I can spot the park from the end of the street. Tall trees loom before me, and as I step onto the gravel path, I feel as though I have been transported into a different world. Inokashira Park in Kichijoji is one of the few green spaces in metropolitan Tokyo. It is home to a small lake, the source of the Kanda River, where one can see families and couples paddle boating on sunny weekends in the spring. Grassy slopes, a luxury to the cosmopolitan Tokyoites, encircle the lake, and trees, another rarity in other parts of the city, are abundant.*

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<sup>272</sup> Respondent #3222029

<sup>273</sup> Respondent #3220457

<sup>274</sup> Respondent #3231252

*I continue down the gravel path, remarking to Yosuke, another friend from study abroad, that the park is even larger than I remembered. The last time I was here, it was early June. Now, in September, fewer flowers are in bloom but the greenery is just as impressive. Yosuke and I cross the wide footbridge over the lake, and make our way to the restaurant situated on the hill. There are stools perched along the right side of the stairs, placed conveniently to accommodate overflow from the restaurant. Taking a seat on the stools, the noise and scents from the kitchen wafting down the stairs, Yosuke mulls over my first question: What exactly does it mean to be Japanese?*

*Language and values. “Really, it comes down to whether you can communicate with someone, and whether you share the same values as that person. These are the things that truly matter.” He gives the examples of friends he met while studying abroad in Wisconsin two years previous: he had often felt as close to Japanese Americans, who had grown up speaking Japanese and surrounded by Japanese culture, as Japanese “returnee children,” Japanese nationals who spent their formative years abroad before returning to Japan.*

Yosuke’s answer surprised me a little bit. I had expected him to refer to ethnicity, at least on some level, but his emphasis on language is very much in line with the responses from other survey participants. Yet Yosuke’s definition of Japanese is significantly wider than traditional definitions. By his designation, biracial individuals raised in Japan as well as *zainichi* Koreans fit into the Japanese “community.” If they are raised in Japan, “then they are Japanese for the most part” he says. When I ask specifically about how he sees biracial individuals fitting into Japanese society, Yosuke recognizes that this group occupies a space in between the Japanese and the foreign, but argues that they fall closer to the Japanese. In his view, the middle ground exists, but it does not lie perfectly between the two ends of the spectrum.

“Mysterious and unnatural. I am often surprised when people with faces that look as though they don’t speak Japanese speak very naturally.”<sup>275</sup> While it is perhaps surprising to hear native speaking fluency from people who do not look ethnically Japanese, an overwhelming majority of survey participants, like Yosuke, listed language as a critical marker determining the denotation of a biracial individual as Japanese or foreign. “The base mark for considering a

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<sup>275</sup> Respondent #3222029

biracial individual to be Japanese or foreign would have to be language, I think” was one reaction. Another respondent went further, saying “No matter how much Japanese blood you have, if you do not speak any Japanese or do not know anything about Japanese culture or customs, you would have to be considered a foreigner.”<sup>276</sup> This may be a more liberal stance, but it does nonetheless highlight the importance placed on language as a marker of national identity.

Nine respondents listed “language” or “mother tongue” as the premier characteristic required for consideration as Japanese. Language skills were often listed in conjunction with country/environment of upbringing as well as knowledge of cultural norms in determining whether a biracial individual would be considered Japanese. While a quarter of the respondents did list references to ethnicity and/or physical features, the fact that language took precedence over ethnicity suggests that ethnicity alone is not enough to guarantee acceptance as Japanese, nor does biracial ethnicity necessarily preclude individuals from being considered Japanese in all cases.

At the same time, while Japanese language fluency is critical for biracial individuals to be seen as Japanese, there are often additional expectations of their other linguistic abilities. For example, one respondent said, “In Okinawa, when [*hāfu*], despite being ‘foreigners,’ cannot speak English, they receive strange looks.”<sup>277</sup> In the opposite situation, one respondent comments “Now, I think *hāfu* stand to gain from their position because in Japan, people who can speak English or another language are envied.”<sup>278</sup> This example, too, exemplifies the expectation that biracial individuals will speak a foreign language.

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<sup>276</sup> Respondent #3351442

<sup>277</sup> Respondent #3052583

<sup>278</sup> Respondent #3057016

Yamamoto's 1993-1994 study of Japanese attitudes toward bilingualism illustrates the positive associations with multilingual abilities. The most common words associated with bilinguals were: *kokusai* (international; 12.9%), *kakkoii* (cool; 5.1%), and *kashikoi* (intelligent; 4.9%).<sup>279</sup> Further, of 607 total responses recorded (from 144 total subjects), Yamamoto found that 59.6% were rated as positive, 29.5% as neutral, and only 10.9% as negative.<sup>280</sup> As illustrated by these findings, feelings of *akogare* may stem not only from perceptions of the physical appearance of biracial Japanese but also their perceived language skills. While this appears to be in contrast to views of multilingual celebrities as un-Japanese, envy or admiration of foreign language skills of mainstream biracial individuals also indicates a distancing mechanism. Expectations of foreign language proficiency suggest that biracial Japanese are held to a different standard and thus are seen as wholly different from monoracial Japanese.

## Conclusions

The interview and survey results discussed above represent a diverse set of views, and highlight the complexities surrounding the position of biracial individuals in Japanese society. Language and ethnicity remain at the center of most discussions of what it means to be Japanese, though these do not necessarily guarantee acceptance as Japanese, and the fluid concept of Japaneseness further complicates this debate by adding more variables to the evaluation. By viewing these results in conjunction with the previous analysis of media sources, it is clear that there are many nuances to popular expectations for biracial celebrities and mainstream individuals alike, and that these standards are different from those held for their monoracial counterparts. Ultimately, however, what is clear is that whether through distancing and

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<sup>279</sup> Yamamoto, 31. (translations original)

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 32.

discrimination or veneration preferential treatment, as understood through the word *akogare*, biracial celebrities and ordinary citizens are marked as belonging to a separate category for recognition, a middle ground between the Japanese and the foreign.

This push away from the long-held assumptions of societal binaries (the Japanese and the non-Japanese) suggests that, however slowly, conceptions of Japanese society are shifting. Viewing perceptions of biracial Japanese celebrities and citizens offers a way to understand and think about Japanese attitudes toward the foreign (or partially foreign) and thus better gauge the potential for immigration, and integration of immigrants, in Japan. While the current examination suggests a degree of hope for expanding conceptions of who count as Japanese, it also makes clear the gradual nature of such shifting conceptions. Whether Japanese society will be receptive to the demographic changes necessary to support the aging population, however, is less certain.

## Chapter Five

### *Conclusions: Japan's New Middle Ground*

The increasing visibility of biracial individuals in Japan through media and popular culture has pushed discussions of ethnicity, language, nationality, and Japaneseness into the open. While once the domain of *Nihonjinron* scholars, these issues are now being debated in more mainstream channels, including through the entertainment news media and online discussion forums. My examination of these debates gives insight not only into how the Japanese public views biracial entertainers in particular, and biracial individuals in general, but also probes deeper onto conceptions of national identity and those prerequisites for being considered Japanese.

Such prerequisites generally include Japanese language skills – which all the celebrities examined here maintain – as well as 100 percent Japanese ethnicity – which, clearly, they lack. The results here have made clear that having one of the two – language or blood – is not sufficient to be considered Japanese. The biracial entertainers discussed previously have the former but not the latter, while the case of *Nikkei* in Japan (perhaps most evidently, Japanese Brazilians), illustrates very clearly that Japanese blood ties do not guarantee smooth integration or acceptance into Japanese society. An interesting corollary to the language prerequisite was the fact that many respondents associated foreign language skills with being un-Japanese. Rather, poor English (or other foreign language) skills were seen as a Japanese quality, shown most clearly through the example of monolingual Wentz Eiji.

The survey results also revealed a third important quality – Japaneseness – which, though vague, manifests itself most clearly in one’s sense of values, attitudes, and ways of thinking (i.e. Angela Aki’s views towards her hometown). This notion has its clearest antecedents in the *Nihonjinron* literature, which are centered on the idea of one unique Japanese culture. While often focused on the distinctive nature of Japanese cultural customs and beliefs, Japaneseness can also extend to include language and ethnic exclusivity, thus tying it back to the first two requirements to be accepted as Japanese.

Despite these strict requirements for acceptance as Japanese, the shifting sense of closeness and distance between biracial celebrities and the mainstream Japanese population, as well as data collected from the survey suggests that there may be room for a middle ground, and a new way to conceive of Japan’s changing population. While in the past, there existed very dichotomous definitions of Japanese and foreigner, insider and outsider, this middle ground may be carving a space between the two. Many respondents reiterated that “*hāfu* and *gaijin* (foreigner) are different,” and when discussing biracial individuals, were clear that “*hāfu* are *hāfu*; they are not foreigners and they are not Japanese.” This evolving third category, falling somewhere between the Japanese insider and the foreign outsider, is the clearest evidence of a shift in Japanese conceptions not only of Japanese national identity but also of the foreign.

This differentiation in labeling and categorization suggests that Japanese biracialism is beginning to be viewed in a new light. In Japan’s not so distant history, biracial individuals were immediately tossed into the “foreigner” category without second thought. The fact that *hāfu* is evolving into a free-standing category indicates a shift in perceptions of this group, and brings biracial individuals into a recognizable and *acceptable* category of Japanese. Indications that individuals who are not 100 percent Japanese can still speak the language and understand

cultural customs may be contributing to this shift in perceptions. The visibility of biracial celebrities who perform according to Japanese norms is providing this cue, and in this manner, is paving the way for the middle ground.

I came into this research hypothesizing that biracial celebrities were prompting a reexamination of Japanese national identity, and redrawing the lines along which this identity is formed. While I no longer believe a so drastic a transformation is occurring, I would argue that the *hāfu* middle ground is, on some level, shifting the way that people conceive of Japanese identity, particularly in opposition to the foreign. As Japan's demographics shift in coming decades, this new middle ground might provide traction for more expansive visions of who is Japanese.

### *Japan's Immediate Future: A Return to the Past?*

Japan is at a crossroads regarding attitudes towards immigration. The country can choose to open up, with former secretary general Nakagawa's proposal to reach a population of ten percent immigrants by 2050; or it can remain relatively closed, favoring immigrants of Japanese ancestry, though lacking the social services necessary to support successful integration of such foreign workers into Japanese society. Japanese politics are also facing a critical juncture. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in power since the current governing system was established after World War II, appears to be on the verge of defeat after over sixty years of nearly uninterrupted rule.<sup>281</sup> The next general election must be held before September 10, 2009; the

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<sup>281</sup>In 1993, the LDP for the first time failed to capture a majority in the parliamentary elections. A coalition of seven parties, whose members included many former LDP members who had broken off from the party, forced the LDP into the opposition for the first (and only) time since its inception. This shift, however, was short-lived, as internal conflict among the seven coalition parties fragmented the group, and the LDP regained power as part of a coalition with the Social Democratic Party of Japan and the New Party Sakigake in the subsequent elections. Gerald L. Curtis. *The Logic of Japanese Politics: Leaders, Institutions, and the Limits of Change* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger,

winner of this vote will likely shape, at the very least, the immediate future of Japanese immigration policy.

Beginning April 1, 2009, however, the situation of foreign workers in Japan took another turn. As the economic slump worsened, and more workers began to lose their jobs, the Japanese government proposed a way to alleviate the problem: eliminate foreign workers from the unemployment rosters. To do so, it “is offering *nikkei* — i.e. workers of Japanese descent on ‘long-term resident’ visas — a repatriation bribe. Applicants get ¥300,000, plus ¥200,000<sup>282</sup> for each family dependent, if they ‘return to their own country,’ and bonuses if they go back sooner.”<sup>283</sup> This “exporting” of the unemployed has echoes in Japanese immigration patterns a century earlier, when Japan sent farmers to Brazil, Peru, and other South American countries, as well as Canada and the US. Their descendents came to Japan through the preferential immigration laws in the late 1980s and early 90s, and now “that markets have soured, foreigners are the first to be laid off, and their unassimilated status has made them unmarketable in the government’s eyes.”<sup>284</sup>

The knee-jerk reaction to draw insider-outsider lines in times of crisis is a clear indicator that Japanese society is not prepared to accept and integrate a large influx of foreign workers, as Nakagawa’s immigration proposal would require. Foreigners are berated for not learning the Japanese language or customs, when in fact most have little time or access to resources that might aid their study. Further, immigrant workers have become scapegoats on whom to pin blame for increases in crime, though per-capita crime rates are actually higher among Japanese

1995), 26; Bruce Stronach. *Beyond the Rising Sun: Nationalism in Contemporary Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 98.

<sup>282</sup> ¥300,000 is roughly equivalent to 3,000 USD and ¥200,000 is approximately 2,000 USD.

<sup>283</sup> Debito Arudou, “Golden parachutes mark failure of race-based policy,” *The Japan Times*, 7 April 2009, Online Edition <<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fl20090407ad.html>>

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

than non-Japanese.<sup>285</sup> The case of *Nikkei* workers shows that blood is not a sufficient prerequisite for integration into society, and this study's examination of attitudes toward biracial celebrities indicates that even language skills and cultural knowledge are not adequate when not accompanied by 100 percent Japanese ancestry. While the low birthrate may drive Japan to seek immigrants to support its aging society, integration of such immigrants will not be successful without (1) social services dedicated to the support of foreign workers and (2) concentrated efforts to open Japanese attitudes to tolerance of diversity in all its forms – cultural, ethnic, linguistic – in Japan.

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

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# Appendices

## *Appendix A: Survey Questions*

### Survey 1: Fashion and Celebrities

1. Gender

- Male
- Female

2. Age

- Under 18
- 18-21
- 22-25
- Over 25

3. Profession \_\_\_\_\_

4. How would you describe your personal sense of style or fashion?

5. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being low and 5 being high), how would you rate the importance of your personal style/fashion in representing who you are?

6. Does the way other people dress (their personal style) influence the way you perceive them? Please explain.

7. Have you ever dyed your hair? If yes, what color? Why did you choose to dye your hair?

8. Have you ever used a skin whitening product? If yes, what kind of product? Why did you choose to use this product?

9. Have you ever used a tanning product or visited a tanning salon? If yes, why did you choose to do this?

10. When you see individuals dressed in “Lolita” clothing, what do you think of them? What characteristics or personality traits do you associate with them?

11. When you see individuals dressed in “Gyaru/Gyaru” clothing, what do you think of them? What characteristics or personality traits do you associate with them?

12. Please consider the following celebrity entertainers:

- Angela Aki
- Wentz Eiji
- Ito Yuna
- Crystal Kay

A. Angela Aki:

How would you describe Angela Aki? Why do you think she is a popular singer?

B. Wentz Eiji

How would you describe Wentz Eiji? Why do you think he is a popular entertainer/tarento?

C. Ito Yuna

How would you describe Ito Yuna? Why do you think she is a popular singer?

D. Crystal Kay

How would you describe Crystal Kay? Why do you think she is a popular singer?

13. Do you consider the above entertainers to be Japanese? Do you think they are more or less popular than ethnically full Japanese entertainers? Why do you think this is true?

14. How do you perceive biracial Japanese individuals (born and raised in Japan)? Do you identify them as Japanese? As half? As foreign? Why?

15. Do you believe that biracial Japanese individuals face discrimination Japan? How?

16. What does it mean to be Japanese? How do you identify someone as Japanese?

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## Survey 2: Japanese Celebrities

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Age

Under 18

18-21

22-25

Over 25

3. Profession \_\_\_\_\_

4. How do you perceive celebrities in Japan?

5. How do you perceive biracial celebrities in Japan? Do you think they are more or less popular than ethnically full Japanese entertainers? Why do you think this is true?

6. How do you perceive biracial Japanese individuals (born and raised in Japan)? Do you identify them as Japanese? As half? As foreign? Why?

## *Appendix B: Interview Questions*

Interview questions were drawn from the list below based on individual responses and as time restrictions allowed. Follow-up questions were added as appropriate.

- What do you think of (Angela Aki, Wentz Eiji, Ito Yuna, Crystal Kay)? Why do you think he/she is popular?
- How do you perceive biracial celebrities in Japan? Do you think they are more or less popular than ethnically full Japanese entertainers? Why do you think this is true?
- What traits make these biracial entertainers popular?
- How do you perceive biracial Japanese individuals (born and raised in Japan)? Do you identify them as Japanese? As half? As foreign? Why?
- Do you believe that biracial Japanese individuals face discrimination in Japan? How?
- What does it mean to be Japanese? How do you identify someone as Japanese?

## *Appendix C: Survey Participant Data*

### **Survey 1: Fashion and Celebrities**

<b>Participant ID</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
3052583	F	18–21	Student
3054315	F	18–21	College student
3057016	F	21–25	Office worker
3060960	F	21–25	Graduate school student
3071582	F	Over 26	Part-time job
3105212	F	21–25	Education
3106425	M	18–21	Company employee
3116108	F	21–25	Office worker
3117458	F	21–25	Student
3141979	F	18–21	Student
3184203	F	21–25	College student
3224615	F	18–21	College student

### **Survey 2: Japanese Celebrities**

<b>Participant ID</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
3219436	F	18–21	Student
3219442	M	21–25	College student
3219534	M	21–25	Engineer
3220457	F	18–21	Student
3222029	M	18–21	Military
3230827	F	18–21	College student
3231252	F	18–21	College student
3290285	F	18–21	Student
3351442	F	18–21	College student

*Appendix D: Proof of Certificate of Exemption for Research Involving Human Subjects from the University of Washington Human Subjects Division*

Date: Tue, 2 Sep 2008 12:56:29 -0700  
From: Tanya Matthews <XXXXXXXX@u.washington.edu>  
To: Erina Aoyama <XXXXXXXX@u.washington.edu>  
Subject: Certificate of Exemption #34771 Administrative Approval  
Parts/Attachments:

Dear Ms. Aoyama,

Your application has been administratively approved by the Human Subjects Division. We have reassigned your application #34771 "Biracialism in Japan" from Expedited Review to Certificate of Exemption under category 2. The period of approval is from 9/2/2008 to 9/1/2013.

Please note that the following restrictions apply:

1. No changes may be made to the protocol. Should the PI find the need to make revisions, a new Certification of Exemption or Minimal Risk application will be submitted for review and approval.
2. The administrative approval for this activity cannot be renewed. Should the activity need to continue past the approval period, a new Certification of Exemption or Minimal Risk application will be submitted for review and approval.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me.

Best of luck with your project,

Tanya Matthews

**Human Subjects Division**

Tanya Matthews, Ph.D.  
Human Subjects Review Administrator  
University of Washington  
Box 359470  
Phone (206) 221-7918  
Fax (206) 543-9218