

Mechanisms of Biases and Cultural Literacy in International Language Education:

One Such Story to Carry

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A dissertation in practice submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership

University of Washington Tacoma

2021

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### **Abstract**

Despite equity and inclusion initiatives, the English based colonial model has permeated the kindergarten to college systems, teaching/learning, theories and methods, the perception of second language acquisition, multiculturalism, and language education (Knowles et al., 2015; Macedo, 2019; Phillips & Abbot, 2011; Battiste, 2013). Additionally, cognitive neuroscientific discoveries of the complexity of language learning, emotional intelligence, and cultural literacy systematically failed to reach educators. Few studies have focused on what factors impact on cultural biases of foreign language learners, or what factors in learning facilitate the dismantling of durable biases. What are the hidden agendas for teaching and learning foreign languages? For Japanese study abroad and language programs, what aspects of the target culture do learners emphasize while de-emphasizing or omitting others? How are implicit biases from white-English coloniality in the K to college systems influencing foreign language education in the U.S.? What elements in learning foster long-term critical cultural literacy? This qualitative study attempts to understand the complexity of implicit biases towards the target culture through first and second-year Japanese language learners who were enrolled at a large college in the metropolitan area of the Northwest region of the United States. The study included three similarly constructed online surveys on cultural literacy and in-depth interviews with the volunteers of these populations. They were administered between the summer of 2020 and the winter of 2021. Concepts from Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 2011) were used for literature and study analyses.

*Keywords:* coloniality, cultural literacy, Japanese, language education, Ecological Systems Theory, biases.

### **Acknowledgment**

My name, Yukari, means “to treasure relationships encountered in life.” The completion of my dissertation represents countless people for their support, expertise, patience, time, and encouragement. My life, teaching, and leadership philosophies are strongly rooted in an ecological, multimodal, multi-generational, holistic worldview based on Japanese culture, art, and educational systems that emphasize interdisciplinary collaboration, and emotional intelligence.

First, I am thankful for my parents and relatives, who were often artists, who showed me how to observe things from different perspectives and think creatively to solve complex challenges from an early age. They stayed positive without losing their core values and built their lives from nothing despite the devastation of WWII. Second, understanding the geopolitical relationship between the US and Japan, I have special thanks for my students and their generations, who continued to speak up against systematic inequalities and to take actions for changes despite their intensified hardships. They continue to remind and inspire me that I should be a constant learner and change agent. Third, I acknowledge members of the participating institutions of higher education who helped me recruit participants over eight months during the worsening COVID-19 pandemic. I appreciate their support, patience, and kindness to take their precious time for my study. Third, I am grateful for my teachers/mentors I had in two countries, who had given me opportunities to explore various perspectives.

Finally, I would like to thank the dedicated professors at the University of Washington Tacoma, who challenged me to test my knowledge, expand my horizon, and help me grow. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Ginger MacDonald and Dr. Christopher Knaus for their expertise and knowledge during the first part of the doctoral program. I also acknowledge Dr. Geoffrey

Pumphrey for mentoring me with his abundant experience during my practicum. I cannot thank enough for my amazing four committee members, Dr. Robin Minthorn (the chair), and Dr. Jeff Cohen (the co-chair) from the University of Washington, Tacoma, Dr. Kendra Cawley, and Dr. Sarah Tillery from the participating institution of higher education. Despite their increased workloads and challenges from the impact of the pandemic, they were available for feedback and my countless inquiries. They are not only great professors/mentors but also are kind, patient, and inspiring. Their expertise, experiences, and mentoring styles helped me pay attention to and find what I have missed or was not clear to the audience.

I did not foresee the complexity of racism until I spent my life in the U.S. as a first-generation immigrant, woman, parent, professional, and Asian. Japan was a colonist and remains an economic power with an ambiguous identity; therefore, my positionality is complex. People I have encountered in life have taught me to reflect on my positionality and help me stay authentic to myself. I am grateful to all. I will close with my deep appreciation towards my own family for their encouragement and support.

**Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgment.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction: Problem of Practice .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Theoretical Frameworks in Research on Language Education .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Literature Review .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Cultural Literacy Study: .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Methods/Research Design .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Study Results and the COVID-19 Pandemic.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Online Cultural Survey Results.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Analysis .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Interview Results and In-Depth Comments in Online Surveys.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Advantages and Limitations of the Research.....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Recommendations and Implications .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Appendix A .....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>Appendix B .....</b>	<b>148</b>

### **Introduction: Problem of Practice**

Since the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, as part of course evaluation, I began collecting data on first impressions of the target language/culture (Japanese) to assess cultural literacy growth via pre-and-post anonymous surveys. Over a decade of exploration, I became aware and interested in emerging patterns of omission and deemphasizing some images of Japan and Japanese culture by adult language learners. Are these omissions or deemphasizing intentional? What are some factors behind these images? Where do they come from? Who/what impacts them? Why has English become/remained the most spoken language? Why has the Japanese language also remained one of the most popular foreign languages after American Sign Language and Spanish despite that the population of Japan is 127 million? (Worldmeter, 2021; The World Bank, 2021) Are there specific times in history that have impacted the popularity of these two languages? Thus, my research project was born.

What is culture? I will use the definition of culture as “an abstract network shaping and connecting social roles, hierarchically structured knowledge domains, and ranked values” (Everett, 2018, p.2). The keyword is “hierarchically,” because it is a circular argument of who/what decides a hierarchy, or if it should be a hierarchy. What is language? Noam Chomsky, one of the most influential linguists, defined the *acquired* language in his third edition of “Language and Mind” (2006) as “an integrated system of rules and principles from which the expressions of the language can be derived, each of them a collection of instructions for thought and action” (p.79), which is a more technical definition. Language is creative and intricately interacts with and creates culture. Moreover, influential scholars continue to express that humans are the most creative species or that humans are the only species with a sophisticated language, despite many discoveries of diverse communication systems via light, sonar, chemicals, or

movements among and between species. Therefore, hierarchical thinking continues to impact the relationship between humans and natural environments, and every *system*. The definition of language or culture is also a philosophical, value-oriented question that will not end.

### **Durable Biases in Language Education and Interdisciplinary Approaches**

According to Pew Research Center (Budiman, 2020), the U.S. has the most immigrants in the world, which represents 13.7% of the U.S. population who share diverse languages and cultures. Language, culture, identity, and values are intricately connected, shaping who we are. Without identifying these core elements that impact equity, it is unsurprising that education, particularly language education, remains unaware of implicit biases of devaluation and dehumanization that had rooted in colonialism.

Language education has been utilized to target and sort out specific groups of people for different career paths and skills through immigration, academic, and economic policies (Galindo, 2011; Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015; Kahlenberg et al., 2018; Chomsky, 1999). Coloniality (Battiste, 2013) is perpetuated through white-English based language education, because white-English based literacy model was globally adopted as the gold standard for academic success, modernization, professionalism, and personal achievement (Freire, 1970; Smith, 2012; Ashcroft et al., 1995; Butler & Iino, 2005). Battiste (2013) defines this cycle of psychological power struggles through white-English based education to shape cultural, relational, and economic aspects of life as “coloniality.” This model has reached both colonized and colonial nations in addition to other nations with complex roles as both oppressor and oppressed, solidifying the ideologies that viewed language/culture as conformity, inferiority versus superiority, liability, or commodity during financial or political crises (Galindo, 2011; Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015; Pimentel, 2011; Young, 2019). Consequently, non-white people are being measured by English-

based literacy in all subjects (Singh, 2011; Macedo, 2019). Pimentel (2011) explains that the impacts of white supremacy on language education and perceptions of immigrants through five language ideologies as follows: 1) linguistic conformity as national unity, 2) another language as liability, 3) the fear of another language due to incomprehension, 4) English as an elite language, and 5) language as an asset for advancement. Immigration, academic, and economic policies have consistently used these five language ideologies (pp.324-343).

The United States' economic, academic, political, immigration and social policies globally played a key role to solidify coloniality in education particularly during the 1930s Americanization era and during the 2008 financial crisis with accelerated globalization (Freire, 1970; Smith, 2012; Macedo, 2000 & 2019; Mills, 1997; Kahlenberg et al., 2018). Bilingual education in the American colonies began in the seventeenth century as an extension of capitalism through bilingual schools established by immigrants (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015). During Americanization in the 30s, Secretary of Labor Davis systematically utilized an anti-immigrant sentiment of *us* versus *them* to naturalize immigrants and *purify* their linguistic and cultural allegiances (Galindo, 2011). Americanization deeply influenced philosophies, ideologies, and theories in education (Galindo, 2011; Macedo, 2000). Through these policies that mandated English-only instruction, students were segregated by proficiency level, disseminating a myth that the level of English proficiency correlated with the level of intelligence (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015; Smith, 2012; Macedo, 2000). Direct Method (now mostly means immersion-style English language education) was often used during the 30s to colonize or oppress targeted populations. This accelerated the propagation of foreign language immersion programs with or without colonial intent, blurring implicit biases (Brown et al., 2017; Freire, 1974; Henry, 2005). Through policies and programs, nuanced stigmatization against English learners spread.

From the boom-bust of the 1990s to the 2008 recession, counter-movements against nativism met equally fierce nativist sentiment, reinforcing the assumption that non-native speakers had deficiencies as low academic achievers and that their role was to provide cheap labor. During these years, intensified globalization also replaced low-skilled populations who had already been denied equal access to higher education (Wanger et al., 2012; Kahlenberg et al., 2018; Carnevale et al., 2018), while simultaneously high-skilled/highly educated immigrants stayed trapped in paths that lacked inclusion and promotion (Galindo, 2011; Kochhar & Cillufo, 2018). Strong nativist sentiment (due to terrorism) and national unity were also reinforced through anti-bilingual policies based on the assumption that non-native speakers were cultural threats. Examples included the Illegal Immigrant and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) (1996); California's first anti-immigrant Proposition 187 (1994); Arizona's Proposition 203 (2000), and No Child Left Behind (NCLB)'s (2001) removal of bilingual education (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015; Pimentel, 2011). IIRIRA, which mandated English-only learning environments through restrictive use of the native language at home created an unnatural English acquisition process, fragmented cultural communities, and failed to result in English proficiency (Galindo, 2011; Wong et al., 2016; Jensen, 2007). NCLB incited accusations that non-native speakers reduced funding with low scores on standardized tests (Smith, 2012; Popham, 2001; Denkmann, 2019; National Education Association [NEA], 2019). Standardized exams that had been originally developed for army recruits to screen non-white men with an emphasis of eugenics further contributed to systematic inequalities through mass-production of public education with English based literacy (Popham, 2001). The concept of *standardization* by the privileged group continues to thrive in the forms of college applications, assessment, certifications, and job statuses. Educators and policymakers often ignored best practices based on non-Western

cultures, while they conveniently utilized second language acquisition and multiculturalism as responsible cultural literacy tools (Kotzé et al., 2017). They also stigmatized or misunderstood those topics until cognitive neuroscience began shedding light to the complexity of language learning, emotional intelligence, and cultural literacy (Guzmán-Vélez & Tranel, 2015; Rachele, 2009; Zull, 2002; Landa et al., 2017).

In terms of stereotyping ethnicity, first, assimilation policies especially oppressed people with “Mexican descent” (Galindo, 2011, p.326) and “Latinos” (p.326) who were targeted by racializing them as linguistically, genetically, and culturally inferior to create cheap labor pipelines, and by placing them in vocational paths instead of providing academic and professional advancement or degree completion (Jensen, 2007; Pimentel, 2011; Kochhar & Cillufo, 2018). The dehumanization of the descendants of slaves, immigrants, and indigenous people were systematically labeled as unintelligent, low achievers (Smith, 2012; Galindo, 2011). “America First” (National Public Radio [NPR], 2019) rhetoric also incites xenophobia that casts asylum seekers from the Mexican border as cultural, linguistic, and economic threats (Pimentel, 2011; Denkmann, 2019). Meanwhile, Asians were carefully stereotyped, banned from citizenship/public education, or segregated. The image or word associate with Asia is often ambiguous. In terms of stereotyping physical region, and history with the U.S., Asia seems to mean specific populations.

### ***Where/What is Asia?***

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-based Violence (API-GBV) pointed out the ambiguity of the definition of Asia on a physical map and in perceptions of people that had been encouraged by political, social, academic, and financial

policies further complicate the complexity and ambiguity of voices, positionalities, and identities:

“Currently, federal agencies are not required to count detailed data for Asian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Americans. In many cases, reporting by racial group[s] can mask important differences among Asian and NHPI sub-groups. Thus, AAPI communities often remain misrepresented, under-funded, and left out of policy and program decision making.” (Sono & Ramakrishnan, 2017).

“There is no official definition of the boundary between Asia and Europe (nor between continents for that matter) so the boundaries are merely traditional – and some of the countries listed as Asian might not seem obvious” (Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-based Violence [API-GBV], n.d.).

API-GBV states that more than 40 countries were represented/defined as Asia, which includes a geographic range between Russia and Qatar (National Geographic quoted in API-GBV, n.d.). However, if once a person resides a long time or was born in another country or culture, their “Asian” element disappears even when they identify themselves as people of Asian descent. Intentional and unintentional ambiguity can lead to systematic undercount and misrepresentation for important data collection, which exacerbates invisibility.

Despite a small number of immigrants of Chinese descent, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the only law that used race to deny citizenship (Burns, 2018; Hale, 2018; Young, 2019). With this unconstitutional law and propaganda, the U.S. had systematically dehumanized Chinese (and Asians) as “filthy”, “unintelligent”, and “strange”, and hyper-sexualized/devalued women (Hale, 2018; PBS, 2018; Young, 2019; The Page Act, 1875). Chinese immigrants could enter for the cheap labor for transcontinental railroads, and later, banned, oppressed, lynched, or killed (PBS, 2018; Young, 2019; Chang, 2021). The Page Act of 1875 systematically desensitized and commodified Asian women impacting the regions and countries where the US and Japanese military forces were or have been present (Chang, 2021). Asian stereotypes have been also utilized to divide them by creating internal competitions or inciting wartime tensions

due to Japanese imperial history (Au et al., 2011; Hale, 2018; Hughes, 2009; Jean, 2005; Kimura, 1995). Consequently, Asian immigrants' diversity in origins, languages, and experiences contributed to keeping Asian activism fragmented and less aware of implicit colonial biases (Baker, 2006; Steele, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic originated in China and intensified from January 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020; Loffman, 2020; Nakamura, 2021; APPI, 2021), exacerbated anti-Chinese and anti-Asian sentiment. In terms of sentiment toward people of Japanese descent, wartime history and economic success has created complex reactions from all groups.

Around the 1990s, Japan economically surpassed the U.S. as the world economic power (Fingleton, 1995; Vogel, 1979). Japanese companies such as Sony began investing in various industries (e.g. entertainment, technology) in the U.S. (Fabrikant, 1989; Fingleton, 1995; Takayama, 1998; Takahashi, 2001). During these years, elite institutions of higher education such as Harvard University studied collaborative Japanese-style management and the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) among successful leaders (Deutschman, 2005; Cohen & Kotter, 2002; Goleman, 1989; Fingleton, 1995). This surge of Japanese analyses included some fascination toward *mysterious culture* or *Japanese behavior* (Horvat, 2000; Miyazaki, 2008; Takahashi, 2008). Despite the anti-Japanese sentiment, Japanese brands began permeating everyday life in the U.S. (Nomura, 2009). Besides products, the Japanese government saw Japanese culture/language as an economic, political, and cultural tool.

The Ministry of Education was established by the Japanese government in 1871 during the Meiji era as a part of the modernization and took the current form as MEXT (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, & Technology) in 2001. This government organization greatly impacted curricula from the K to 12 education systems during globalization and financial

crises (Butler & Iino, 2005; Matsukoka, 2001). It continues to influence how Japanese culture is projected for athletic, international, and academic events/programs (MEXT, 2020). Japan and Japanese industries have succeeded in packaging stereotypes to globally sell an idealized image of Japan, particularly to the U.S. Children who watched Japanese TV shows, cartoons or films became the parents of the millennial generation, the most multicultural, largest generation (Yonezawa, 1999 & 2000; Sanada, 2001; Pew Research, 2014). Between 1996 and 2010, quarterly or monthly magazines such as *Nipponia* sponsored by the Japanese government used specific words in the titles and articles to project *cool Japan where old and new co-exist in harmony unlike in other nations* (Dower, 1999). Examples include “kawaii (cute)”, “the land of technology” and “the land of hospitality.” (Sakai, 2006; Ishihara et al., 2007; Torikai, 2006 & 2008). The U.S. succeeded in propagating white-English literacy as a global standard, while Japan stealthily succeeded in keeping Japan as a uniquely mysterious land without having people suspect their implicit biases toward Japan and Japanese culture (Mineo, 2001). Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate the impact of the two languages in terms of biases and cultural literacy.

What are the hidden agendas for teaching and learning foreign languages? For Japanese study abroad and Japanese language programs, what aspects of the target languages and cultures do learners emphasize while de-emphasizing or omitting others? How are implicit biases from white-English coloniality in the K to college systems influencing foreign language education in the U.S.? What elements in learning foster long-term critical cultural literacy? I will explore the qualitative questions through concepts from CRT (Zamudio et al., 2011) and shared concepts from the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Goleman, 2011)/Social Emotional Learning (SEL) (Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007).

### **Theoretical Frameworks in Research on Language Education**

Three theoretical frameworks to conduct my exploratory, qualitative research on biases and cultural literacy are: 1) concepts from **Critical Race Theory (CRT)** (white supremacy and color blindness) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), 2) self and social awareness from **Emotional Intelligence (EI)/Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** (Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007), and 3) **Ecological Systems Theory** (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1989 & 2000). I chose these three frameworks to capture the complexity of language acquisition, and learning and bias processes that would occur in social, academic, financial, cultural, and personal environments.

Neuroscientific evidence also suggests that emotional involvement, pre-knowledge, and formal education would impact long-term memories including bias and cultural literacy (Bransford et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016; Bhat, 2015; Snowden, 1997; Stilwell et al., 2016; Chomsky, 1999).

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

Within the CRT tradition, Freire (1974) touched on the relationship between literacy and the distortion of knowledge production under colonialism. However, his early thoughts on the colonial unconsciousness in language education have only been partially built upon structural inequalities in American educational systems (Bell, 1998; Warren, 1954; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Up to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1953) and the Civil Rights Movements (the Civil Rights Act, 1964; the Rehabilitation Act, 1973; EEOC, 1961), race and diversity issues in CRT had been discussed as a power struggle between black and white people or between haves and have-nots (Bell, 1998). Picard (2007) states that seeing the race issues in the U.S. in “the black white divide, either alienating, or leaving little or no room for other racial groups to constructively revise power and identity” (p.221). Thus, instead of a binary view of systematic inequalities, a holistic view of CRT emerged.

Smith, a Critical Race theorist, (2012) advocated an ecological view to decolonize the four main attributes of European imperialism: “an economic expansion, the subjugation of others, an idea/spirit with different forms of realization, and a discursive field of knowledge” (p.22). Smith and Patel (2016) promoted participatory research methods through the marginalized groups’ ownership of their own voices, empowerment, and learning processes (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Their studies on indigenous cultures/languages with an ecological approach impacted future researchers. Macedo, a CRT linguist, is also a major advocate for “decolonizing foreign language education” (2019). He published the nationwide findings of his three-year evaluations on the overall foreign language education (bilingual education, English as a Second Language/ESL<sup>1</sup>) education, heritage language education, and discourse analysis) from K to college systems, and stated that white English-based literacy promoted by “neo-Darwinian linguists” (p.3) stubbornly permeate foreign language education. These linguists view that language should be “pure” (colonial languages, especially English), insisting that foreign language education should reflect Western colonialism’s elitism. This view devalues the changing nature of vernacular languages spoken by different ethnicities, ages, regions, occupations, or socioeconomic groups, and ignores the complex role that language plays for equity, inclusion, oppression, and biases (Macedo, 2019; Ramsey, 2019; Baker, 2017).

From the 1990s to the 2008 financial crisis, many people fell off a two-sided spectrum of CRT (Reed et al., 2004). Consequently, the perception of intersectionality<sup>2</sup> (Crenshaw, K., 1989; Zamudio et al., 2011; Soave, 2019; Harris & Patton, 2019) became more complex. With or without the CRT concept, researchers in different fields also began to reach a similar conclusion

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<sup>1</sup> The term ESL was used in his book.

<sup>2</sup> the definition as “the complex, cumulative way the effects of different forms of discrimination combine, overlap or intersect” (quoted Tracking Social Norms in UN, 2020); Collins, P. H., the sociologist (quoted in Soave, 2019).

that a multimodal/multi-literacy approach for learning would be natural and effective (Jensen, 2007; Kotzé et al., 2017; Knowles et al., 2015; Zumeta et al., 2012; Wanger et al., 2012; Zhu & Ye, 2012). Millennials became the largest and most multicultural generation (Pew Research, 2014; Picard, 2007), which also contributed to an ecologically diverse approach. CRT's concepts slowly influenced educational policies and curricula, which attempted to correct systematic oppression with initiatives such as multiculturalism, bilingualism, or diversity training (Achieving the Dream [ATD], 2004; Banks, 1996; Center for Community College Student Engagement [CCSSE], 2014; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hart Research Associates, 2010). However, these initiatives did not alter implicit biases that led to discriminatory hiring practices among universities, lost opportunities for academic or professional success (Brayboy, 2003; Gasman et al., 2015) and mistreatment of underrepresented people (Childress, 2019; Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005; Levin et al., 2013; Kimmel & Fairchild, 2017). Thus, the unawareness of a colonial mindset in teachers, administrators, and students can continue to reinforce the concepts and practices of white-English supremacy (Macedo & Bartolomé, 2014; Baker, 2006).

During the last two decades, a hierarchical, efficiency-based model based on colonialism solidified how selectively we invest in education, particularly in higher education in the U.S., reducing the empowerment of students, educational workforce, and organizations (Smith, 2012; State Higher Education Executive Officers Association [SHEEO], 2020; Carnevale et al., 2018; Desrochers & Krishstein, 2014). Data accumulated during the pandemic show the severity of compound inequalities impacting wellness and access to education, housing, and employment of the already marginalized populations (disabilities, gender, race/ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, marital, parental, or veteran status) (Granville, 2020; Addo, 2020; Houle & Addo, 2018; Artiga et al., 2020). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, systematic inequalities have

been exacerbated but become visible in public discourses such as Black Lives Matter movement (Locke, 2016; Taylor, 2021; Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, the legal scholar/professor, who coined intersectionality in 1989, emphasized the importance of awareness of the compound impact of intersectionality in everyday lives (Time, 2020; Soave, 2019; Harris & Patton, 2019; Locke, 2016). The United Nations in “A Tracking Social Norms: A Game Changer for Gender Inequalities” (2020) also addressed the compound impact of intersectionality continue to remain durable in terms of political, social, and economic empowerment of women, resulting in significant stagnation since 1995 when the UN began tracking gender inequalities in over 193 nations.

To examine implicit biases previously addressed in the research questions, it is essential to review literature and to analyze the study with theoretical frameworks such as CRT. Some literature explicitly or partially mentions concepts from CRT; however, other literature has scientific facts without the CRT concept or uses other theoretical frameworks such as Universal Design (UD)/Universal Design of Instruction (UDI) (Connell et al., 1997; Scott et al., 2003) and Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 1989 &2000). Regardless of disciplines, theoretical frames, or the lack of them, the literature review indicate that evidence from different fields merges to support a similarly effective approach for learning, emotional intelligence, and literacy: an ecological approach (Iruka et al., 2019). However, foreign, or international language education in the U.S. and Asia have more difficulty adapting this approach due to complex durable biases embedded in education. Few studies have focused on what factors impact on cultural biases of foreign language learners, or which theoretical frameworks facilitate the dismantling of durable biases.

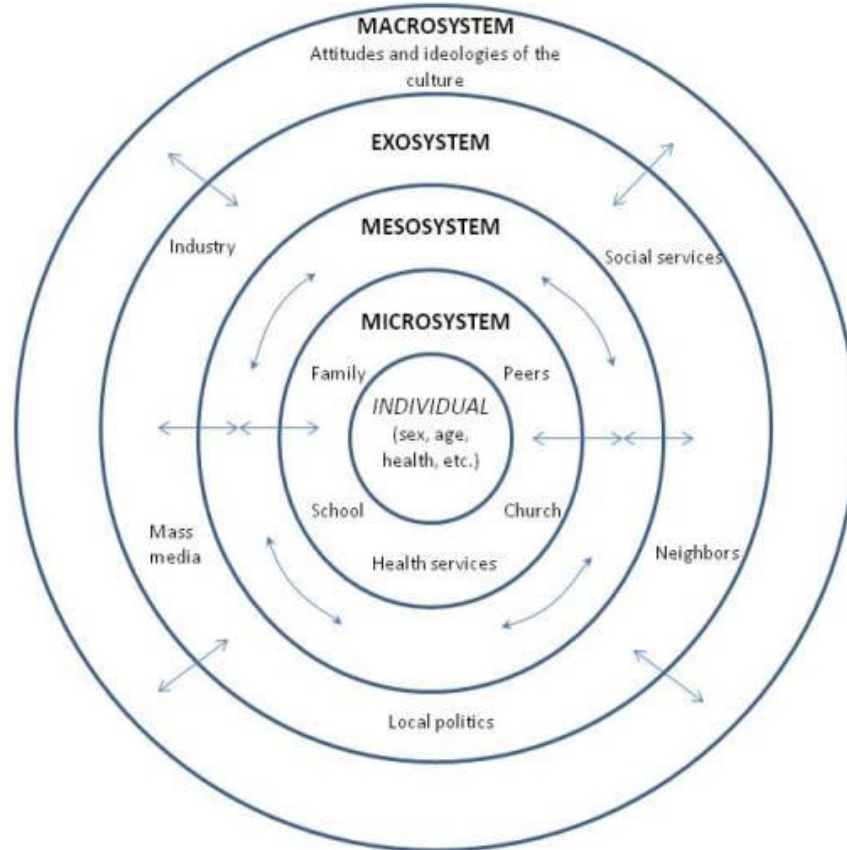
### **Emotional Intelligence (EI)/Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Diverse viewpoints and learning styles with a strength-based holistic approach also share the concept of CRT. To grasp the complexity of human development, self-awareness is the foundation of “critical consciousness” (Freire, 1974). Self-awareness of colonial implicit biases is the beginning of leadership and the key to effective teaching/learning. Goleman’s concept of emotional intelligence (EI) (2011) consists of interdependent self-awareness, social awareness, relationship management, and self-management. The definition of EI is the ability to recognize and manage our own emotions and to utilize that ability to impact others and solve complex issues (Goleman, 2011; CASEL, 2019). To dismantle the durability of implicit biases in language education, it is essential to exercise a high level of EI in teaching and learning. Personal and organizational transformation starts from altering how we think and act in complex contexts, challenged by continuous opportunities for adaptation and evolution (Deutschman, 2005; Kotter, 2013; Cohen & Kotter, 2002). Many scholars described that a well-balanced combination of cognitive and emotional approaches was essential to establish an effective, non-threatening learning environment where urgency for change would be naturally promoted and fostered (Cohen & Kotter, 2005; Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Maxwell, 2002). Lencioni (2002)’s constructive conflicts through diverse interactions are necessary for creating accountability and insight because opposing ideas, different perspectives and temperaments can create a panoramic view of a problem or project and increase the chances of preventing errors or inefficiency (Dubinsky et al., 2007). Neuroscientists also support that collective EI strengthens the connectivity of integrated learning processes (Guzmán-Vélez & Tranel, 2015; Zull, 2002).

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

#### **Figure 1**

*Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 1986, 1989 & 2000).*



*Note:* Chronosystem represents the passage of time, which is not shown on the model.

Ecological Systems Theory consists of five systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem) (Jensen, 2007, pp.36-37) that impact a child's lifetime development of worldview and self through diverse interactions within/between the systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Harris et al., 2009). These systems were organized from the most direct or closest (microsystem as a child's immediate relationships/context) to the farthest to the person (chronosystem as the passage of time such as birth, growth, and aging) (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Mesosystem is an immediate outer layer of a microsystem that links two or more contexts. Exosystem is the outer layer where a child does not directly interact such as parents' workplaces, while macrosystem is beyond the mesosystem that creates cultural values, customs, and laws (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). To

understand the complexity of biases and development of EI and cultural literacy, it is essential to examine how significant factors in the five systems and their interactions play a role (Harris & Courtney, 2003; Jensen, 2007; Iruka et al., 2019; Kotzé et al., 2017).

### **Literature Review**

Through CRT's core concepts of "intersectionality,"<sup>3</sup> color blindness, and white supremacy (Zamudio et al., 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), the literature review attempts to describe the following five mechanisms of implicit biases and the lack of comprehensive literature on colonial impact in language education: 1) durable trends of the National Standards for foreign language and international education; 2) how immigration policies created structural biases in language education through stigmatizing foreign languages<sup>4</sup>; 3) how the privileged dominated language teaching theories, methods, and organizations; 4) how white English-based literacy impacted Asians in the U.S. and education among Asian nations; and 5) despite new neuroscientific discoveries, misconceptions about language learning processes persisted because of political, economic, social, and academic climates. Through the lens of CRT, the literature review analyzes legal and academic documents and data related to biases, learning, and equity available in EBSCO, JSTOR, MEXT (a Japanese governmental organization), and other professional databases in different fields<sup>5</sup> between 1965 and 2021. The review also includes materials and data published by professional organizations<sup>6</sup>.

### **The National Standards for Foreign Language Education and International Education**

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<sup>3</sup> Crenshaw (Hills & Bilge, 2016, p.81) coined this complexity as "intersectionality."

<sup>4</sup> This topic has been briefly explained in the Introduction section; thus, it was omitted from the literature review section.

<sup>5</sup> Asian history, business, disabilities, education, Japanese, language acquisition and education, education abroad programs, EI, foreign languages, immersion programs, immigration, neuroscience, political science, psychology, social science, and UD.

<sup>6</sup> TESOL (Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages), ACTFL (the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages), ATD (Achieving the Dream), CAST, OCR (The Office for Civil Rights), etc.

What is language education for? What elements of language education have been omitted or deemphasized? During the 60s and 70s, economic prosperity and refugees from the Cold War shaped modern bilingual education (Galindo, 2011). Bilingualism emerged as a countermovement to nativism. The Bilingual Education Act (BEA) (1968) (known as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ‘ESEA’) was passed to promote bilingualism (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988), yet bilingualism or multiculturalism versus English-only nativism debates continued, affecting approaches to multicultural and English education (Hsu, 2017; Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015). Latino activists in the 1960s civil rights movement advocated for the bilingual education of Spanish-speaking children and for their equal rights (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Discriminations against foreign accents also became civil rights issues as a countermovement (Reed et al., 2004). Matsuda, an Asian Critical Race theorist, advocated for the legal protection against discrimination of those with foreign accents (Zamudio et al., 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). During the 60s and 70s, educational organizations such as TESOL<sup>7</sup> (Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages) and ACTFL (the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) were created as vehicles to popularize major theories and methods that elites had established (ACTFL, 2020; Alatis, 1987; Anderson, 1967; Chomsky, 1999).

ACTFL task forces conducted a comprehensive three-year (2008-2011) research study to evaluate the impact of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (Phillips & Abbot, 2011). After the teams reviewed over 2,000 professional literature related to the National Standards from 1998 to 2009, they discovered that language teaching and learning greatly focused on the National Standards (Phillips & Abbot, 2011; Macedo, 2000). During these years,

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<sup>7</sup> TESOL also made recommendations to academic and federal institutions or international organizations (Anderson, 1967; Alatis, 1983).

technological innovation, globalization, and anti-immigrant policies solidified white English-based literacy (Macedo, 2000 & 2019). Out of seven major journals, *Modern Language Journal* mostly for post-secondary educators, and *Hispania* for teachers of Spanish, a most frequently taught foreign language, published most articles on the National Standards compared to other languages or TESOL journals (Phillips & Abbot, 2011). The frequency of the language-specific standards<sup>8</sup> in publications indicated that foreign language teachers at the secondary and college levels particularly focused on aligning with the Standards (Phillips & Abbot, 2011). ACTFL also created interdependence of the five Cs (Culture, Communication, Connections, Comparisons & Communities, p.5) as their core values (ACTFL, 2015). Among the Five Cs, culture was most mentioned followed by communication, while connections, comparisons or communities were not frequently discussed. Forty states had implemented or clearly documented the concepts of the Five Cs (ACTFL, 2020; Phillips & Abbot, 2011). Yet, according to ACTFL surveys, language educators lacked the understanding of the Five Cs, and theories, and confidence with their own cultural knowledge and experiences. Frequently discussed topics were: 1) curriculum and program development; 2) teaching; and 3) policies, while theories/methods or learners/learning were less mentioned; this indicated that educators were often less knowledgeable of their implicit biases, theories, methods, and assessment of students' learning of the target language/culture (Phillips & Abbot, 2011; Macedo, 2000; Landa et al., 2017; Giedt et al., 2015).

In conclusion, despite the diverse nature of foreign language education, these trends support that those language educators focused mostly on aligning language curriculum with the National Standards based on an English model and on finding best practices for functionality to produce global leaders. They had less focused on long-term community building, character

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<sup>8</sup> Spanish-55, French-40, German-12, Japanese-10, and Russian-6 (Phillips & Abbot, 2011, pp.3-4).

development, theories/methods, or a holistic approach for learning in relation to concepts of UD/UDI. Ironically, language outcomes including tests became the goal instead of collaborative learning processes through interactions, communities, and connections to foster lifelong empathy and understanding (Silver et al., 1998; Singh, 2011). Other challenges include the lack of budget, time, leadership, professional development for specific languages, and teachers' unwillingness to update their skills/knowledge and experiences (Phillips & Abbot, 2011; Macedo, 2019). K-to-12 systems followed similar paths, due to the legal, economic, and academic factors mentioned in the introduction section.

### **Language Education Theories and Organizations by Elites**

Why are some populations able to influence all disciplines, systems, and education including language education while some populations or ideas are omitted or deemphasized? The American Association for Adult Education's research on learning (Crenshaw, 2017; Knowles et al., 2015; Chomsky, 1999) indicated that, during WWII, formal education for white elite men was mass-produced. Privileged scholars studied human behavior and learning processes (often to control), which led to the production of influential cognitive psychologists, linguists, and social scientists that shaped major teaching theories and methods without much input from non-Western cultures (Knowles et al., 2015; Anderson, 1967; Chomsky, 1999). Unfortunately, many scholars particularly failed to acknowledge CRT's concepts of color blindness and intersectionality. A good intention for the democratization of education obscured implicit biases based on the English or U.S. first context (Leshkovska & Spaseva, 2016; Waks, 2007; Macedo, 2019; Waks, 2007). Along with the theories of the subconscious mind popularized by Freud and Jung, Chomsky's innate subconscious, complex ability to acquire a language met with Skinner's theory of learning as conditioning (Knowles et al., 2015). Direct Method was influenced by both

theories at different times and unethically used during the Americanization among imperialistic nations (Henry, 2005; Jean, 2005). For example, to colonize Koreans and Chinese in Manchuria, Japanese imperialists utilized Direct Method with assimilation policies, “doka seisaku in Japanese” also called “purification” (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015; Hughes, 2009; Jean, 2005; Kimura, 1995; Macedo, 2019; Hall, 2009). Dissimilating Asians that shared cultural and linguistic attributes by policies based on white supremacy acted as a self-mutilation of Asian cultures and identities, creating violent, complex oppression and deep implicit biases as colonizers, and colonized (Daniller, 2021). Without a clear definition, Direct Method often means an immersive style of teaching, or “direct acquisition” as used in a Canadian indigenous study (Johnson, 2017). It is not entirely clear when exactly the ambiguity between a colonial version of Direct Method and an immersive-style method with the adequate use of the native language (e.g. at home/outside the classroom) occurred. However, cognitive scientists, cognitive psychologists, neuroscientists, and linguists such as Chomsky and Bruner influenced researchers/educators on the importance of an authentic, non-threatening environment for complex learning processes (Rutten & Soetaert, 2013). It can be also intentional or unintentional with implicit biases to obscure colonial influence in language education.

During the 60s and 70s, among theories, linguistic debates between Skinner’s behaviorism in *Verbal Behavior* that emphasized the brain as blank before learning, and Chomsky’s innate “language acquisition device” (LAD) to integrate learning processes shaped much of language education (Conteh-Morgan, 2002; St. Clair, 2017; Lawson et al., 1980). Skinner’s behaviorism was easy for Social Darwinists to manipulate by asserting the supremacy of a teacher (white/Western teacher) as an expert and viewing students as passive or inferior learners. Behaviorists preferred compartmentalized teaching methods such as drilling and

negative reinforcements to condition certain learning behavior (Knowles et al., 2015). Contrarily, Chomsky popularized the difference between the knowledge of the underlying grammatical rules acquired through a LAD as “linguistic competence”, and the overt manifestation of the learned rules through verbal communication as “performance” (Conteh-Morgan, 2002, p.192), arguing that the language acquisition process is complex and requires diverse learning activities.

Unfortunately, he also theorized that second language acquisition was not possible for adults who had passed the critical period (Conteh-Morgan, 2002; Al-Harbi, 2020). His theory was exploited to explain that adult immigrants were incapable of mastering English. Despite flaws, Chomsky’s language theories became the foundation for future leaders who emphasized a learner-centered, collaborative learning environment with a holistic approach, shifting the tide away from a teacher-centered approach.

Naturally, the affective domain (e.g. intrinsic motivation, anxiety, and empowerment) became the focus from the 1970s. Experts focused more on discovering the nature of the complex learning processes than on acknowledging systematic inequalities exposed by activists and philosophers with or without the CRT concept (Knowles et al., 2015). Shifting the emphasis from linguistic competence and performance to communicative competence with multiple intelligence dominated the twenty-first century. This emphasis on EI began spreading from education systems to the private sector as globalization intensified (Goleman, 2011; Hooks, 2003). The act of facilitating interaction as “communicative competence” in Interactionist Theory (Gardner, 1995) contrasted with Chomsky’s linguistic competence. Interactionists emphasize Krashen’s Innatist Monitor Model, incorporating the five elements that impact language learning: social context, learner characteristics, learning conditions, learning process, and learning outcomes to create an authentic, natural environment (Nishitani & Matsuda, 2011;

Conteh-Morgan, 2002; Hooks, 2003; Ponniah, 2010). This indicates the importance of learners' ownership of the learning process by giving them opportunities to succeed in solving complex problems. However, student-centered teaching trends met with anti-immigrant policies as globalization and technologies advanced. Regulations and education policies had already solidified English literacy as the standard for K-to-college, failing to expose implicit biases.

Between the 1980s and 2000, as a countermovement against nativism, TESOL programs promoted diverse learning/teaching styles, multiculturalism, multi-literacy approach, the understanding of the language acquisition process, of the psychological stages of the second language learning, and of the importance of a non-threatening learning environment (Anderson, 1967; Alatis, 1983; Kotzé et al., 2017; Banks, 1996). Yet, TESOL and its counterpart, ESL, contained the concept of *otherness*, failing to expose English superiority in language methods and theories (Macedo, 2000 & 2019; Phillips & Abbot, 2011). Important multicultural teaching methods<sup>9</sup> were influenced by Chomsky and Krashen's theories, which advocated an authentic, immersive environment that naturally activates both subconscious acquisition and conscious learning built on a learner's pre-knowledge (Conteh-Morgan, 2002; Knowles et al., 2015; Chandler et al., 2017). Despite a student-centered approach, educators failed to re-examine implicit biases from colonialism embedded in those theories and methods (Smith, 2012; Freire, 1974; Macedo, 2000). White-English literacy influenced how their students viewed English and English speakers (Gayton, 2016). Each language method or theory has strengths and challenges; however, ethics matter for language education because language shapes cultural values, academic and professional success, and identities; thus, the lack of "critical consciousness"

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<sup>9</sup> 1) Grammar-Translation method; 2) Audio-Lingual method; 3) Direct method; 4) Total Physical Response, originally developed by James Asher, a psychologist in 1965 (Oflaz, 2019) and 5) Natural method (Wong et al., 2016)

(Freire, 1974) continued to impact durable biases worldwide (Landa et al., 2017; Giedt et al., 2015).

### **White English-Based Literacy and Neoliberalism in Asia Impacting Education**

What/Who is Asia? What are needs and identities in Asian countries or communities?  
Which languages should they choose for bilingual or multilingual education in their systems?

The shift to neoliberal<sup>10</sup> language education through key events like the 1997 Immigration Reform and the 2008 recession reduced language to a commodity. During this time, language ideologies were used to make English a lucrative, global language (Macedo, 2000; Ota, 2018; Smith, 2012). For example, American social media (Facebook, Google) and technological companies (Apple, Amazon, Microsoft) became ubiquitous, asserting English as a success index in non-English speaking countries (Butler & Iino, 2005; Guedin, 2013). Neoliberalists and multiculturalists shaped diversity trends, contributing to advancing the U.S. economic conquest and English-based bilingualism. Multiculturalism without concepts from CRT became an easy fix for equity and inclusion at schools with cultural festivals (Macedo, 2000 & 2019).

Modernization and capitalism exported from the U.S. also have had a great impact on industrial nations such as South Korea and China; there is a growing systematic effort to send students to elite American universities for social and capitalistic gain (The Economist, 2014 & 2015). Despite the respect for the humanities in top OECD nations (OECD PISA, 2015 & 2018), capitalistic tendency to view education to gain more assets, power, or influence instead of character development, social responsibility, and empathy prevails. Viewing the English language as a global standard for academic, professional, and personal success has prevented Asian countries from developing curricula focused on Asian multilingualism and Asian studies

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<sup>10</sup> Neoliberalism in education is a political and capitalistic way to consolidate influence and certain abilities (Hastings, 2019).

(Butler & Iino, 2005). Because of the U.S. militaristic and political involvement in North/South Korea, China, Vietnam, Philippines, and Japan, Asian countries have difficulty healing, reconnecting, and collaborating toward peaceful coexistence with a shared vision. Instead, the U.S. exacerbates historical wounds among Asian countries, forcing Japan to take the American side in terms of militaristic cooperation, land disputes, nuclear energy, and Japanese Constitutional amendments for more militaristic power that many Japanese people oppose and other Asian nations fear (Japan's Okinawa, 2019). For example, seventy percent of Okinawans voted against the construction of the U.S. military base, indicating this intensified reality (Japan's Okinawa, 2019).

Americanization outside the U.S. and ubiquitous white-U.S.-English supremacy are the most challenging issues for language educators that involve all forms of communication, cultural literacy, and the humanities. The U.S. continues to monopolize higher education with standardized exams for college applications (Butler & Iino, 2005). Because U.S. test publishers continue to sell standardized tests such as TOEFL (for international students) and GRE (for graduate students), the content of these tests direct the content of the K to 12 materials for non-English speaking countries for the preparation of highly competitive college entrance exams (Butler & Iino, 2005). The U.S. owns most of the top research universities in the world (Samalavičius, 2018); therefore, those who aspire to higher education cannot escape mastering or achieving the high-level of English proficiency, whether students reside in English-speaking countries or not. This continues to interfere with what Asia should be doing to improve critical history education for peace, cultural identity formation, and authentic language education (Amino, 2012). The world was trained to prioritize neoliberalism and English-only white

supremacy in policymaking, curricula, and materials to help educate *unfortunate* (inferior) people in Americanized democracy (Hsu, 2017; Leshkovska & Spaseva, 2016; Hasting, 2019).

White-English supremacy is more problematic if students come from colonized countries where colonists oppressed and destroyed local languages and cultures. English as a symbol of elite status beautified American supremacy or democracy among colonized and occupied nations (Pimentel, 2011; Baker, 2006). For example, English language education was emphasized in post-WWII Occupied Japan (1945-1952). Scholars (Butler & Iino, 2005; Huh, 2006; Kimura, 1995) indicated that English was first implemented in the nineteenth century as part of modernizing efforts sparked by the threat of American imperialist encroachment in Asia. The discouragement of English during WWII was reversed by the postwar U.S. military government; the first nine years of schooling became compulsory with the re-introduction of English as a communication tool in 1947 (Butler & Iino, 2005). During globalization in the 1990s, reading English became a sign of elite education in Asia. It is equally problematic for colonial countries to perpetuate the idea of their linguistic and cultural supremacy, even if the language is not English. Pew Research Center (Kochhar & Cillufo, 2018) indicated that among immigrants, due to targeted immigration policies (demands for low-skilled vs. high-skilled Asians for cheaper labor), Asians had the highest inequality gap in 2018, which was higher than that of the white population. This trend represents high inequality gaps among Asian nations, affecting their approaches to foreign language education to gain access to higher education programs abroad. Besides English, Japanese has been used for specific career paths demanded by multinational companies or preferred by parents as elite education in Asian nations that were colonized or exploited by European countries, the U.S., and Japan (Okumura & Obara, 2017; Ota, 2018; Nakajima, 2001). These intricately manipulated economic, political, and academic policies

continue to create an illusion of *professional* or modern individuals, solidifying implicit biases and impacting education in Asia.

During globalization, Japan economically surpassed the U.S. and succeeded in influencing as a cultural and academic force in various fields (Fingleton, 1995). Japanese technological companies began investing in entertainment industries (e.g. film, video games, karaoke, fashion, variety shows) (Fabrikant, 1989; Fingleton, 1995; Takahashi, 2000; Uchiyama, 2009). Business leaders researched cooperative, Japanese-style management and EI (Deutschman, 2005; Cohen & Kotter, 2002; Goleman, 1989; Fingleton, 1995). In 2001, MEXT (The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, & Technology) was integrated, impacting education systems in Japan and foreign language education overseas (Butler & Iino, 2005; MEXT, 2020; Sato, 2001). The land of *cool*, *cute*, and *harmony* was well established, while criticisms of the Japanese government's handling of the 2011 Great East Earthquake was suppressed by becoming the host nation of the 2020 Olympics (Library of Congress, 2020; MEXT, 2020). The U.S.'s success in establishing white-English literacy as a global standard intricately interacted with Japan's cultural campaign, stealthily promoting Japan as the uniquely mysterious land without having people suspect their implicit colonial biases toward Japan and Japanese culture (Dower, 1999; Nagata, 2007).

To dismantle coloniality in language education, long-term interdisciplinary learning processes with a community-based approach is proven effective (Dubinsky et al., 2007; Tulloch et al., 2017; Wanger et al., 2012). Fortunately, new technology can also prove the importance of interdisciplinary learning and authentic human interactions that create empathy. However, political, economic, social, and academic tensions interfered with new discoveries' reaching whoever needed the most.

### **Knowledge Gap Between Neuroscientific Discoveries and Biases**

Out of eugenics, nature-nurture controversies on learning intensified during the 1960s and '70s when elites developed major theories (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015; Alatis, 1987; Anderson, 1967). Chomsky (1965) popularized a theory that a person could innately integrate “a network of overlaid neural functions (auditory, visual, tactile, and sensory motor)” with the four components of language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) to comprehend and produce by using “transformational rules” (St. Clair, 2017, p.1). Fortunately, cognitive neuroscience established in the 1980s with brain imaging technologies scientifically explained the several important factors of learning processes that could expose theoretical inaccuracies of the 1960s. Counter to behaviorists’ views of learning as compartmentalized (Wong et al., 2016), strong neuroscientific and biological evidence suggests that learning is a synthesis of diverse processes influenced by emotion, pre-knowledge, and human interactions (Bransford et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016; Bhat, 2015; Snowden, 1997; Stilwell et al., 2016; Martins & Boeckx, 2019).

Live brain imaging technology can prove how learning foreign languages, sign language, or musical instruments strengthen connectivity and the executive areas used in complex problem-solving (Wong et al., 2016; Sadato et al., 2004; Johansson, 2006). Communicative competence requires EI (self-awareness, self-control, relational management, and social awareness), which develops through human interactions (Goleman, 2011; Wong et al., 2016). Natural learning occurs in an environment with human, diverse, and collaborative elements, so that learners can use the five senses to explore, analyze, and synthesize information (Burgstahler & Coy, 2008; CAST, 2016; Sawaguchi, 2009; Scott et al., 2003; Zull, 2002). These pieces of evidence agree with concepts of UD<sup>11</sup>/UDI (Burgstahler, 2015; The Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2011), Social

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<sup>11</sup> Universal Design (UD) is defined as “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (CAST, 2016).

Emotional Learning (SEL) (Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007), and Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Despite these new data, the inaccuracy of a critical period for second language acquisition and the misconception of bilingual brains as inferior had little chance for correction for four reasons (St. Clair, 2017). First, nativism has intensified since the 1997 Immigration Reform against globalization. Immigrants (English language learners) were often blamed for unemployment during globalization. Second, in 1998, Watson's Human Genome Project, which attempted to map genetic code to predict future traits and diseases, sparked nature vs. nurture debates that shifted public discourse toward eugenics. The idea of patenting DNA sequences for medical treatments exacerbated this controversy (US Congress, 1998). Third, despite the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) (1990) and multimodal/multiliteracy based learning concepts from UD/UDI, educators failed to view disabilities as different learning and communication styles. Thus, an ecological approach of UDI impacted language education slower than we had hoped (OCR, 2011; Jensen, 2007; Kotzé et al., 2017). Finally, a binary view of two opposing ideas (nature vs. nurture, native English speakers vs. non-native speakers, etc.) prevented people from embracing complex ideas including language acquisition, learning processes, and the plasticity of the brain. For example, with an interdisciplinary approach, researchers have been discussing the critical period for the first language acquisition (as the base for sequenced language acquisition) and for emotional intelligence and the plasticity of the brain because of intricate relationships among these factors. However, leaders and educators often assumed that the plasticity of the brain would have no expiration date or no factors that could limit it such as traumatic events during childhood, chemical exposure in environments, poor

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nutrition due to poverty, lack of human interactions, and social isolation (Sawaguchi, 2009; Chattarji et al., 2015). In a privileged, wealthy country, we had to wait until a pandemic of 2020 undeniably exposed that the complex compound impact of systematic inequalities had always existed globally impacting the basic cognitive, emotional, social, and human development while the marginalized populations had already lived the impact (United Nations [UN], 2020).

In terms of bilingualism, without a firm foundation in one's first language (L1), subsequent language (L2) acquisition will suffer (Kotzé et al., 2017; Sawaguchi, 2009; Cohen-Morgan, 2002). More comprehensive, long-term studies found that compared to students with restrictive use of L1, bilingual learners who spoke their L1 without limitations were better able to transfer language skills to English (Tulloch et al., 2017; Zhu & Jian., 2012). Second, bilingual brains had more advantages in high-level executive functioning in the area, which coordinates “thoughts and actions for goal-oriented directions” (p. 4) by flexibly switching between tasks during multi-tasking and updating information (Wong et al., 2016). Thus, the idea that bilingual people are inferior is inaccurate; they simply process information differently from monolinguals. Third, there is more strong evidence that bilingual education, interdisciplinary teaching, and conscious, formal education during adulthood increases the connectivity of one's “cognitive reserve” (CR) (Bhat, 2015, p.4; Guzmán-Vélez & Tranel, 2015; Bransford et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016; Snowden, 1997; Stilwell et al., 2016; Johansson, 2006). The higher the density of grey matter, the higher the L2 proficiency level was, or the earlier bilinguals learned their first language, indicating that bilingualism and lifetime formal education can strengthen the CR (Bransford et al., 2010; Bhat, 2015; Stilwell et al., 2016; Johansson, 2006). The CR delays or shields from the onset of Alzheimer's disease and dementia (Wong et al., 2016; Bhat, 2015; Snowden, 1997; Stilwell et al., 2016). These findings may imply that a compartmentalized,

mechanical environment can fragment learning processes and increase factors for illnesses (Wong et al., 2016; Bhat, 2015).

In summary, the literature review indicated that the slow pace of decolonizing imperial practices in education is strongly tied with the knowledge gap between inaccuracies and misconceptions of established theories and new neuroscientific discoveries on learning, language acquisition, and EI. The constant resurgence of nativism or neoliberalism in response to political, social, and economic climates continue to impact academic policies and curricula. Despite different disciplines, as I have mentioned earlier, there was shared evidence/concepts that they had reached as follows: learning is a synthesis of diverse processes influenced by emotion, pre-knowledge, and human interactions (Bransford et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016; Bhat, 2015; Snowden, 1997; Stilwell et al., 2016). This evidence shares the importance of an ecological, multigenerational, community-based learning environment that encourages non-judgment, flexibility, identity and empowerment processes that CRT, EI, SEL, UD/UDI advocate. However, more importantly, these *theories* and ideas have been present in many languages and cultures, yet they have been omitted or deemphasized. Therefore, equitable language education requires a conscious effort to stay aware of historical, academic, and psychological biases and to transform with a holistic consciousness.

### **Purpose**

This qualitative study attempts to understand the complex elements of implicit biases towards the target culture/language for adult language learners, and to explore key factors that can foster long-term cultural literacy by understanding the learners' perceptions of the target language/culture (Japanese) among students whose exposure to the target language/culture differ.

This study also attempts to capture the complexity of the process of stereotyping or biases (positive, neutral, and negative) from students' perspectives at a large institution of higher education whose communities and students are diverse. It aims to capture students' reasons and motivational factors to take Japanese courses, where/who/what impacted their perceptions, and when/why their perceptions shifted from one position to another. I attempt to compare the perceptual similarities and differences between the two populations (first-year Japanese learners and second-year Japanese learners/study abroad Japanese program participants).

### **Cultural Literacy Study:**

#### **Mechanisms of Cultural Biases in International Japanese Language Education**

##### **Research Questions:**

This exploratory, qualitative study will address the following research questions:

1. What aspects of the target language and culture do Japanese language learners emphasize while de-emphasizing or omitting others? How historical and other factors from colonialism (in Japan and the U.S.) have impacted their perceptions of emphasis or deemphasis?
2. What/who influenced their decisions to pursue Japanese courses or to form images toward the target culture/language (Japanese)?
3. What factors in teaching/learning can foster lifelong critical cultural literacy?

Participants are enrolled in the beginning courses of the three-term sequenced, first and second-year Japanese courses at a large college in the metropolitan area from the fall of 2020 to winter of 2021. I define biases as diverse perceptions of power or ability asymmetry impacted by a hierarchical thinking/system (Smith, 2012). The process of biases is defined as over-generalized negative and positive images towards a specific group or culture. This cultural

literacy study serves as a starting point to understand factors that impact implicit biases and to foster critical cultural literacy in foreign languages and international education. The findings will explore possible next steps for change and future research. Concepts from CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), EI (Goleman, 2011), and Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was used for the analysis of the study to understand the complexity of biases and recommend effective approaches in learning/teaching and assessment.

### **Methods/Research Design**

Little research has focused on the students' bias mechanisms of emphasizing, de-emphasizing, and on promoting cultural literacy in International Language Education. This led to my exploratory, qualitative study at a college whose mission has already embraced the concept of CRT, EI, and UD/UDI. The qualitative method is suitable for this study because it serves to capture human interactions and complex elements such as biases, EI, and cultural literacy with in-depth surveys in natural or immersive settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Iruka et al, 2019; Kotzé et al., 2017). This qualitative research will “give voice to diverse perspectives, to better advocate for the participants, to better understand a phenomenon or process that is changing as a result of being studied” (Creswell, p.2003, p.213). I will take a constructivist<sup>12</sup> approach that emphasizes meanings being created by human interactions through an open-ended process of questioning and a transformative advocacy approach for developing an effective assessment (Creswell, 2018; Muhammad et al., 2015).

### **Participant Recruitment Site**

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<sup>12</sup> A social constructivist view is to understand the complexity of diverse views through multiple human interactions in natural settings and to also explore meanings of personal impact through historical and cultural lens (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The participating institution of higher education is located in the northwestern region of the U.S. During the 2018-2019 academic year,<sup>13</sup> this institution served over 67,000 students (head count) including 25,000 fulltime equivalent (FTE) students. The demographics of the students were as follows:

- Transfer (63%), Career Tech (24%), Pre-college (10.5%), and Community Education (3.3 %); White (54.7%), Hispanic/Latino (12.2%), Asian (8%), Multiracial (6.2%), Black/African American (4.7%), International (2.4%), Native American/Alaskan (0.7%), and Pacific Islander (0.56%)
- Fifty-five percent of the credit students identified as female
- The average age was 28.

Characteristics of the college are as follows:

- their mission to expose implicit biases and to promote equity and inclusion at the institutional level throughout different disciplines (HECC, 2017)
- their state in the process of implementing the CRT concepts from K to college systems (Equity lens, 2017; HECC, 2017)
- faculty-led education abroad programs for different disciplines
- large enrollments in foreign language programs, especially Spanish and Japanese
- partnerships with local and global industries
- service-learning, and community-based learning
- diversity in their communities
- partnerships with high schools through dual-enrollment programs

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<sup>13</sup> The specific data in the “Participant Recruitment Site” was retrieved from the college’s Webpages and published Climate Surveys (2015 & 2018).

This state has a colonial history that includes the Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese American Internment, hate groups, racially discriminatory laws to exclude people of color, and oppression against indigenous people (Young, 2019; PBS, 2018; Au et al., 2016). Since 2014, this state has been implementing the concept of CRT throughout the K-to -college systems in teaching/learning and assessment (HECC, 2016). Due to wartime experiences, efforts to promote peace education, and friendships between Japan and the U.S. created successful sister city programs and well recognized Japanese immersion programs from the K-to-12 levels (Li et al., 2016).

### **Description of Sample**

At this college, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which officially began in March of 2020 (CDC, 2020), approximately 200 to 350 students took Japanese courses per term (Compare with the actual sample size in Table 1). Students who enrolled in sequenced Japanese courses were taught in an immersion-style by multiple instructors at two locations. The demographics of those students have been diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, languages, age, major, disabilities, veteran or employment status, and reasons for taking courses<sup>14</sup>. Since 2015, this college has begun implementing concepts of CRT (Ex. white supremacy, color blindness) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Macedo, 2000) and began the Education Abroad Program in 2018.

I recruited students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study from multiple instructors including the researcher. Although all students with similar demographics are taught in an immersive style, the degrees of intensity in collaborative, reflective, immersive settings are different between instructors. Survey/interview questions for the second-year Japanese learners contain questions on their long-term learning experiences through the personal and academic

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<sup>14</sup> Internal departmental data (2019).

environment, while survey questions for the first-year learners attempt to capture how their images of Japanese culture/language were formed prior to learning Japanese at this institution. Participants for the interviews were recruited from Japanese education abroad program participants, and first and second-year Japanese learners who completed the online surveys.

***First-year Japanese language learners:***

Students who take the first class of the three-term sequenced, first-year Japanese courses in fall are at the beginner's level with less exposure to learning Japanese. Their range of exposure to the target language/culture varies from little to some. Some students took Japanese courses at the secondary level; therefore, they would take courses to refresh their memories. Usually, eight sections of the first class of three-term sequenced, first-year Japanese courses are offered at two locations taught by several instructors. Two hundred twenty students could enroll in these courses. This population is larger than students enrolled in second-year Japanese courses. Students who enroll in sequenced Japanese courses are taught in an immersion-style by multiple instructors at two campuses. For this population, the online survey was sent between the end of August and the middle of September prior to the fall term in 2020 before students were exposed to the teaching styles of their instructors. To capture the earliest perceptions of Japan/Japanese culture, I excluded learners from the second course of the first-year Japanese courses. No third-class of the three-term, sequenced first-year Japanese courses were offered during the fall term.

***Second-year Japanese language learners:***

Prior to the pandemic, over 100 students take the first-class of the three-term sequenced, second-year Japanese courses offered at two campuses only during the fall term. The second-year learners have more exposure to the target language/culture. For this population, the online

survey was sent between the end of August and the middle of September prior to the fall term of 2020 to compare changes in cultural/bias awareness.

*Unenrolled Japanese learners who are eligible for the second-year Japanese course*

Several sections of the third-class of the three-term sequenced, first-year Japanese courses were offered during the spring and summer terms of 2020 and winter term of 2021. Students who had completed all three courses of the first-year Japanese courses by the winter of 2021, but who were not enrolled in the first course of the three-term sequenced, second-year Japanese courses in fall of 2020 were also included in addition to the first course of the second-year Japanese courses. The learners who completed these courses have similar exposure to Japanese learning/culture to that of the second-year Japanese learners.

*Past participants of the Japanese education abroad programs in 2018 or 2019*

Participants of the two education (study) abroad Japanese programs (2018 & 2019) are highly motivated and diverse with more direct exposure to Japanese culture/language through host families, conversation partners, and other local experiences. The total population was 37 students. Although they are more likely to volunteer to participate in the study, due to moves, transfers, or the pandemic, I anticipated the number of participants would be very small.

**Sample Size**

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the learning environment socially, economically, and academically since March 2020 (CDC, 2020; UN, 2020). All available courses offered at the participating institution of higher education in the northwestern region became completely remote teaching and learning from March 2020. This unprecedented, continuous uncertainty from the pandemic could impact the number of enrollments for the 2020-2021 academic year. I also estimated the low response rate due to compounded challenges, stress, illness, lack of time, and taking multiple courses via remote learning. My realistic response rate for the online surveys

during the pandemic is between 20 to 25 percent, totaling 20 to 30 first-year Japanese learners, 10 to 15 second-year Japanese learners, and 3 to 5 participants from the Education Abroad Japanese programs. Actual numbers became close to my estimate (Compare with the actual size in Table 1).

### **Data Collection**

I sent the recruiting email to the instructors who taught courses from which I would recruit participants. The semi-structured online surveys were disseminated via Qualtrics to the students who volunteered to participate. Prior to beginning the collection of data, I briefly explained in writing the purpose of this study to students, who could decide whether they wanted to voluntarily consent to participate in the research study. The online surveys were disseminated via Qualtrics to all students who were enrolled in the first courses of the three-term sequenced, first-year Japanese courses in the fall of 2020, and all students enrolled in the first courses of the three-term sequenced, second-year Japanese courses in the fall of 2020. The online surveys were also sent to participants who had completed the first-year Japanese courses between the spring of 2020 and the winter of 2021, but who did not take the second-year courses in the fall.

#### ***Online Surveys with Qualtrics***

Three similarly constructed online surveys are composed of 21 to 23 questions that are based on Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and concepts from CRT (white supremacy, color blindness, intersectionality) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and EI/SEL (Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007) to capture long-term impact of biases in academic, social, community-based, and personal contexts. Survey questions include academic, linguistic, professional, and personal backgrounds, interests, interest in study abroad programs, past influential events/people for their interest in Japan/Japanese, reasons for taking Japanese courses,

and other related matters. Sensitive information such as gender, ethnicity, and disabilities were not asked. Participants were asked if they spoke more than one language but were not asked which languages. The age range was asked (See Appendix A & B).

The recruiting email/survey link was disseminated to the following three populations by several members of the participating institution of higher education between the summer of 2020 and the winter of 2021 (first-year Japanese learners, second-year Japanese learners, eligible second-year learners, and participants of the two Japanese study abroad programs). Prior to collecting data, at the beginning of the surveys, the purpose of the study was explained to students, who could decide whether they wanted to voluntarily consent to participate in the study via email. There was a Google form link at the end of the survey to see if the survey participant was willing to volunteer for a virtual interview.

#### *Semi-structured Virtual Interviews/Online surveys*

Interview participants were recruited from two Japanese study abroad programs and the first- and second-year learners who had completed surveys and had indicated their interests for interviews. Although the interview questions were like those of the survey questions, more in-depth guiding questions were asked. The interviews were recorded and transcribed without video features. I was unable to reach potential volunteers between the summer of 2020 and the fall of 2020 from Japanese study abroad participants due to disruptions caused by the pandemic. The interviews for the first and second-year learners were conducted between the fall of 2020 and the winter of 2021.

#### *Coding for Emerging Themes and In-Depth Analysis*

The information of those who gave consent to participate in the survey was collected by Qualtrics. Simple yes-no questions (e.g. do your Japanese friends?), multiple-choice questions

(e.g. sources of images), and age range were analyzed by Qualtrics. Grouping similar meanings or concepts helps the research to discover relationships among different components and to understand the big picture (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, quoted in Belotto, 2018). Therefore, to interpret the data, for in-depth questions and first seven impressions of Japan/Japanese culture, I created a several-tier coding system with Microsoft tools for emerging themes based on theoretical frameworks of CRT, EI, and Ecological Systems Theory. Images were categorized into food, nature, anime, characteristics, feudalistic, futuristic, Japanese language, and WWII/imperialism (See Table 3). Qualtrics was less flexible to analyze texts, mixed languages (some images were Japanese words), and complex concepts, particularly involving culture.

The coding system was created and utilized to capture the impact of the Cool-Japan campaign. The key marketed images and words of the Cool-Japan campaign (Dover, 1999) were as follows: coexistence of old (feudalistic) and new (futuristic) images, characteristics (e.g. mysterious, cute, hospitable, artistic), harmonious environment with nature (e.g. Japanese gardens, aged forests), and the Japanese cuisine (e.g. intricate traditional dishes, popular food for young people), and anime or video game characters. Images related to the Japanese language were expected because the participants were enrolled in Japanese courses. To capture colonial biases, images, and words associated with WWII, the Japanese flag/red, Okinawa, and gender role were grouped into WWII/Imperialism. First, I used my coding system to analyze the perceived images by the first-year Japanese learners. Second, I used it to analyze the images perceived by the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant. Then, these two analyses were combined for comparison. Finally, in-depth interviews/survey comments were analyzed with three theoretical frameworks and combined with the previous findings, which led to the overall emerging characteristics in Table 4. CRT was an effective tool to discover the

perception gap and biases, while EI and Ecological Systems Theory were essential frameworks to capture long-term, complex learning processes, bias development, and colonial impact.

### **Validity for the Accurate Findings/Processes**

In-depth descriptions to communicate findings are possible by surveying the population with different degrees of exposure to Japanese learning and by creating survey questions that capture key elements in the five systems of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. I received feedback from non-researchers, and non-participants to see if survey questions capture key elements in the five systems of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, concepts from CRT, and EI in terms of influences from homes, communities, workplaces, and resources on the target culture (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Jensen, 2007; Kotzé et al., 2017; Iruka et al., 2019; Appendix A & B). I also debriefed with non-participants to clarify my biases and to understand findings from different perspectives (Winch, 2015). Negative information that runs against the themes was included (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Ethical Considerations**

I followed the requirements and guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ethically conduct the study (Bell et al., 2020). Potential participants were provided the consent form at the beginning of the online surveys, which conveyed the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the anonymity of data, their right to voluntarily consent to participate in the research study and their right to withdraw at any time without coercion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). They also had the right to obtain copies of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Prior to the dissemination of the surveys, I asked my interdisciplinary team to answer the survey questions if they were easy to understand and clear. I debriefed with an interdisciplinary team to ensure the accuracy of findings and conducted the study with mutual respect and inclusive

language (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Smith, 2012). To reduce teaching impact from the researcher/instructor, participants were recruited from Japanese courses taught by multiple instructors.

### **Study Results and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Due to a new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which officially began in March of 2020 (CDC, 2021), all Japanese language courses were switched to remote operations (short synchronous zoom sessions and asynchronous teaching outside the class at students' speed). This reduced influence from different instructors in terms of teaching styles. Participants were recruited between the summer of 2020 and the winter of 2021. During these months, students, faculty, and institutions of higher education had experienced multifaceted challenges as follows: illness/deaths, job/housing insecurity, political/religious divisions, increase in white supremacy/hate crimes, nationwide exposure of systematic inequalities, violence against the marginalized populations, lack of access to healthcare/education/internet, caring for family members, burnouts, awareness of mental health, and global comparison of handling the pandemic (Houle & Addo, 2018; Granville, 2020; UN, 2020; Nakamura, 2021; Taylor, 2021; Borger, 2021; Lakshmanan & Beard, 2021; Artiga et al., 2020; Yale, 2020; John Hopkins, 2021).

Additionally, due to climate change, natural disasters such as wildfires, mega-storms, flooding, and severe winter storms have impacted the livelihoods of many people. Enrollments at institutions of higher education continued to drop due to compounded hardships. These challenges have impacted the participants and supporters who helped me recruit possible survey participants. Remote operations also made it difficult for participants to respond in a timely manner, which seemed to have more impacted the second-year Japanese learners than the first-year Japanese learners. Their response rate was much lower than that of the first-year Japanese

learners and what I had estimated. I was not able to successfully reach the participants of the two Japanese study abroad programs due to the compound impact of the pandemic including moves and not updated contact information. The total number of interviews was much lower than I had originally anticipated prior to the pandemic. Despite these compound difficulties, the estimated sample numbers came close to the actual sample size except for the number of interviews and participants of the Japanese study abroad programs. However, there were ten participants who had stayed/lived in Japan, who were able to give insight for the study. I will start with the survey results and later, I will discuss in-depth survey comments and interviews.

### **Online Cultural Survey Results**

Three similarly constructed online surveys are composed of 21 to 23 questions that are based on Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and concepts from CRT (white supremacy, color blindness, intersectionality) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and EI/SEL (Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007) to capture long-term impact of biases in academic, social, community-based, and personal contexts. These theoretical frameworks were utilized to analyze the data. Institutional and World Language division data have indicated students' diverse backgrounds. Students who enroll in Japanese courses tend to be more diverse than the overall demographics of the participating institution in terms of representations from students with disabilities, veterans, international students, LGTBQ and indigenous communities<sup>15</sup>. Regardless of race/ethnicities or majors, their strong interest in Japanese language/culture has been also known within the institution. Questions include the first seven images of Japan or Japanese culture, origins of those images, sources of experiences/knowledge of Japan or Japanese culture, number of languages spoken, age, reasons for taking Japanese courses, contexts where

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<sup>15</sup> Internal departmental data (2019).

participants made Japanese friends, their majors, their resources of knowledge of Japan/Japanese culture, and specific events that contributed to changes in their perceptions of Japan/Japanese culture from one position to another. It took participants 15 to 90 minutes to complete the surveys. Survey participants were asked to write seven images associated with Japan/Japanese culture in the order that came to their minds (See Appendix A & B).

### **Analysis**

Online survey participants for the first-year Japanese learners were recruited by four faculty members in the fall of 2020, reaching 141 students, or 68.4% of the total enrollments in the first course of the three-term sequenced, first-year Japanese courses at the participating institution of higher education (See Table 1). The survey was available from one week prior to the fall term to the end of the third week to eliminate influences from their instructors and course materials. About 92% of the respondents completed the survey prior to the fall term, resulting in hardly any academic/cultural influences from their instructors. The response rate was 26.2%.

Online survey participants for the second-year Japanese learners were recruited by four faculty members between the summer of 2020 and the winter of 2021, reaching 164 students (See Table 1). This was 86.4% of the total second-year learners, including those who had completed all first-year Japanese courses by the winter of 2021, but who did not enroll in the first course of the three-term, sequenced second-year Japanese courses in the fall of 2020. The first courses of the three-term sequenced second-year Japanese courses were offered only during the fall term. The second-year Japanese learners who participated in the survey had two specific time windows that helped their response rate: a week prior to a term and after their final exams. The response rate was 10.3%. About 88.2 % of the respondents completed the survey prior to each term (summer and fall of 2020 & winter of 2021) while 91.9% of the first-year learners

completed the survey prior to the fall term. Compounded challenges from the pandemic had impacted the second-year learners more while the first-year learners could complete the survey during a break prior to the fall term of 2020. It was more difficult to reach/recruit participants of the two study abroad Japanese programs during the pandemic.

The recruiting email/survey link was sent to the 2018 and 2019 Education Abroad Japanese program participants. Although the total number of the population was 37, most of their email addresses except two were of the participating institution where they no longer attended. Only two responded to the survey/interest in interviews; however, only one completed the online survey. Despite their interest in interviews, time/location constraints during the pandemic prevented us from setting up the interviews. Therefore, the total number of interviews among these populations was much lower than I had anticipated prior to the pandemic. However, I was able to conduct four interviews among first-and second-year Japanese learners who had completed the surveys. Ten of the total participants who had stayed or lived in Japan provided insightful data although no interviews from the two Japanese study abroad programs were conducted. Three of them stayed less than a month between the ages of 0 and 5. Three of them stayed less than a month during their teen years. Four of them stayed less than a month or over a year during their adulthood.

To secure anonymity, I included responses of the study abroad program participant in those of second-year Japanese learners. Participants of the Japanese study abroad programs had already completed all first-year Japanese courses prior to the programs or completed them by the end of the study abroad programs. Therefore, not much difference among these groups was found in terms of the age range, majors, and languages that were regularly spoken at home.

### **Sample Demographics**

**Table 1***Participant response rates & recruitment*

<b>JPN Learners</b>	<b>Total Enrollments</b>	<b>Recruited</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>Response(n)</b>	<b>Response %</b>
<b>First-Year</b>	206	141	68.4%	*37	26.2%
<b>Second-Year</b>	190	164	86.3%	17	10.3%
<b>JPN Ed. Abroad</b>	37	37	100.0%	1	2.7%

\* 2 incomplete responses were excluded from the total number of the participants: n =53

The demographics of the 53 participants who completed the surveys are as follows:

### *Age Range, Languages, and Overseas Experiences*

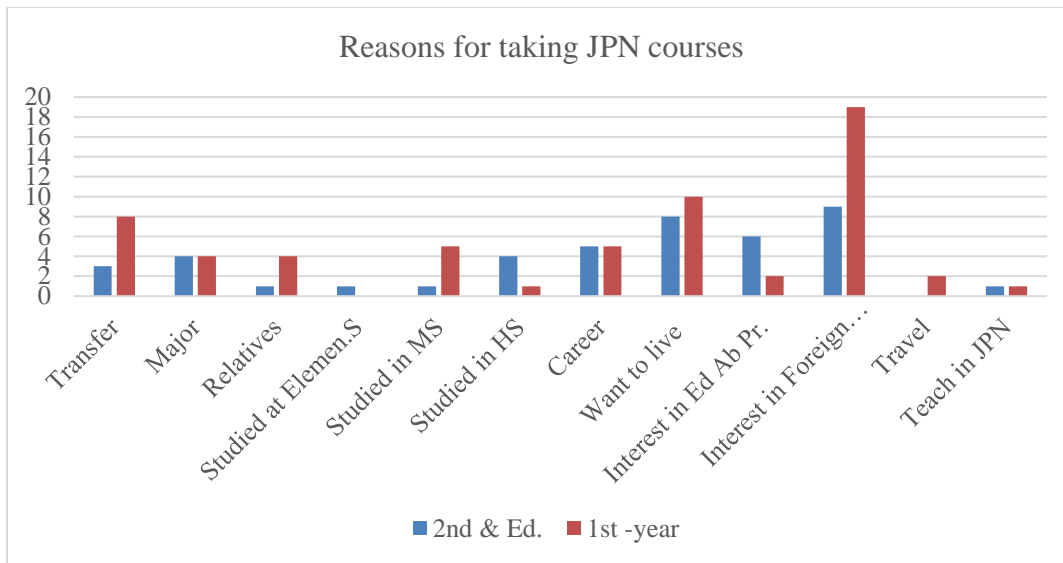
The following demographics correspond to the survey question 10, 13, and 16 for first and second-year Japanese learners, and to survey questions 10, 14, and 18 for participants of the Education Abroad Japanese programs (See Table 1; Appendix A & B).

- Age demographics of the first-year learners were 55.3% (18-20), 18.4% (21-29), 10.5% (30-39), 5.3% (40-49), and 10.5% (no answer).
- Age demographics of the second-year learners were 35.3% (18-20), 35.3% (21-29), 17.6% (30-39), and 11.8% (no answer)
- Age demographics of the total participants were 49.1% (18-20), 23.6% (21-29), 12.7% (30-39), 3.6% (40-49), and 10.6% (no answer).
- Among the total participants, 72.7% primarily spoke English and 3.6% were bilingual.
- Among the total participants, 18.2% (n=10) have stayed or lived in Japan. A couple of them have been there more than once at different times.

## **Reasons for Taking Japanese Courses**

### **Figure 2**

*Reasons for taking Japanese courses*



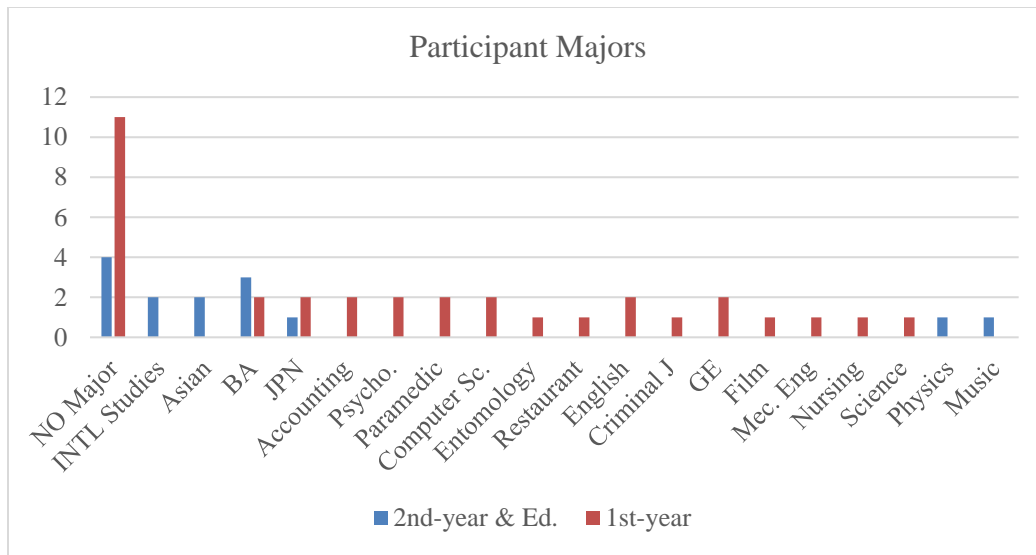
*Note:* Figure 2 corresponds to the survey question 14 for first-and second-year Japanese learners, and participants of the Education Abroad Japanese programs. Participants were able to choose multiple choices and add their own reasons (See Appendix A & B).

Respondents were able to choose more than one reason for taking Japanese courses and write other reasons. The first-year Japanese learners indicated “interest in foreign languages” most frequently, followed by “interest in living in Japan.” Their interest in travel, Japanese education abroad programs, and teaching in Japan also indicated their global outlook. Other common reasons included having taken Japanese classes at the secondary level, having relatives of Japanese descent, their major, and career (such as chef, entrepreneurs, or teachers). The second-year Japanese learners and the study abroad participants (including those who had participated in other Japanese study abroad programs at different levels/institutions) also chose to take courses because of their major or interest in foreign languages, living in Japan, education abroad programs, and career.

## Majors

### Figure 3

*Participant majors*



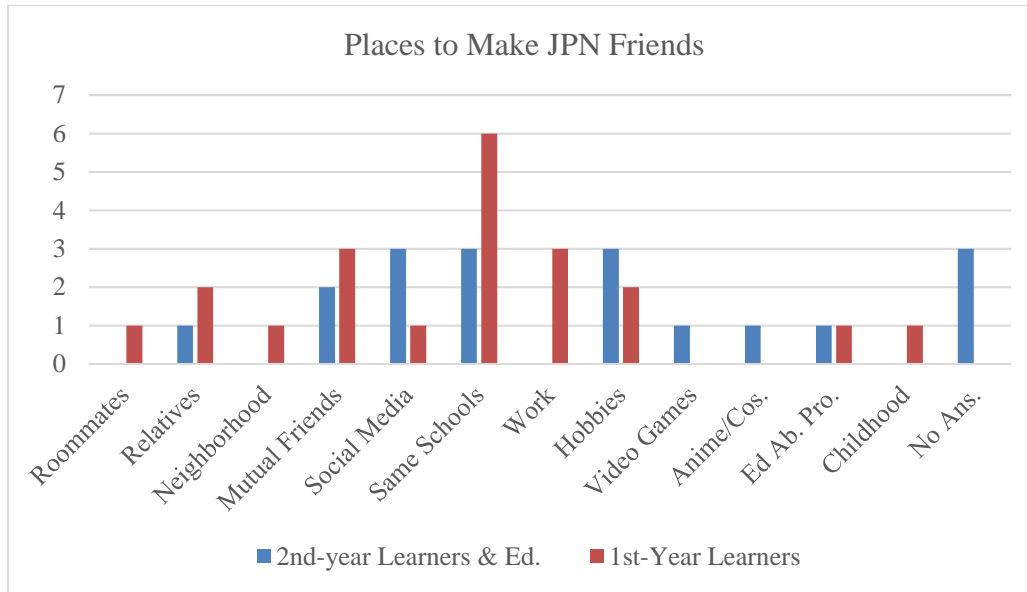
*Note:* Figure 3 corresponds to the survey question 14 for first-and second-year Japanese learners, and to question 15 for participants of the Education Abroad Japanese programs. Participants were able to write their majors (See Appendix A & B).

Majors of the total participants were wide ranged. A couple of them were double-majored. However, 11.4% of the first-year Japanese learners did not have a major while the second-year learners and the participant of the Education Abroad Japanese program indicated majors related to international/Asian studies.

### **Social Contexts for Making Japanese Friends**

#### **Figure 4**

*Places to make Japanese friends*



*Note:* Figure 4 corresponds to survey questions 17 and 18 for first- and second-year Japanese learners, and questions 19 and 20 for participants of the Education Abroad Japanese programs. Participants were able to choose multiple choices and write their own places (See Appendix A & B).

Respondents were able to choose more than one context and write other contexts for making Japanese friends. Over half of the second-year Japanese learners (53.3%) had “Japanese friends,” while 39.5% of the first-year Japanese learners did. The first-year Japanese learners made Japanese friends more through long-term, in-person interactions (e.g. same schools, mutual friends, work, childhood, relatives). The second-year Japanese learners made friends through hobbies (e.g. video games, anime conventions) and social media. However, they also made friends through their mutual friends or going to the same schools. They did not choose or chose less frequent neighborhoods, residences, or workplaces for making Japanese friends while a couple of first-year Japanese learners did. Despite these differences, the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant also indicated their long-term commitment to learning and appreciating the target language/culture through friendships with Japanese people. Because of meaningful human experiences or interactions, they have also come to understand the

complexity of culture and people. Moreover, the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant had lengthy comments on their regular research on Japan/Japanese culture with specific sources (e.g. Japonology, Life Where I'm From, Tofugu, NHK, National Geographic, the Japan Times, Japanese course materials/videos).

There were some differences between the two populations in terms of demographics. Both first and second-year Japanese learners had the highest percentage of age range between 18 and 20. However, the second-year learners had slightly more respondents with the age between 21 and 29 (36%) while 18% of the first-year Japanese learners were in that age range. In terms of major, the first-year learners had wide-ranged majors or no majors while second-year learners and the study abroad participants had majors related to international or Asian studies. Reasons for taking Japanese courses were similar indicating their strong interest in Japan, Japanese language, or culture.

The striking difference between the two populations lies in the extent of community and school influence in terms of places to make friends/interact. The first-year Japanese learners had been exposed to Japanese culture from childhood, schools, relatives, and workplaces. They mentioned more human interactions or interest in human interactions than second-year learners. The second-year Japanese learners made friends via hobbies may mean a different trend, although a further study is needed. It could also mean that the K to 12 Japanese language programs and more diverse communities had exposed younger participants to more complex, long-term cultural literacy development during their childhood and early teen years. In terms of responses, about 92 % of the respondents from the first-year Japanese courses completed the surveys before the fall term, indicating that they had the least exposure to their instructors or peers. About 88% of the respondents from second-year courses or the study abroad Japanese

program also completed surveys prior to a term. Compounded difficulties seemed to have impacted the second-year Japanese learners more than other participants, resulting in a lower response rate or delayed responses at the end of a term when they had more time.

Finally, 74% of all respondents primarily spoke English, although more than 18% of all respondents had clearly indicated their multicultural or bilingual upbringing. Because Japanese learners were already interested in Japan/Japanese culture, it did not make much difference in terms of commitment to learning the target language/culture (Japanese). Among many comments related to commitment to learning about Japanese culture, examples include as follows:

“I watch a lot of anime, so that is a major factor in my impressions of Japan. But I also watch videos on the culture and research how things work in Japan compared to America.”

“I think a lot of my perceptions of Japan come from middle school when we studied part of the history of Japan. It also comes from my WWII class I took in high school which delves into the more negative history of Japan.”

“The media I consumed as a child, Hayao Miyazaki and history books about the world. Also, I have friends that are Japanese who have been to Japan and tell me about it.”

### **Images on Japan/Japanese Culture**

All survey participants were asked to write seven images associated with Japan/Japanese culture in the order that came to their minds for survey question one (See Appendix A & B). Therefore, they ranked their images from one to seven. Total original images perceived by the first-year Japanese learners was 119. The total number of images ranking from one to seven was 241 among the first-year learners. Total original images perceived by the second-year Japanese learners and the study abroad program participant was 66. The total number of images ranking from one to seven was 120 among the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant. I did not include images that respondents wrote in their comments. However, I will discuss them later.

## Sources of Images

**Table 2.**

*Sources of ranked images*

	People	Media- US/JPN	Formal/Experiential Education	Food	Marketing
1st-year	24.7%	39.3%	7.9%	7.9%	4.5%
2nd-year & Ed.	22.2%	40.7%	18.5%	9.3%	5.6%

Participants were able to choose more than one source of Japanese images. Out of 89 responses of the first-year Japanese learners, 39.3% came from Japanese anime/TV shows/films, 24.7% from people (e.g. friends who visited Japan, Japanese neighbors, exchange students from Japan, roommate, Japanese teacher, or Japanese people that respondents had met in Japan/US, grandparents/relatives, and their stay in Japan), 10% from books/documentaries/cultural videos for research, 9% from Japanese/US media, and 7.9% from food. Examples of books included “Snow Country by Yasunari Kawabata” and “The Tale of the Heike.” Several respondents mentioned Hayao Miyazaki’s films for their liking of the complexity of humanity and relation with the natural world. Five people took Japanese or history classes at the secondary or college level prior to taking Japanese courses at the participating institution. Four respondents mentioned YouTube videos made by people who live in Japan. Four mentioned marketing tactics (e.g. commercials, packages, or pitches). Three respondents had occupational interests. Two respondents mentioned specific things from history classes they had taken, while a couple of them mentioned that they had not learned much about Japan in their history classes. Two mentioned artwork or furniture associated with their grandparents. Only one respondent mentioned video games or manga as a source of Japanese images. Surprisingly, these sources indicated that respondents had more direct resources from people they knew well, grew up

watching Japanese TV/anime or eating Japanese food with positive memories from childhood, and researched Japan via classes or other resources.

Interestingly, the key sources of images from the second-year learners and the study abroad program participants were related to their commitment to researching the target culture/language (Japanese). Other sources included formal and experiential education such as Japanese/history classes, Japanese Immersion programs, and study abroad programs at different academic institutions at the secondary level. Out of 53 responses of the second-year Japanese learners and the study abroad program participant, 40.7% of the sources for their images came from Google/Japanese TV shows/films or YouTube, 22.2% from people (e.g. exchange students from Japan, military colleagues stationed in Japan, or Japanese people that respondents met in Japan, family members, and their stay in Japan), 18.5% from Japanese courses or history classes they took at different levels, 12.9% from Japanese products (e.g. commercials, packages, or pitches), and 5.6% from food or restaurants. Three respondents mentioned the book as a source of Japanese images without specificity. No one mentioned video games as the source, although some indicated they had made Japanese friends via hobbies (e.g. video games, anime convention). Additionally, 53.3% of this population had Japanese friends compared to 39.5% for the first-year learners (See Table 2).

Both groups had similar sources for their images and a strong interest in Japan/Japanese language or culture; however, the second-year Japanese learners had chosen more in-depth or specific sources such as Japanese or related courses instead of vague images from anime. Regardless of language proficiency levels, images from video games or products were least mentioned while they sought more direct sources such as people and videos produced by people

who currently live in Japan. Two respondents mentioned that Google had decided top-ranked images of Japan for them, indicating their awareness of embedded implicit biases in the media.

In terms of their regular exposure to Japanese sources, about 30 % of the second-year participants and the study abroad program participant frequently watches anime, historical dramas (14%), school dramas (11%), horror (8.6%), variety shows (8.6%), science fiction (5.7%), and 20% of them listen to J-pop, J-rock, or Japanese orchestra. In contrast, 52% of the first-year learners regularly watch anime, while the rest of the categories remained between 2% and 7%, indicating the striking difference between the two populations.

### Key Thematic Findings of Perceived Japanese Images

**Table 3**

*Frequencies of image types between the two populations*

	<b>First-Year JPN Learners</b>	<b>Second-Year JPN Learners +Ed</b>
<b>Total # of images: ranking 1 to 7</b>	241	120
<i>Food</i>	14.5%	17.5%
<i>Nature</i>	12.9%	11.7%
<i>Anime</i>	12.0%	5.8%
<i>Characteristics</i>	11.6%	22.5%
<i>Feudalistic</i>	9.1%	5.8%
<i>Futuristic</i>	9.1%	5.8%
<i>Japanese Language</i>	5.4%	5.8%
<i>Imperialism/WWII</i>	5.0%	5.0%

*Note:* Table 3 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B). Some participants wrote multiple images for one rank. Some also omitted image 7 indicating that they had fewer images. However, almost all participants wrote at least seven imaging rankings from 1 to 7 in the order of their perceptions. ED means the Education Abroad Japanese programs.

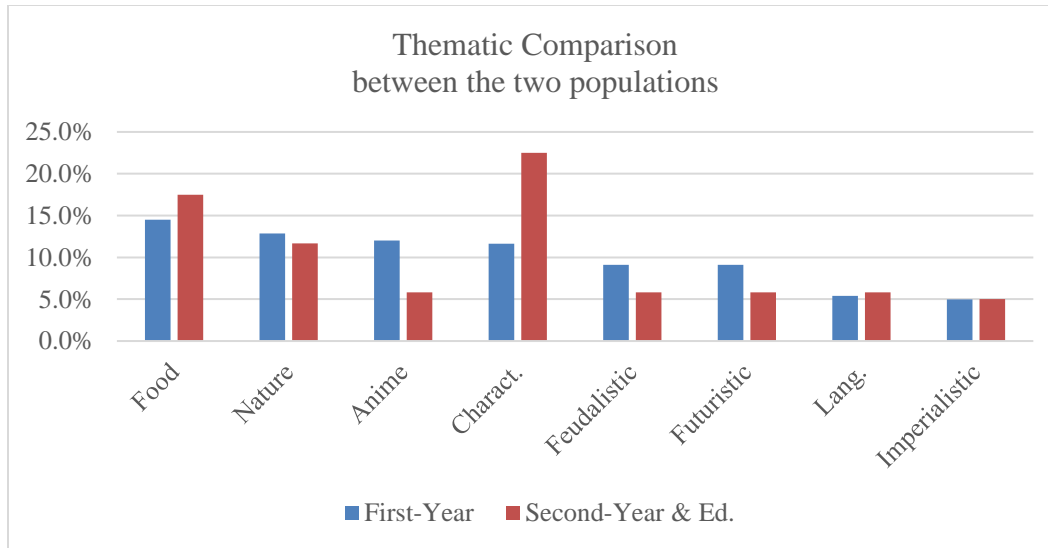
As I have mentioned earlier, between 1996 and 2010, quarterly or monthly magazines such as Nipponia sponsored by the Japanese government, used specific words in the titles and articles to project “*cool Japan where old and new co-exist in harmony unlike in other nations*”

(Dower, 1999). Examples included “kawaii (cute)”, “the land of technology” and “the land of hospitality” (Sakai, 2006; Ishihara et al., 2007; Torikai, 2006 & 2008). The U.S. also succeeded in propagating white-English literacy as a global standard, while Japan stealthily succeeded in keeping Japan as a uniquely mysterious island without having people suspect their implicit biases toward Japan and Japanese culture (Mineo, 2001; Matsuoka, 2001). The idea that Japan has been isolated without outside influence is not historically accurate; therefore, it is important to have a learning environment where learners can experience history from the perspectives of the omitted populations (Amino, 2012). In terms of a marketing pitch and deemphasizing the dark sides of Japanese history, the image of an isolated, hidden, mysterious place was effective. Japanese technology/media industries such as Sony and Nintendo have become ubiquitous in the last two decades when Japan and the U.S. economic, academic, political, immigration and social policies globally played a key role in market-specific images without a colonial history in language education (Freire, 1970; Butler & Iino, 2005; Smith, 2012; Macedo, 2000 & 2019). Compared to the respondents of the second-year Japanese courses and the study abroad Japanese program, thematic images of Japan and Japanese culture from the respondents of the first-year Japanese courses corresponded more to the Cool-Japan campaign that aimed at marketing the exceptionalism of “*cool Japan where old and new co-exist in harmony unlike in other nations*” (Dower, 1999). One respondent summarized as below:

“Anime is a popular hobby, “kawaii” culture in Japan, such as creating cute mascots for services, prefectures, etc. Is very positive and happy feeling. Buddhism is a very peaceful frame of mind to view the world through.”

### **Figure 5**

*Comparison on thematic types*



*Note:* Figure 5 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B).

All survey participants were asked to write seven images associated with Japan/Japanese culture in the order that came to their mind for survey question one (See Appendix A & B).

Therefore, they ranked their images from one to seven. Total original images perceived by first-year Japanese learners was 119. The total number of images ranking from one to seven was 241 among first-year learners. Total original images perceived by second-year Japanese learners was 66. The total number of images ranking from one to seven was 120 among second-year learners. I did not include images that respondents wrote in their comments.

In terms of frequency, images related to food/eating (14.5%) ranked the highest for the first-year learners, while characteristics (22.5%) ranked the highest for the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant. Images related to food (17.5%) were second-highest for the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant. Images related to nature ranked second-highest for first and third highest for the second-year Japanese learners and the study abroad program participant (See Figure 6). However, the explanations for those images on nature and food were different between the two groups, which I will discuss later. Images related to characteristics ranked the fourth with 11.5% for first-year Japanese learners, while it was the

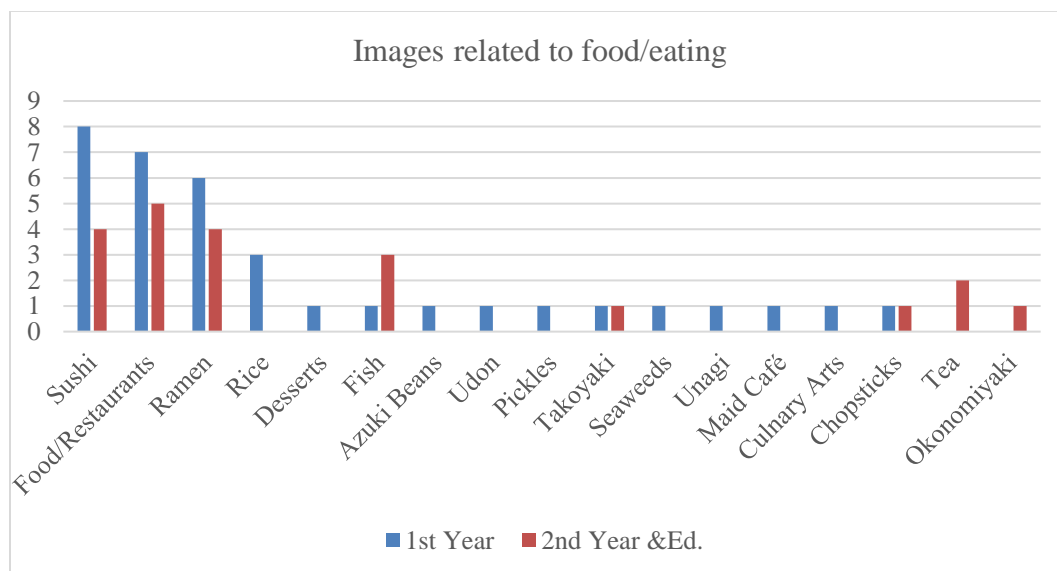
outstandingly highest (22.5%) for the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant. Although images related to anime/characters ranked the third-highest among the first-year Japanese learners (12%), it was only 5.8% among the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant without many characters (See Table 3 & Figure 8).

Interestingly, the frequency of futuristic images and images related to feudalism and religion were evenly split with 9.1% for the first-year learners, and 5.8% for the other group. However, the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant paid less attention to feudalistic/futuristic images, or anime. They paid more attention to human characteristics represented in all. The two groups had images and comments related to the Japanese language at similar frequencies (5.4 % and 5.8%). However, the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant had more in-depth comments, interests, and goals for learning the language. I will compare the results in detail.

## Food/Eating

**Figure 6**

*Images associated with food/eating*



*Note:* Figure 6 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B).

Out of 241 responses of the first-year learners, 35 images (14.5%) were associated with food (including specific food items), restaurants, and culinary art. Among 66 original images and 120 total responses perceived by second-year learners, images related to food/eating were 17.5%; therefore, this category ranked high for both groups (See Table 3). However, between the two populations, the first-year Japanese learners mentioned not only more specific food items/places but also mentioned in comment sections that those food images had positive and nostalgic associations with specific people, particularly grandmothers or family members. In terms of feelings associated with food, regardless of culture, popular variety or cooking shows also contributed to nostalgia from childhood.

“I grew up watching a lot of traveling shows, ones that mostly focused of food more often than not.”

Additionally, the first-year learners also paid more attention to artistic elements of packaging, places, and food presentations while the second-year learners mostly mentioned images of food/eating without specificity. Authenticity related to food was frequently mentioned among the first-year learners, which can be explained in the following statements:

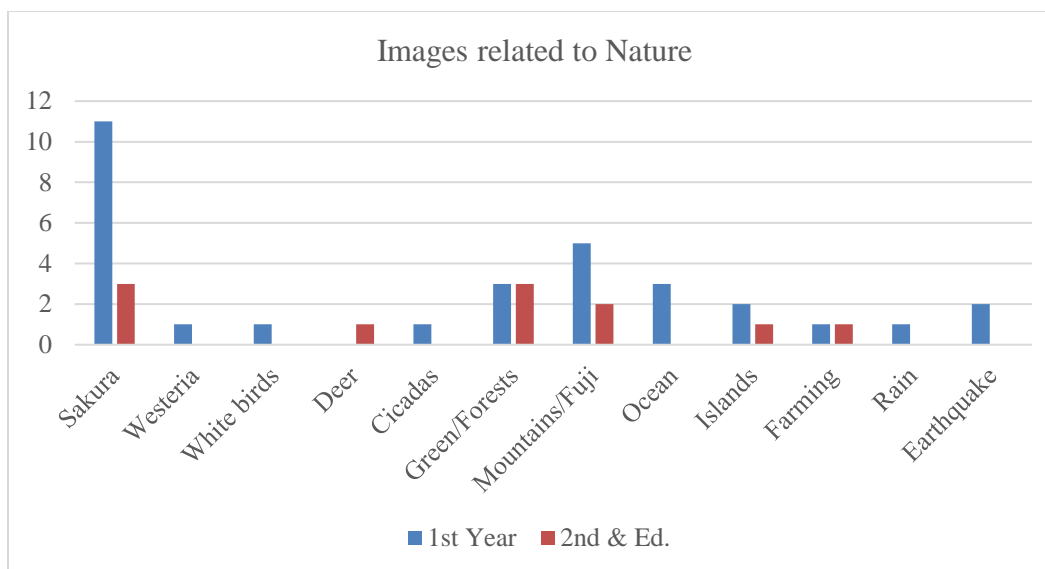
“Sushi, Ramen, and Udon. They're all foods I enjoy; although most of the time I've had these they weren't authentic and contained elements from other cultures.”

“[T]he rice and sushi parts were probably stereotyping.”

### **Images related to natural landscape and animals**

#### **Figure 7**

*Images related to nature*



*Note:* Figure 7 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B).

Among the first-year Japanese learners, 31 images (12.9%) were related to natural landscapes, trees, flowers, or animals, while among the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant, 11 images (14.1%) were related to nature. These thematic images ranked second-highest for the first-year learners, while it was third-highest (11.7%) for the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant (See Table 3). There were several differences between the two groups regarding the meanings behind these images. First, the first-year Japanese learners listed more specific animal/plant species (e.g. cicadas, wisteria) and positive feelings associated with those images (e.g. peaceful, calming, beautiful) in comment areas. A couple of them also mentioned mythological or religious elements associated with those natural images such as green, forests, and mountains. Second, the first-year students more frequently mentioned the ocean, waves, and islands while second-year students did not mention the ocean at all. The first-year learners who chose the ocean also mentioned that Japan is an island nation or part of Asia in comment areas, while the other group mentioned islands, but did not mention the ocean at all. However, two of the second-year learners and the study abroad

program participant mentioned in the comment sections that Japan was part of Asia and that tranquility could be present in all nature, people, and countries. Third, 35% of natural images perceived by the first-year learners were sakura (cherry blossoms). Participants described sakura as ephemeral natural beauty and what they thought Japanese people valued. One respondent stated as follows:

“[T]he cherry blossoms are something huge in anime that created this aesthetic with such strong emotions for me so it's become the most positive thing for me.”

Feelings associated with sakura were positive except one participant's indicating the inevitability of short-lived life as melancholic, while another stated as below:

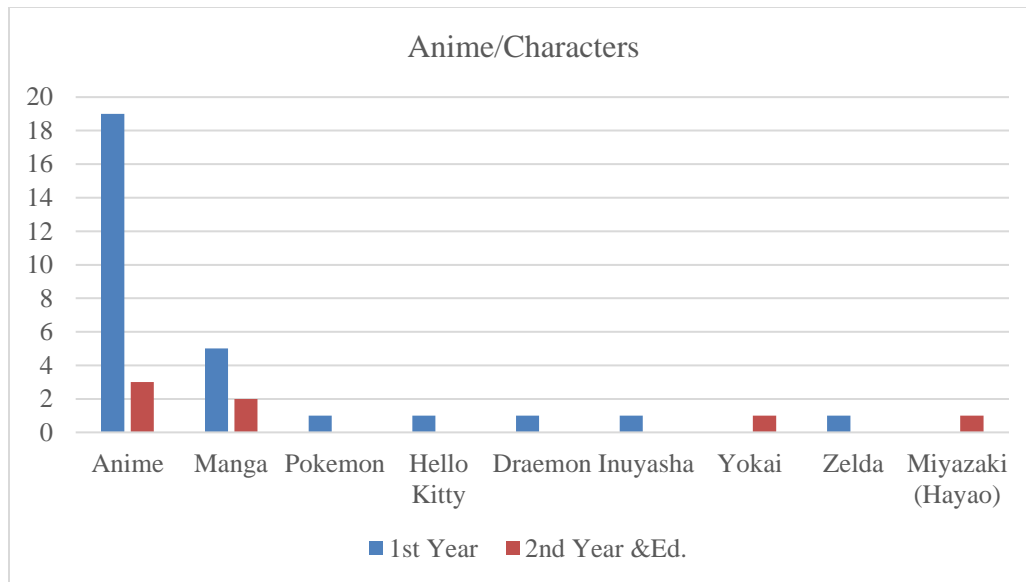
“Cherry blossoms are beautiful and they fall. That's tied together. It's sad and true but definitely beautiful.”

In contrast, the second-year learners did not associate sakura or other natural images with specific feelings although they marked them as positive images. Several respondents who stayed/lived in Japan frequently mentioned their feelings associated with sakura. Fourth, a couple of the first-year learners mentioned images related to earthquakes, while the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant did not. Only one participant of the second-year learners mentioned the Tohoku Earthquake related to another topic. Finally, there may be a generational difference regarding their attitude toward surrounding nature due to accelerated climate change. Their comments related to perceived images were often about nature and the complexity of humanity, while the second-year learners had more comments related to topics of their cultural, linguistic, and personal interests with an objective and analytical lens.

### **Anime/Films/Famous Characters**

#### **Figure 8**

*Images related to Anime/characters*



*Note:* Figure 8 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B).

Among the first-year learners, twenty-nine images (12%) were related to Anime/animated films, manga, or specific anime/video game characters, (e.g. Pokemon, Doraemon, Inuyasha, Zelda), while among the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant, these images made up only 5.8% with fewer characters. Interestingly, neither first-year learners nor second-year learners paid attention to the plot of anime episodes; however, several participants and a couple of interviewees who were first-year Japanese learners indicated that character development, emotional involvement, and complexity of humanity in anime/animated films or video games were the main reasons for their positivity toward anime. Several participants mentioned that a Western binary view between good and evil did not represent the complexity of humanity, indicating that they were drawn to these specific characteristics of Japanese culture that they thought their own cultures had lacked. Many participants perceived anime as positive or somewhat neutral. In other words, a mixture of nostalgia and lack of existence in their primary culture might have impacted these positive image associations toward images related to anime or game characters.

Nostalgic feelings associated with childhood or people are as follows:

“A lot of the knowledge I have is based off of anime's that I watched since I was a kid. They're easier to understand now and since I have Japanese friends, I get curious and see how accurate my understanding is.”

“Growing up watching Anime throughout the 90's and 00's.”

“Inuyasha is an anime that had been really liked by someone who I looked up to.”

“I loved anime and manga as a teenager, and have always wanted to visit.”

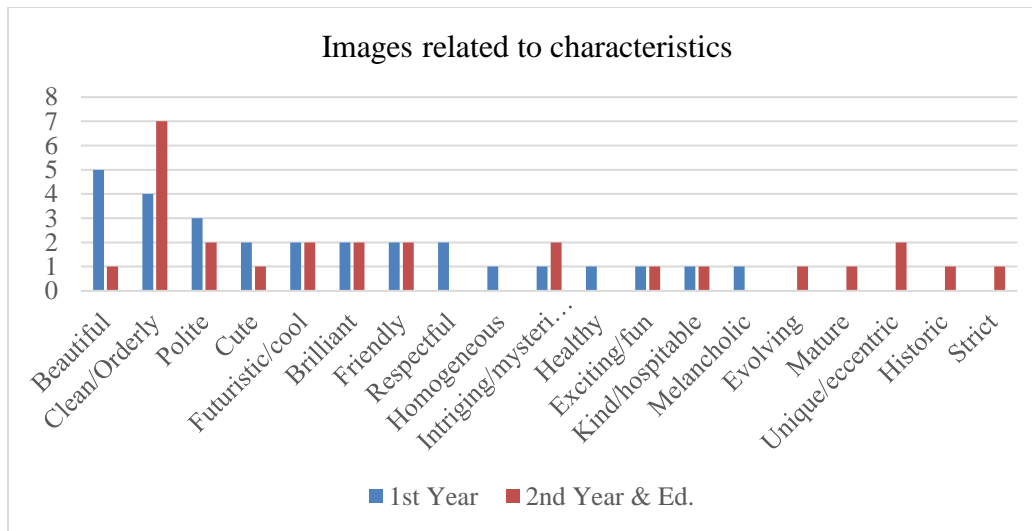
A couple of participants mentioned that their mothers or parents had discouraged them from playing Japanese video games or watching anime due to violent content. Interestingly these participants mentioned their emotional involvement in anime or game character development and in the complexity of human struggles in anime films as positive experiences without mentioning violence. However, they mentioned that over-sexualization of female characters or younger characters was harmful. Several people indicated that their images from Japanese TV/anime shows during their childhood were vague; however, they stated that strongly positive or nostalgic feelings were evoked by specific cute or creative characters such as Pokemon that had not existed in the U.S.

Among the second-year counterparts, anime, or game characters were not primary sources of Japanese images. It was the second from the bottom (5.8%) (See Table 3). Several participants of all groups mentioned Hayao Miyazaki's contribution to storytelling and art in animated films, which often depicted the complexity of humanity and natural environments where humans interacted.

## **Characteristics**

### **Figure 9**

*Images on characteristics*



*Note:* Figure 9 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B).

In terms of images related to characteristics of people, places, or environment, the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant had overwhelmingly more images related to characteristics of Japanese culture or people (22.5%) than first-year Japanese learners (11.6%) (See Table 3). However, there was a striking difference between the two populations for their word choices and meanings behind their choices of images described in the comment sections. For example, the first-year learners had a wide-range of characteristics to describe the complexity of Japanese culture, Japanese behavior or experiences they had through people such as exchange students, friends, or relatives, while the second-year learners had more nuanced human or cultural attributes. In the comment sections, they mentioned that some characteristics such as eccentric or mysterious were perceived as neutral, complex, or unknown to them yet. The first-year learners listed beautiful or artistic with high frequency while only one second-year learner mentioned artistic elements. Beautiful was most mentioned in combination with “peaceful” and images from nature in comment sections for the first-year learners. However, both populations highly recognized cleanliness/orderliness particularly associated with public

transportation as the overall impression. This was true for those who had stayed in Japan during childhood. One respondent was aware of the projected image of cleanliness as below:

“Being clean is also positive, but could also just be what they say because it's what Japan wants people to think of Japan.”

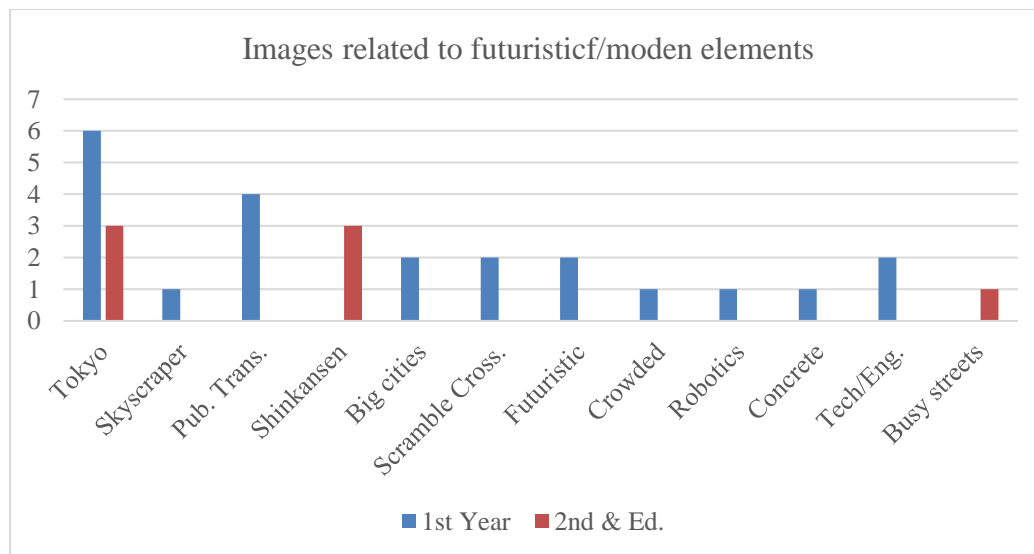
Interestingly, Kawaii culture was part of “Cool Japan” marketing images (Dover, 1999); however, it was not the most frequently mentioned attribute as I had expected. One respondent stated as below:

“[K]awaii culture in Japan, such as creating cute mascots for services, prefectures, etc. Is very positive and happy feeling.”

As the response summarizes, emotional responses evoked by something they think/experienced as Japanese may weigh more than what the specific thing is.

**Figure 10**

*Images related to futuristic/modern elements*



*Note:* Figure 10 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B).

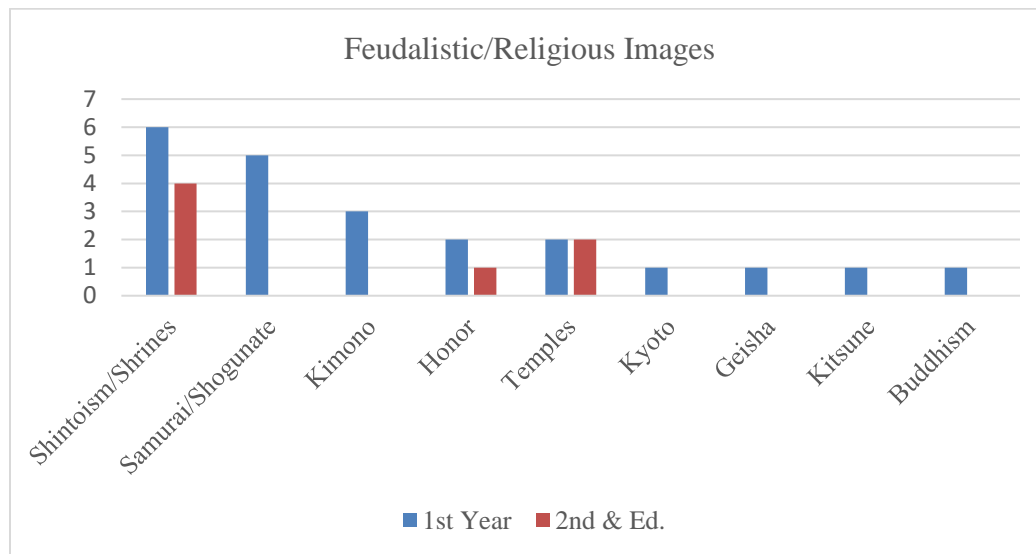
Both futuristic and feudalistic images were mentioned with 9.1% for the first-year learners. Despite fewer frequencies, both futuristic and feudalistic images were 5.8% for the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant, indicating that participants from

all groups had perceived a balance between images belonging to something old and something new. However, the second-year learners and the study abroad participants paid less attention to futuristic or feudalistic/religious images than the first-year counterparts did (See Table 3).

Overall, the second-year learners and participants who had stayed/lived in Japan paid less attention to marketed anime, cuteness, feudalistic or futuristic images while they paid more attention to food and characteristics than first-year learners. The first-year learners had a wide-range of images associated with modernity or futuristic elements in the building, roads, technology, and urban lifestyle, while second-year learners only had Tokyo and shinkansen (bullet trains) (Figure 10). Those who stayed in Japan mentioned the public transportation system as one of their first impressions in addition to the complexity of the Japanese language or communication difficulty.

**Figure 11**

*Feudalistic/Religious images*



*Note:* Figure 11 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B).

Among the first-year learners, twenty-two images (9.1%) were related to feudalism or religion. Although the first-year learners had more images related to religion, both populations

had more images related to Shintoism than Buddhism. Stereotypical images of samurai, kimono, or geisha were present among the first-year students; however, the participants who chose these feudalistic images explained that they were the images of a specific period in Japan when their grandmothers had lived and brought those images to the U.S. They were also fascinated by those images that their grandmothers could bring from their homeland. The second-year learners and the study abroad program participant did not choose stereotype images such as samurai or geisha. Instead, the second-year participants chose traditional and religious images such as temples and shrines without personal associations and with neutrality. No one from all groups mentioned ninja despite popular Japanese anime TV shows such as Naruto. Finally, attraction toward specific feudalistic, traditional, or religious images might have to do with the lack of existence in their own (US) culture as stated below:

“Kimonos are a traditional type of clothing that I always found to be beautiful and different to what we see in the United States.”

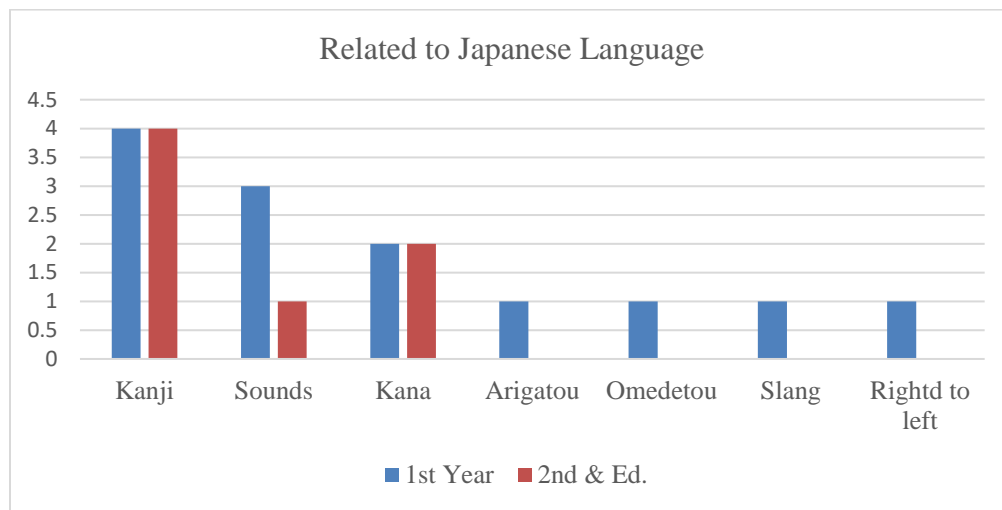
“The way life lived in Japan is different and foreign to my way of life. That sort of opposite attracts me to want to get to know more about the culture and travel there one day.”

In contrast, several respondents from the second-year learners and the study abroad program mentioned that perfectionistic, social appropriateness that Japanese societies and schools would expect of others was “daunting”, “strict”, “rigid”, or “scary.” They recognized that those attributes had existed since feudalistic periods as physical and mental frameworks, restricting self-empowerment, self-expressions, and identity-formation. Three respondents also recognized that these attributes could isolate Japan and Japanese people from the rest of the world or inflict close-mindedness on the marginalized populations, such as women and people who experience disabilities. Despite honor and respect towards the elderly that were associated with feudalistic images, two respondents critically indicated that Japanese societies or people

were less understanding of people who experience disabilities. Two respondents indicated masculine work culture as toxic. A preservation of something from feudalistic, patriarchal, or masculine has something to do with sexism and striving for perfection without admitting mistakes (White, 2002). I will discuss this further later.

**Figure 12**

*Images related to Japanese language*



*Note:* Figure 12 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B).

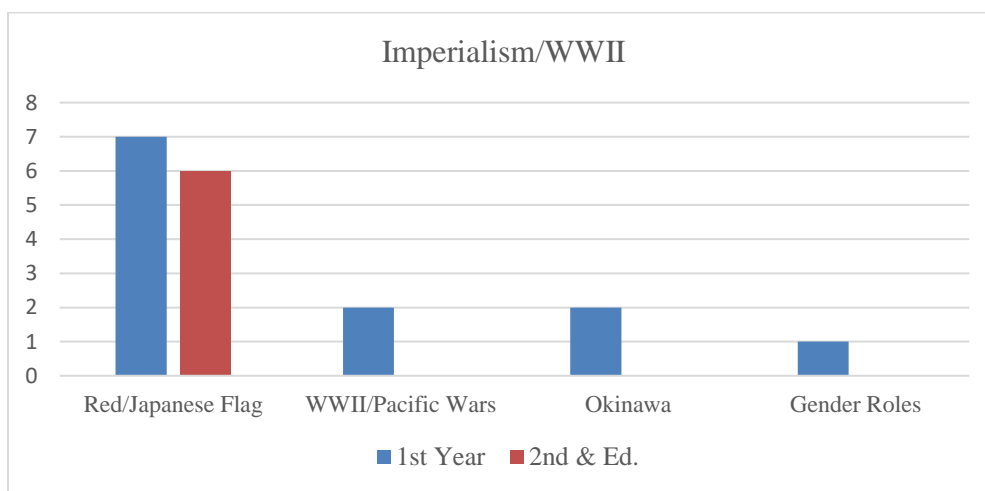
There are significant differences between the two groups regarding the range and ranking. First, the second- year learners ranked images related to the Japanese language between one to three, indicating those images came to mind before other images did, while the first-year learners ranked images related to the Japanese language between five and seven, indicating they came much later to their minds. The second-year learners and the study abroad program participant had more specific, lengthy comments regarding the complexity and characteristics of the Japanese language than the first-year counterparts in the comment sections.

In terms of ranking, the first-year learners chose food, nature, anime, and characteristics at the early part of their perceptions, while for the second-year learners and the study abroad

program participant, those images varied from person to person. Second, the first-year learners mentioned specific Japanese words such as “omedetou (congratulations)” and “arigatou (thank you)” that they heard from their family members or from other sources, which was missing among the other group. The second-year learners and respondents who stayed in Japan mentioned that the onset of learning Japanese was a turning point for positively perceiving Japan/Japanese culture. Compared to the first-year Japanese learners, they had a more specific interest and fascination towards the linguistic complexity of the Japanese language. Examples included honorific forms to show the level of respect or humility, intricacy of Kanji characters, and unspoken social codes to recognize which context/communication should be formal, neutral, or casual. However, fascination toward the complexity of the Japanese language and distinctive sounds were present among all populations in their comment sections. Additionally, the sounds of the Japanese language had positive associations with what they heard from their grandparents, family members, Japanese friends, American celebrities who live-streamed from Japan, or when the participants were in Japan.

**Figure 13**

*Images related to imperialism/WWII*



*Note:* Figure 13 corresponds to survey question one for all participants (See Appendix A & B).

As I have mentioned in the methodology section, images grouped as WWII/imperialism were important to see if there were patterns of omission, deemphasis, neutralization, or alteration. The findings for this group were not what I had expected.

First, both first-and second-year learners, “red” or “Japanese flag” ranked between one to three, which was surprising. However, unlike negative associations common among Japanese natives (Young, 2019; Japan’s Okinawa), none of them associated “Japanese flag” or “red” with imperialism, nationalism, WWII, or negatively. Two respondents viewed images of red or the Japanese flag somewhat beautiful stating as below:

“I saw it all together in an image created in my mind, almost like a piece of art. The red sun stood out the most as it is part of the Japanese flag.”

“They came from drawings (anime) or photos I have seen of Japan. The color red I associate with the word Japan as well as coincidentally appearing on its flag.”

A couple of the second-year learners chose “red or Japanese flag” as neutral images stating as below:

“[T]he red and island are just images that come to mind for me because of the location of the Japanese islands and the flag combined with old Buddhist temple designs. its not really positive or negative.”

Another respondent recognized a hint of difficult history in the U.S. and Japan as below:

“The Japanese flag has stood for many things, not all of them great. Like when I look at an American flag, I feel a mix of feelings when I look at the Japanese flag too.”

Similarly, Okinawa is negatively perceived among Japanese people as part of the Japanese involvement in WWII and tragedies (Japan’s Okinawa, 2019). However, participants who mentioned Okinawa indicated the richness of island culture or a place they knew as a positive image. Several respondents of all groups mentioned Japanese involvement in WWII and Pacific Wars, and persistent sexism in Japanese society. The second-year Japanese learners did not choose images related to WWII/Imperialism except the Japanese flag/red; however, three

respondents mentioned that learning about Japan's wartime history changed their perceptions of Japan/Japanese to a more complex, neutral, or negative position. Three interviewees mentioned the general lack of history education in, particularly Asia and the U.S. On the other hand, several participants listed their Japanese/history or other courses as sources of their historical images. Positive images toward imperialism may have to do with the lack of overall history education and fewer multi-generational interactions, indicating the importance of humanities and multigenerational communities (Tulloch et al., 2017).

Second, the degree of awareness toward Japan's complex, imperial past had something to do with respondents' academic, social, and community environments. Respondents who recognized colonial past had taken history classes at the secondary or college levels, known Japanese exchange students or friends who were in Japanese immersion programs, were part of Japanese Immersion programs that are known for critical history education (Li et al., 2016), had family members of Japanese or Asian descent, had military colleagues/family members who had stationed in Japan, or they had stayed/lived in Japan. Their awareness and criticalness was not limited to the Japanese imperial past. Examples included discrimination against people who experienced disabilities, xenophobia, suicide, over-crowdedness, not speaking up for themselves, strict social codes, gender inequality, comfort women, religious persecutions against Christians during feudalistic years, lack of personal space, academic pressure, and sexism. Two respondents indicated gender inequality as follows:

“Gender roles are another one I'd view as a negative. The separation of the genders (male and female) can be very obvious and noticeable, especially in the work area and roles of home life.”

“The thing that isn't really getting better is the corporate climate, which is very problematic. I cannot say much though as the US is the same way for much of seems negative.”

Another respondent indicated that YouTube influencers had mentioned the high suicide rate in Japan.

“My knowledge is quite limited, so the only negative aspects I know about Japan is Pearl Harbor and the suicide rates.”

However, despite their awareness of dark parts of Japan/Japanese culture, they maintained positivity toward Japan/Japanese culture with maturity. One respondent who has stayed in Japan summarized as below:

“Japan preserves its own history very well, but I did come to realize that key parts of its own history is censored, fabricated, or simply omitted. A lot of these omissions are because of international pressure, since Japan does not want to acknowledge and thus take responsibility for compensating those affected by things the country has done in the past to other nations. It strikes me as odd though, because Japan should be at least willing to try and make amends for its past, and it would only stand to benefit from the improved political relations in its region by doing so.....it can secure its own well-being in the increasingly tense world we live in. But perhaps with more time spent in the country, I can understand what Japan really plans on doing about its history. I at least know that there are organizations in Japan who want to set the record straight, and they have significant support.”

Third, in addition to the importance of “critical consciousness” (Freire, 1974), as Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) indicates, the respondents recognized that their views of culture or history had grown mature through strengthening interactions between and among personal, social, academic, and macro societies while experiencing the passage of time. It is important to recognize to stay consciously critical of one’s own culture and self in relation to others and other cultures. Moreover, despite their being labeled as social media generations (Dimock, 2019), these young participants chose personal interactions as the key sources to make friends, learn Japanese language/culture, and continue to appreciate all parts of the complexity of cultural literacy. Although they consume information via media primarily, a couple of them were very aware that media is skewed toward one’s preference; thus, biased.

From the comment sections, they chose to educate themselves by watching documentaries and YouTube videos on a variety of topics produced by people from various backgrounds who live/lived in Japan, experiencing their experiences. This indicates that language and culture cannot be learned without human connections and experiences (See Sources of Images of Japan/Japanese Culture; Chomsky, 1977; Sawaguchi, 2009). SEL/EI plays an important role for long-term, cultural literacy development (Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007), which I will further discuss in the next section.

Finally, a neoliberal Japanese cultural campaign has impacted the omission, neutralization, deemphasis, or beautification of imperial images. While the U.S. politically, economically, academically, and socially succeeded in convincing that English is a professional, global language, Japan has also succeeded in emphasizing that “*cool Japan where old and new co-exist in harmony unlike in other nations* (Dower, 1999) with a hint of exceptionalism. One significant example of this cleaned-up model was how Japanese film/game industries became ubiquitous during the childhood of the survey participants. One respondent expressed an ambiguous mixture of fascination and nostalgia that would minimize the imperial past as follows:

“Through popular Japanese entertainment that has entered American culture and a certain mystique that comes with being a secluded island, I formed a certain romanticized perception of Japan.”

This view is aligned with an artistic emphasis of “red” or “flag” in the perceptions of the survey respondents, not perceiving that these images had been of imperial past among Japanese native speakers. These images became something beautiful to them, while six respondents from the second-year Japanese courses and the study abroad program participant perceived as neutral with mixed feelings when they looked at the Japanese or American flag. The omission is also related to the age difference, availability of diverse vicarious experiences through music, literature, or

history at school, media, or communities, how/who wrote history, and how it has been told, taught, and revised, which I will articulate later.

In the next section, I will discuss the ten key characteristics that emerged from in-depth comments and interviews, relating to omissions, deemphasis, fabrication, and desensitization. Mechanism of unconscious and intentional omission and deemphasis is blurry because of the complexity of ecological systems and interactions among them through the passage of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It also involves the affective domain such as intrinsic motivation, anxiety, and empowerment as well as EI (Knowles et al., 2015; Bransford et al., 2010; Bhat 2015; Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007; Goleman, 2011). The following findings also shed light on how to break a cycle of bias forming and to build an evolving cultural literacy.

### **Interview Results and In-Depth Comments in Online Surveys**

**Table 4**

*The ten characteristics that emerged from in-depth comments/interviews*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Quote Examples</b>
Nostalgia from childhood (food, anime, events, people)	<p>“Happy childhood memories.”</p> <p>“My favorite memory is during New year when everybody goes to each other's house to wish them omedeto and we make oshiruko and share it with those who come by.’</p> <p>“Growing up watching Anime throughout the 90's and 00's.”</p> <p>“A lot of the knowledge I have is based off of anime's that I watched since I was a kid.”</p> <p>“My perception somewhat changes, recently, the last few years, I have wanted to dig into my family’s heritage and researched about culture around Asia....”</p> <p>“And as a child growing up of course having friends that still lived in the culture of Japan, yokai came up quite often.”</p>
Multigenerational impact	<p>“I grew up with grandparents speaking Japanese as their second language.”</p>

Multimodalities	<p>“Artwork in my own home as well as my grandmother who grew up in Japan.”</p> <p>“I grew up listening to Enka as well as listening to the story of momotaro sang and singing momotaro sang song.....”</p> <p>“I think learning Japanese for me is a way of honoring my grandparents as well as it has always been my interest to learn it for myself.”</p>
Critical Consciousness (Freire, 1974)	<p>“I have more negative perceptions toward X organization because of how Y was being mistreated....” (critical of a system in the U.S.)</p> <p>“when i learned more about Japan's role in WW2. Not so much having any negative feelings toward Japan, but more of the question on how did Japan and the United States end up forgiving each other and being allies.”</p> <p>“All I know is that fish is a big deal in Japan, where some candies are even 'fish flavored'; it is a big part of it's culture. The only real negative thing is that because of it being so "huge", it is causing over-fishing.”</p> <p>“learning about WW2 where Japan stood, and learning about comfort women during this time.”</p> <p>“Japanese take care of their elderly, respect them, but don't take care of their special needs children/family members.”</p> <p>“the isolation Japan embraced for hundreds of years contributed to a greater schism between East and West.”</p> <p>“Most of the other words aren't positive or negative. I find most of them positive to myself, but wouldn't be universally positive.”</p>
Fascination/Idealization/The Perception Gap “Cool-Japan” campaign	<p>“It’s possible that my idealistic look at Japan has [been] misguided by my impressions, but I don’t have any negative images....”</p> <p>“I think most of them are positive because I have a pretty idealized view of Japan.”</p> <p>“I saw it all together in an image created in my mind, almost like a piece of art. The red sun stood out the most as it is part of the Japanese flag.”</p>
Want Human Connections (language acquisition, learning processes)	<p>“Japanese films have more complex character development...unlike American movies with good and evil....”</p> <p>“Japanese games give more positive emotional engagement....”</p>

<p>Want Peaceful Existence (peace education, climate change)</p>	<p>“Buddhism is a very peaceful frame of mind to view the world...”</p> <p>“Tranquil, Evolving, Mature, Unique. These words are all extremely positive because at least to me, I know the environment I originally expected to mature as an adult in here in the US is not what I expected at all. But upon spending legitimate time in Japan and exploring the day-to-day lifestyle, I feel happy knowing that these traits have manifested in the world.”</p>
<p>Complexity of Japanese</p>	<p>“it has 3 alphabets.” “intricate....” “where do I start?”</p> <p>“The language was very beautiful to me and it had a flow to it that I found to be soothing and complex all at once.”</p>
<p>Commitment to Learning</p>	<p>“the most significant change happened when I started learning Japanese. Prior to that I mostly got my information from fiction.”</p>
<p>Invisibility of Women of Asian descent &amp; WWII</p>	<p>“Do not talk about negative things in the past, just move on.”</p> <p>“showing affection towards another out in the open often made others uncomfortable.” (spoken by a female Japanese teacher)</p>
<p>SEL/EI for Cultural Literacy (Social Emotional Learning) (emotional involvement &amp; character development) Q22 (see Appendix A &amp; B)</p>	<p>“There are some dark parts in history...I wouldn’t view [them] as negative, but some parts of tradition or culture just fully line up with my views, but it is to be expected in life that not everyone else has the exact view as you.....”</p> <p>“Japanese videogames more focus on positive emotional experiences and character development...Pokemon, there is nothing like that. Here (US), just shooting or getting high scores...”</p> <p>“My perception of Japan did change initially negatively when I looked into its history and the way of life for the working class (blue and white collar).....started talking to more people in Japan, I began see...”</p>

*Note:* Table 3 corresponds to survey questions 1, 3, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 22, 23, and interviews for all participants (See Appendix A & B). To ensure anonymity, specific words such as people/places are changed to X, Y, etc.

Besides online surveys, four in-depth interviews from the first-and second-year Japanese learners were conducted between the fall of 2020 and the winter of 2021. For the first question, the participants were asked to continuously write whatever images/phrases came to their minds within the timed two minutes, and to rate them from extremely positive to extremely negative (e.g. moderately positive, neutral, moderately negative). They were also asked to explore where

those images came from, who/what had associations with those images, and whether those images were vague or intense. Other guiding interview questions included events that had changed participants' perception of Japan/Japanese culture from one position to another. The participants also examined if experiences during the pandemic had changed their perceptions of Japan/Japanese cultures or their own culture and if the change in their perceptions of their own culture impacted their perceptions of the target culture (Japanese). For those who had stayed/lived in Japan, the participants also reflected on their first impressions and changes to those impressions, and reasons for those changes. These guiding questions were related to survey questions 1, 3, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 22, and 23 (See Appendix A & B).

### **Characteristics Related to Omission, Deemphasis, or Desensitization**

The ten key characteristics that emerged from in-depth online survey/interview comments include: 1) nostalgia from childhood memories, 2) multigenerational influence on cultural literacy, 3) critical consciousness (Freire, 1974) toward the target/own cultures, 4) idealization toward the target culture/language (Japanese) or the perception gap, 5) a strong interest in complex human experiences and emotional engagement, 6) a strong interest in peaceful, spiritual, and natural elements, 7) an attraction toward the complexity of communication (Japanese/language systems) and human experiences, 8) commitment to learning the target language/culture (Japanese), 9) the invisibility of women of Asian descent and wartime history, and 10) Ecological Systems Theories and EI/SEL play a long-term effect on bias development and cultural literacy. I will discuss how these findings relate to omissions, deemphasis, desensitization, or paths for the better understanding of cultural literacy in language education.

### **Nostalgia towards Childhood Memories and Grandmothers**

In terms of family dynamics and implicit biases, three patterns emerged. First, parents, particularly fathers were the least mentioned. Comments regarding parents were neutral or realistic; thus, often negative to the minds of children. First, grandparents often play a cushion role against parental conflicts. Three participants commented on parents, mostly on mothers, about restricting exposure to video games or anime; however, one respondent realistically captured a common daily conflict as below:

“My parents didn't like the dark side of anime..... so I went along and agreed with my parents on that.”

Although the respondents' overall perceptions of anime were positive or neutral, a couple of survey/interview participants mentioned that violence and hyper-sexualization of female or young characters in anime were harmful. Parents, particularly mothers, had good reasons for wanting their children to have less exposure to harmful content during impressionable young years as women; however, it could be challenging when their primary role became constant reality checks sounding negative or strict. It was unknown from the survey whether the gender or ethnicity (Asian/Japanese descent) of a parent would impact how a child would react regarding restricting video games or anime. However, it would be worthwhile to explore with further research because it involves gender, gender role, and how female/young characters are drawn and behaved in anime or video games. There may be layers of implicit biases from colonialism and the “Cool-Japan” campaign (Dover, 1999).

One participant had a fragmented recollection of the father who had lived in Japan during his childhood. Although fragmented, the participant remembered the father's positive experiences with Japanese families who had included him as part of their family. The participant also recalled his father using “koko (here)” when they were on a bus to signal the driver that he was getting off. The sounds of the Japanese words spoken by people the participants cared about

were not only nostalgic but also human. When things or words are associated with people they cared about and interact with, culture ceases to stay a static thing or an imagination. One participant summarized as below:

“[T]he most significant change happened when I started learning Japanese. Prior to that I mostly got my information from fiction.”

Several participants of all groups mentioned artifacts, souvenirs, and books their family/extended family members had brought, and these objects were visible during their childhood. Some examples included a Japanese sword, children’s books in Japanese, paintings, dressers, Kimono, Japanese dictionaries in Japanese, old music, recordings, and photos that their loved ones had taken in Japan. One participant mentioned the painting of geisha that the participant’s grandmother had brought from her homeland and was aware that the image of geisha was a fragment of a particular time in her life and Japanese history, which she could bring. I cannot know the whole story; however, some artifacts could be brought to the U.S. maybe because other possessions could have been destroyed, taken away, or lost. In the comment sections, a couple of the participants had sensed a mixture of sadness and beauty from the objects that their extended family members had brought and had been visible to the eyes of the children. The ability to capture nuanced emotion indicated that the participants had developed high emotional intelligence and empathy for humanity. One respondent summarized as below:

“I think learning Japanese for me is a way of honoring my grandparents as well as it has always been my interest to learn it for myself.”

The role of grandparents and that of parents differed in terms of immediate responsibilities and interests in child rearing. Ten respondents (16.3%) indicated the positive or important role of grandparents (particularly, grandmothers) or members of extended families in

the perceptions of another culture. All of them had positive memories during their childhood although their memories were fragmented. They remembered the sounds of songs sung, Japanese folktales told, laughter as soothing and happy. Other nostalgic experiences related to grandparents, particularly grandmothers included food they cooked, shared, or ate for specific events. They also positively recalled the sounds of how their grandparents spoke Japanese to them as children. Learning occurs more naturally when positive memories (marked with Oxytocin in the brain) and a little structure or stress (marked by Cortisol) co-exist (Horvath, 2014). Several studies indicated that for a synthesis of diverse learnings to happen, learners would need to intrinsically stay motivated, and build new experiences based on pre-knowledge while taking risk to expand their perspectives and enhance their understanding in a non-threatening, holistic, and loving environment (Bransford et al., 2010; Bhat 2015; Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007; Chandler et al., 2017).

The first-year Japanese learners indicated more nostalgia (fragmented happy childhood memories) toward the sounds of the loved ones (songs, storytelling, laughter), TV shows/anime during childhood, specific shows introduced by friends, and souvenirs that carry nostalgia. It was often an entry point for becoming interested in Japanese/Japanese culture. The participants also had safe environments/frameworks often with multigenerational or other interactions. However, comments on grandmothers, mothers, or female teachers gave a glimpse of a complex mechanism of biases that had impacted them, which I will discuss later.

### **Critical Consciousness (Freire, 1974) toward the Target Culture and Their Own**

Critical consciousness was present at different levels among the participants; however, there was the shift from fragmented things/images to characteristics of Japanese/Japanese culture or people as the participants had more exposure to the target culture/language through

experiential or formal learning and interactions with people whom they had cared about. That shift eventually led to a commonality among all people through a consistent re-evaluation of their own culture and themselves and their relation to both natural and human worlds.

The first-year Japanese learners listed more images as neutral than the other population. Examples included places (Tokyo, Hokkaido, scramble crossings), the Japanese flag, Sakura, anime, futon, or kana (the Japanese syllabary system). The shared reason for neutrality among all groups was summarized as follows:

“I think all of the images are pretty neutral because they're just features or things from Japan.”

However, those who had more exposure to the target culture/language were able to recognize that their images were fragmented snapshots without enough information to form opinions and they were careful not to judge or jump to conclusions. This indicated a sign of maturity as in the following statements:

“All of them I don't think any of them really tie into any negative stereotypes and for the most part are extremely vague.”

“Most of the other words aren't positive or negative. I find most of them positive to myself, but wouldn't be universally positive.”

The two questions in the survey attempted to understand the complexity of cultural literacy development. The survey question six asked the participants if there had been a time their perception of Japan/Japanese culture changed from one position to another and what had impacted that change (See Appendix A & B). Over 70% of the first-year learners responded yes. Impactful events included taking history, culture, or Japanese classes at the secondary or college levels, visiting/staying in Japan, close friends' introducing them to Japanese culture via anime, and researching Japan. Several respondents indicated their strong interest in Japan/Japanese culture began during childhood. About 70 % of the respondents stated their perceptions of

Japan/Japanese culture had changed to more positive, to neutral (10.3%), and slightly negative or complex (30%). However, they indicated since those events, their positions have not changed much.

In their interviews or survey comments, they clearly indicated that more exposure to Japan/Japanese culture had increased their interest by embracing the complexity of all sides (positive, complex, and negative) of Japan/Japanese culture. Participants who stayed in Japan during childhood mentioned that their vague images of Japan/Japanese culture gradually grew more complex as time passed. Those who visited or lived in Japan during adulthood indicated their perceptions of Japan/Japanese culture became complex with an in-depth understanding of Japanese imperial history, sexism, over-crowdedness, high suicide rate, and other social challenges because of critical consciousness. Similar awareness of Japan's past was also mentioned among the first-year Japanese learners who had been exposed to Japanese culture. Despite their awareness, over 90 percent of all respondents indicated their overall perception of Japan/Japanese culture remained positive while they continued to learn about them. More significantly, adult learners with higher-proficient levels and more exposure to Japanese culture paid less attention to superficial *cute* or *cool* images of Japan that had been marketed via the "cool Japan" campaign (Dover, 1999). They paid more attention to the overall characteristics of people and places as well as to the importance of human interactions with the target language (Japanese) (See images related to characteristics). One respondent summarized the shift as below:

"Tranquil, Evolving, Mature, Unique. These words are all extremely positive because at least to me, I know the environment I originally expected to mature as an adult in here in the US is not what I expected at all. But upon spending legitimate time in Japan and exploring the day-to-day lifestyle, I feel happy knowing that these traits have manifested in the world."

Question eleven asked the participants if specific events had contributed to the understanding of Japan/Japanese culture during the COVID-19 pandemic and how those events changed their perception of Japan/Japanese culture.

About equal number of respondents who were first-and second-year Japanese learners mentioned yes and no (41-44.8%) and maybe (10.3%) to question 11. They mentioned only two events during the pandemic that had changed their perceptions of Japan/Japanese culture: the U.S.'s poor handling of the pandemic and having more time to research on Japan/Japanese culture, which increased their understanding. In other words, the pandemic and remote learning were the impactful events.

### **Idealization and The Perception Gap: the Japanese /Flag**

Among the images related to WWII/imperialism, the perception gap towards “red” and “the Japanese flag” between those of the Japanese/Asian populations and those of the participants who had chosen those images was striking and unexpected. The images related to WWII, “red”, and “the Japanese flag” had the highest frequency among images related to WWII among all survey participants (See images related to WWII/Imperialism). All of them perceived these images as positive or neutral unlike a controversial, negative associations common among Japanese people and people in Asia. The following comments by the participants shed light on the impact from the Cool-Japan campaign that stealthily marketed the exceptionalism of “*cool Japan where old and new co-exist in harmony unlike in other nations* (Dower, 1999). A couple of the respondents viewed images of red or the Japanese flag “like a piece of art”, “from drawings (anime)” and perceived them positively. A couple of the participants perceived them as neither positive or negative, but neutral as “just a thing” or “the location of the Japanese islands.”

However, one respondent expressed that “the flag could be both positive and negative depending on where you live.”

Another respondent recognized a hint of difficult history in the U.S. and Japan as below:

“The Japanese flag has stood for many things, not all of them great. Like when I look at an American flag, I feel a mix of feelings when I look at the Japanese flag too.”

The data suggested that the more exposure to Japanese/Japanese culture the participants had, the more likely they commented on the complex wartime history, other related topics, and social issues in Japan. However, no one mentioned how Japanese people and people in Asia negatively perceive the Japanese flag in association with the Japanese government who had been poorly handling issues that were originated or related to wartime history. The history of the Japanese flag and what it has symbolized to Asia and Japan are complex and controversial to the present. Post-WWII examples include comfort women, atrocities in Asia, atomic bomb, nuclear energy, misused education for war efforts, omitted or revised history, the meltdown of the nuclear power plants during the Tohoku Earthquake (2011, March 11) and the Japanese government’s handling with people in the disaster zones, the amendment to the Japanese Constitution for more militaristic power, Okinawa, Japanese leaders visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, and geopolitical tensions with South Korea, North Korea, and China (Japan’s Okinawa, 2019; Hughes, 2009; Jean, 2005; Kimura, 1995; Donghyun, 2006).

The history of the Japanese flag had an ironic start around the end of the Edo Era; however, the flag was used much earlier sporadically. During the Meiji Restoration, the opening of Japan after 300 years of closure and isolation, as a sign of modernization, Japan used a Hinomaru, the-circle-of-the-sun” flag to identify their ships for Western colonial countries who had come with their national flags (White, 2002). Hinomaru’s design originated from the Sun Goddess of Shintoism/Japanese mythology (Takeda, 2002). The Japanese imperial Navy and

Army used versions of “the rising of the sun” hinting Japan’s exceptionalism while colonizing Asia and oppressing people, particularly Korean, Chinese, and foreign-born women during wartime. Inevitably, violence against women and children is negatively associated with bloodshed and all versions of the Japanese flag in the minds of the colonized, the oppressed, and Japanese people, particularly women (Hughes, 2009; Jean, 2005; Kimura, 1995; Japan’s Okinawa, 2019; Hall, 2006; Henry, 2005; Donghyun, 2006).

Layers of omissions related to wartime history involving Asia and the U.S. can be simultaneously intentional, or automatically chosen by system for individuals, and unintentional. They are also linguistic, generational, political, financial, regional, academic, and personal, involving some degree of censorship by all or some parties involved. Most participants grew up passing the K to 12 systems between 1981 and 1996 (millennials) or between 1997 and 2012 (Generation Z) (Dimock, 2019). As I have mentioned in the literature review, the following political, economic, academic, and social events/policies took place in the U.S. during these years that have created durable biases. Examples include anti-Japanese sentiment due to Japan’s surpassing the U.S. economic power in the 80s and 90s, technological innovation (Microsoft/Apple) and boom-bust in the 90s, the ubiquity of U.S. media in the world (Facebook/Google/Amazon), 9/11, globalization, No Child Left Behind that devalued bilingual education and English learners, xenophobic immigration policies, the Gulf war, the Iraqi/Afghanistan wars, corporate scandals that led to 2008 financial crisis, significant budget cuts for education (K to college), and the widened inequality gap (Kochhar & Cillufo, 2018). Because of xenophobia and lack of will to emphasize the importance of the humanities, neuroscientific discoveries, and other scientific discoveries on the complexity of the learning process, language acquisition, and emotional intelligence had less room to reach to educators and

policymakers (Galindo, 2011; Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015; Kahlenberg et al., 2018; NCLB, 2001; Zull, 2002; Bransford et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016). During these years, controversial events involving the Japanese government were deeply related to wartime history and colonial oppression of the marginalized populations in Asia and Japan. The Cool-Japan campaign (Dover, 1999) coincided with the No Child Left Behind years in the U.S. Therefore, it is not surprising the perceptions of the images directly related to the Japanese flag was too cleaned up or neutral by the time that they had reached the U.S. One respondent summarized this phenomenon as below:

“[W]hen i learned more about Japan's role in WW2. Not so much having any negative feelings toward Japan, but more of the question on how did Japan and the United States end up forgiving each other and being allies.”

Unfortunately, the answer to this question may be economic and geopolitical.

Other factors for the historical omission or the perception gap can be the lack of multigenerational interactions, the diminished surviving population who had experienced WWII in the nations where colonialism had impacted, the lack of history materials translated from other languages to English, the lack of foreign language education limiting the understanding of historical events written in the original language, the lack of historical events told by the marginalized (e.g. the colonized, women, children, journalists, teachers), the lack of English proficiency of the older foreign-born immigrants (Korean, Chinese, and Japanese) (Budiman, 2020), and the lack of the learning environment in communities where important stories can be engraved, written and told on the locations of historic events or buildings such as public parks. In terms of images perceived as negative, those who had more exposure to Japan and Japanese culture were aware and critical of wartime history. Their criticalness extended to other social issues such as suicide, over-crowdedness, lack of understanding toward people with disabilities,

hyper-masculine societies, overuse of concrete, and so forth. However, despite criticalness, they did not view cultural literacy in a hierarchy of negativity, positivity, or neutrality by valuing the complexity of all sides. They also mentioned that their overall perceptions of Japan/Japanese culture remained positive because of the commonality in all people. In contrast, from this study alone, it was not clear if first-year learners with less exposure to Japan/Japanese culture perceived Japan/Japanese culture in a positive light because of their anticipation toward something new, the impact of the Cool-Japan campaign, politeness to stay positive, or all of the above.

Another perception gap was about cleanliness. Cleanliness was the most frequently mentioned characteristic as an image and in comment sections among all participants, including the participants who had stayed/lived in Japan. One respondent was aware of the projected image of cleanliness as below:

“Being clean is also positive, but could also just be what they say because it's what Japan wants people to think of Japan.”

“It is the cleanest place I have visited. The people, cities and towns are very clean and feel refreshing.”

One respondent summarized the relationship between cleanliness and health as below:

“hygienic, kind, disciplined. Many cultures are these things. Hygiene has always stood out to me though bc of the bowing instead of hand shaking, how people do workout breaks as a group even in business settings (not sure if that's still popular), and I understood that kids would clean up their own classrooms. Seems like all good things to build a culture of health and accountability for taking care of one's body and things.”

Although the Cool-Japan campaign aimed at marketing cleanliness/orderliness in association with futuristic public transportation, the reasons for striving for cleanliness were not well conveyed to those who had perceived cleanliness as their image of Japan/Japanese culture. Obsession toward cleanliness came from the Meiji era when Western colonists pressured Japan

to open and modernize the nation. Historically, regardless of countries, being clean was regarded as a sign of civilization since colonists often derided poor hygiene as barbaric. Additionally, one of the stereotypes toward Asians by Western colonists in Japan and the U.S. was “dirty” or “filthy” (Young, 2019; Hughes, 2009; Jean, 2005; Kimura, 1995; Henry, 2005). It is not a coincidence that Japan invented high-tech toilets and published magazines that dedicate considerable pages for how to effectively clean places (Imai, 2003). To control and oppress others, shaming is a powerful tool, which often leaves long-time scars or animosity because it dehumanizes people at the fundamental level. During the imperial era, Japan used assimilation policies, “doka seisaku” particularly against Koreans with a systematic shaming involving hygiene and *modernizing* the current Seoul (Hughes, 2009; Jean, 2005; Kimura, 1995). In terms of language, the Japanese military used Direct Method by restricting the use of the native language, adding layers of oppression and violence (Hughes, 2009; Jean, 2005; Kimura, 1995; Hall, 2009). It is important to learn about the reasons for the creation of specific images through colonial history because the ubiquity of those images could blind critical awareness.

In addition to cleanliness associated with imperial history, both Shintoism and Buddhism emphasize purification through water. As a ritual/custom, people need to wash their hands before paying respect to gods. Popularity for onsen (hot spring) and public bathhouses are cultural. However, Shintoism and imperialism are closely related, while discipline from martial arts is related to Buddhism and feudalism. Both religions have been intricately connected with internal wars as well as modern wars. They are also an important part of Japanese culture. Therefore, it is important to mention the relationship between purification and colonialism. Purification is not limited to Shintoism alone. We should not forget that colonists had utilized other religions to *purify* others by colonizing with eugenics.

### **Craving for Human Connections and Language Learning**

Despite being known as social media generations (Dimock, 2019; Pew Research, 2014), around 25% of the first-year learners and 22% of the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant mentioned people (e.g. Japanese friends, exchange students, military colleagues/family members stationed in Japan, Japanese neighbors, Japanese people they met in the U.S. or Japan) as sources of their images. Although all populations indicated that media (about 40 % for either population) as their frequented source, learners with higher proficiency or/and more exposure to Japan/Japanese culture had formal education (See Table 2). The most mentioned reason for an entry point for learning Japanese was nostalgia and happy events that they had experienced with people whom they had cared about (e.g. family/extended family members, Japanese friends, peers who went to the same schools). Those who chose anime also had some stories behind such as learning about specific anime via friends, watching anime during childhood, or anime reminded of something happy). Whether playing video games or watching anime/films, the participants were more interested in character development and the complexity of humanity instead of a binary, simplified view of good vs. evil that is common in the U.S. From the study alone, it is not clear if the participants were attracted to the attributes that are missing in their own culture or environments, or if the emphasis toward complexity is a natural, holistic part of learning or both.

However, high emotional intelligence to recognize nuances was mostly exercised by the participants who had more exposure to Japanese or other cultures (e.g. had relatives, Japanese exchange students, took history/Japanese classes, part of Japanese Immersion programs, stayed or lived in Japan). This indicates the importance of CRT and SEL/EI that encourages consistent

criticalness and empathy (Bransford et al., 2010; Bhat 2015; Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007).

### **Interest in Peaceful Coexistence in Nature and Climate Change**

According to Pew Research Center on facts on generations (Dimock, 2019), millennials (the age between 23 and 38) had experienced political, social, and financial turmoil such as 9/11, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, President Obama, and xenophobia during their impressionable years while the major concern for Generation Z (the age between 7 and 22) has been climate change with a strong advocate, 13-year-old Greta Thurnberg (BBC, 2019; Amnesty International Survey, 2019). Most participants grew up passing the K to 12 systems between 1981 and 1996 (millennials) or between 1997 and 2012 (Generation Z) (Dimock, 2019).

There was a significant difference between the two groups of participants in terms of images related to nature. Although images related to nature were the third-highest (11.7%) among the second-year learners and study abroad participants, those images were general without specificity. In contrast, the first-year learners chose more natural images related to peace and beauty with specific plants and animals with high frequency. They had several comments about harmonious coexistence with nature. Those images were often related to Japanese mythology (Shintoism), mountains, oceans, and islands, while those images were missing or less frequent in the other population (See images related to nature). The “Cool-Japan” campaign marketed a mysteriously beautiful image of Japan (Dover, 1999); however, fascination toward the beauty of Japan among the first-year participants was less about the marketed image of Japan. Instead, they mentioned that they had been attracted to a peaceful, harmonious environment, which they thought that Japan could offer. A couple of participants from the other population who had stayed in Japan experienced a peaceful environment and wanted to go back

to experience it again. Perceived images can be something people wish to have because they are missing in their environments. It is important to remember that not all perceptions are biased or marketed.

From my study, it is not clear to determine generational characteristics among the participants; however, five to nine age differences during their impressionable childhood and teen years might have contributed to the degree of interest in images related to nature. It would be worthwhile to investigate the relationship between the awareness of climate change and images related to nature with peacefulness in further studies. Strong interest in peaceful environments may have something to do with the lack of peaceful livelihoods due to witnessing and experiencing the compound impact of unequal systems from an early age.

The U.S. political climate directly impacts curricula from K to 12. A slight age difference may not be a huge gap during adulthood; however, it can be significant in terms of availability of information, experiential learning environment at schools/home, in communities, and degree of media exposure. For example, despite having the most Information and Communication Technology companies, access to computers from home in the U.S. between 2010 and 2013 was around 72%, while those of European and Asian nations was above 80% (OECD, 2005-2019). By 2019, European countries and South Korea have achieved between 82 and 99.7 % of internet access while the U.S. has reached only 79.9% access despite the highest mobile broadband subscriptions per 1,000 inhabitants (OECD, 2005-2019; Social Progress Index [SPI], 2020). The U.S. scored worse on safety (57<sup>th</sup>), affordability of higher education, housing, and healthcare (42<sup>nd</sup>), inclusiveness (35<sup>th</sup>), internet access, and access to basic education (K to 12 systems) (44<sup>th</sup>), and the poverty rate among the elderly, children, and the marginalized populations (SPI, 2005-2020; OECD, 2005-2019). SPI (2005-2020) ranked the U.S. the top for higher education,

yet the examples reveal that we are less accessible to remote learning, basic education (K-12), and higher education, hardly valuing or funding for educators or education.

Impactful documentaries on climate change came out during technological innovation including the internet; however, the ubiquity of free YouTube and social media was more recent, impacting younger participants of Generation Z, which is important. Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" came out in 2006 (Guggenheim, 2006). David Attenborough's "The Blue Planet (2001)", "Planet Earth (2005)" (BBC Our Planet Now, 2021) and other documentaries had impacted millennials and Generation Z as well as their parents despite tumultuous political, economic, social, and legal climates between 2001 and 2021. However, younger participants had free access to his documentaries from an early age via YouTube (BBC, 2021), while older participants had limited access via DVD or TV. During the Obama Administration, mandatory recycling was particularly spreading on the west coast and helped millennials have lasting personal recycling habits (LeBlanc, 2019) while younger populations had become more concerned about advocating for their survival and the survival of the planet by protesting industries/companies or policies that would harm natural environments and their well-being (LeBlanc, 2019; Amnesty International, 2019; Longman, 2020).

The lack of peacefulness is not limited to climate change. Social injustice experienced by Indigenous communities was directly related to the protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline initiated and supported by younger generations (Elbein, 2017; Hersher, 2017). Due to international pressure for equity, inclusion, and social justice, the Japanese government finally recognized the Ainu as Indigenous people of Japan with the 2019 Ainu Recognition Bill, although their rights are not fully restored. Social justice for Ainu and other Indigenous communities in Japan through language and cultural literacy is also important. The Upopoy

National Ainu Museum opened in July of 2020, the year for Tokyo Olympics (postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic) as the first national museum to dedicate to Ainu Indigenous communities in Hokkaido, Japan (Bassetti, 2020). Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* (1997) is frequently utilized in the classroom for cultural literacy regarding these topics. Despite the political divide pronounced during the Trump Administration, parental support for teaching about climate change at home/schools has dramatically increased (Kamenetz, 2019) along with large-scale advocacy for social justice for Indigenous communities worldwide. Therefore, it is important to have further inquiries on harmonious existence with nature and advocacy for social justice via multigenerational images, perceptions, and expressions in foreign language education.

### **Attracted to the Complexity of Language/Communication**

As I have stated earlier, the two populations differed regarding the range and ranking for images related to the Japanese language. The second-year learners ranked images related to the Japanese language between one to three, indicating those images came much earlier than other images did, while the first-year learners ranked images related to the Japanese language between five and seven, indicating they came much later to their minds. Most first-year learners had less exposure to Japanese culture and less or no exposure to the Japanese language. Therefore, fascination toward the complexity of different literacy systems (Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji characters) evoked their interests. A couple of the participants who stayed in Japan mentioned that the complex language systems were daunting although interesting.

While the first-year participants indicated fascination toward Kanji characters because they were so different from their language, the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant mentioned how they could effectively learn them better. Those who had

more exposure to Japanese culture and the Japanese language mentioned the complexity of unspoken social codes to determine when to use honorific, polite, or casual forms of Japanese.

### **Commitment to Learning and the Importance of Formal Education**

Those who had more exposure to Japanese/Japanese culture, or second-year learners indicated the importance of language as a vehicle to understand people who speak it. Thus, their interest shifted from fragmented images to deeply understanding common attributes of human interactions and experiences by improving communications in Japanese. The shift reflected their high frequent images related to characteristics (22.5%) (See images related to characteristics).

In their comments, those who had more exposure to Japan/Japanese culture regardless of which population, had formal education (history, Japanese classes, or other related courses, Japanese clubs/circles, Japanese immersion programs, study abroad programs). In addition, nine participants were bilingual; ten participants grew up in multicultural environments. Some had interactions with Japanese friends, exchange students, military colleagues, family members, or teachers who had stayed in Japan. Ten participants stayed or lived in Japan. Over half of the second-year learners and about 40% of the first-year learners had Japanese friends. They made friends via formal education or people they had known. All these elements can neurologically, emotionally, and socially increase diverse learning processes strengthening the executive area, emotional intelligence, empathy, and connectivity (Bransford et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016; Bhat, 2015; Snowden, 1997; Stilwell et al., 2016; Heron et al., 2011). The formal education throughout adulthood also increases the Cognitive Reserves (CR) and could prevent or delay the onset of Alzheimer's and dementia because the CR enhances the connectivity of diverse learnings and strengthen the executive area that involves critical thinking and decision making (Bransford et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016; Bhat, 2015; Snowden, 1997; Stilwell et al., 2016).

Thus, learning framework (formal education) with multimodalities, multiliteracies, flexibility, non-judgement, and fun elements enhances critical consciousness for reevaluating biases in the learning environments where individuals interact at the macro, community, social, emotional, academic, and personal levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bransford et al., 2010; Bhat 2015; Goleman, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007; Horvath, 2014; Tulloch et al., 2017). Because of the plasticity of the brain, commitment to learning throughout life helps re-evaluate what has been omitted, deemphasized, fabricated, or desensitized (Frasnelli, et al., 2011; Dormal et., 2017; Van Wassenhove, 2013).

From the study alone, it is unclear if the participants' attraction toward complexity is due to the lack of complexity in the learning environments in the U.S., or the natural process of learning or both. It is worthwhile to explore with another study.

### **Invisibility of Women of Asian Descent and Wartime History: Silenced More Than Once**

#### *Silence as a virtue*

Among Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, and people of Asian descent, patience and resiliency without complaints or speaking up have been regarded as a cultural virtue (White, 2012; AAPI, 2021). The "virtue" for not talking about anything negative is particularly prevalent among women. Silence as a virtue has a contradiction of submissively beautiful images and super-strong warriors. This can mean that women of Asian descent are silenced by Confucian, imperialistic, or patriarchal cultures in their communities or country of origin (White, 2012), and silenced again in non-Asian, colonist countries by their systems and people who had been impacted by those systems. At the same time, they are also pressured to achieve unattainable psychological strength as warriors (Rose, 2017), which leads to modern citizen behavior that was part of wartime propaganda.

Some respondents implied or stated that their grandparents had grown up during Japanese colonization/imperial era. However, their grandparents did not speak about wartime experiences. A couple of respondents mentioned that to shield grandchildren, the grandparents might have purposely spoken about those difficult experiences in Japanese which respondents were not able to understand. One respondent also mentioned a Japanese female teacher had felt “showing affection towards another out in the open often made others uncomfortable.” These examples shed light on the stigma of sounding “negative” despite legitimacy, or on being silent as a virtue in Asian cultures. One respondent mentioned such a struggle of a Japanese female teacher as follows:

“Do not talk about negative things in the past, just move on.”

According to Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) data, during the pandemic, there were close to 6,600 harassment/hate crimes against the AAPI populations and people of Asian descent (AAPI, 2021), and that 66% of those incidents was toward women. Pew Research data (Budiman, 2020) indicated that by the origin of birth, immigrants from Asia make up 28% of the U.S. immigrants. Despite the total percentage, fewer Americans were aware of the frequency of racial discrimination against Asian people<sup>16</sup> (27%), Hispanic people (30%) compared to against Black people (50%) (Daniller, 2021). Despite long years of presence as immigrants, the invisibility of the AAPI and people of Asian descent did not seem to come up until the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated anti-Asian sentiment. Countless propaganda images have been used during wartime and the years when economic/geopolitical issues had become intensified with any Asian nations. This would not help eradicate a vicious cycle of hate.

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<sup>16</sup> The demographic terms (Asian, Hispanic, Black) used in Pew Research Center survey data.

“Dirty”, “cheap”, “exotic”, or hyper-sexualized images on Asian women were prevalent during wartime propaganda that was used by Japan and the U.S. throughout Asia, indicating the complexity of oppression within the same culture/region and between different cultures (Young, 2019; Chang, 2021; Hale, 2018; Hughes, 2009; Jean, 2005; Kimura, 1995). Although the huge spike was directly related to the anti-Asian (particularly Chinese) rhetoric spoken by the previous president, the root cause is more complex. Violence and oppression against women and children of Asian descent have thousands of years of history with dynasties and strong patriarchies in their country of origin such as China, Korea, and Japan (White, 2002). Power imbalances had been systematically embedded in their cultures. Therefore, women of Asian descent had been silenced more than once, first by their own cultural and social codes originated from imperialism/patriarchies, and multiple times by colonist countries that had colonized/occupied their country of origin, including Japan and the U.S. Moreover, during the WWII or any events that intensify geo-political relations with Asia, to prove loyalty, U.S. citizens of Asian descent were compelled to excel as “model citizens”, productive workers, good American soldiers, or good obedient wives while being ignored, excluded, devalued, interned, attacked, or killed (Young, 2019; the Page Act of 1878).

The teaching of “good wife, good mother (ryousai kenbo in Japanese)” and Confucian education systematically began during the Meiji era when imperialism and westernization were implemented hand in hand in Japan (White, 2002; Donghyyn, 2006). The history of the Japanese flag and the Meiji Code of 1898 had an ironic relation to the “black ship” arrival of Commodore Perry from the U.S. in 1853, which required an identifiable national flag. Japan also would like to create the modern, unified image of Japan to present to the colonial, Western countries by implementing what it thought best practices of the world where colonialism and modernization

was the standard of civilization (White, 2002; Donghyun, 2006). During the dawn of the Meiji era, the Iwakura Mission of 1871 sent a group of Japanese officials to Europe to explore educational, legal, and military models (White, 2002; Cobbing et al., 1998). Imperial Japan decided to use a Prussian (later Germany) model for the constitution marked by strong militarization, a French military model, and the British education system (White, 2002; Cobbing et al., 1998). The Meiji Code of 1898 forced the sudden shift from the feudalistic samurai system to the Confucian family model to create an image of Japan. The exceptionalism of “*cool Japan where old and new co-exist in harmony unlike in other nations*” (Dower, 1999) sounds like an echo from the Meiji era, only cuter and cooler.

It is more problematic that propaganda used as colonists by Japan and the U.S. in Asia have been circulating and impacting the perceptions of all people, including people of Asian descent in addition to the ambiguity of what and where Asia is. Moreover, Pew Research Center (Kochhar & Cillufo, 2018) indicated that among immigrants, due to targeted immigration policies (demands for low-skilled vs. high-skilled Asians for cheaper labor), Asians had the highest inequality gap in 2018, which was higher than that of the white population. This trend represents high inequality gaps among Asian nations, affecting their approaches to foreign language education to gain access to higher education programs abroad. Both Japanese and English have been used as elite, global, or professional tools, which also symbolizes the role that Japan chose. The range of the choice was intentional, forced/pressured, or wanting to “whitewash” (Rose, 2017) themselves for survival, preference, or pride. According to Social Progress Index (SPI) and OECD data between 2005-2019, the highly-educated Asian nations/regions (Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan) have high gender inequality and

often high suicide rate. Japan ranks at the bottom for gender inequality, which continues to display in recent comments by the Tokyo Olympics chair (BBC, 2021).

The power imbalances exist among Asian communities and countries, which can be exploited to divide them for capital and political gains by systems and influential people in the U.S. Therefore, people of Asian descent are silenced more than once as they live their lives at all levels of ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Often, they also silence themselves not to stick out too much, which is a Japanese saying “*deru kugi wa utareru*”, meaning “do not be nails that stick out, otherwise, you will get struck down.”

### ***Language Barriers for Foreign-Born Older Asians***

Besides staying positively silent as a cultural virtue, for survival, or due to systematic oppression, people of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese descent may have encountered more language barriers based on English-based societies. This can lead to being invisible, unheard, misunderstood, or ridiculed. Pew Research Center (2015) on facts on Asian Americans indicated that in terms of the population over one million by descent in the U.S., China ranked the highest (5 million), followed by India (4 million), Vietnam (2 million), Korea (1.8 million), and Japan (1.4 million). However, among older foreign-born Asian populations, about half of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese people had language barriers for various reasons (e.g. English is not spoken in their country of origin; restricted use of their native language impacted English proficiency, public education was denied by law, poverty, etc.) (Galindo, 2011; Wong et al., 2016; Jensen, 2007; Young, 2019). It is also complicated that foreign-born Asians of Indian, Filipino or Vietnamese descent had higher English proficiency because of colonization or occupation by English-speaking countries that had impacted the result (Galindo, 2011; Wong et al., 2016; Jensen, 2007; Young, 2019).

A couple of the survey participants recognized sadness and unspoken memories that their grandparents had brought from their homeland but did not talk about. From the survey alone, it is not clear why they did not or were not able to talk. Their reasons could be cultural, personal, and linguistic. It would be worthwhile to explore why multigenerational stories could not be passed on and how language and history education play an important role.

“I wanted to learn Japanese so I can understand when my grandparents talked to each other or when they didn't want me to know what they were talking about.”

### ***Hyper-sexualized Anime Characters and Desensitization: Not Cool***

Among the first-year learners, 12% of the images were related to Anime/animated films, manga, or specific anime/video game characters, (e.g. Pokemon, Inuyasha), while among the second-year learners and the study abroad program participant, only 5.8% with fewer characters made up their images (See Table 3 & images related to anime). Interestingly, neither population paid attention to the plot of anime episodes; however, ten participants of all groups mentioned that their positivity toward anime was character development, emotional involvement, and complexity of humanity. Several participants also mentioned that they preferred complex characters, storytelling, and artful drawings in Japanese anime, particularly films (Hayao Miyazaki, Ghibli) to a Western binary view between good and evil. Many participants perceived anime as positive or somewhat neutral. Some participants indicated nostalgia toward anime because their Japanese friends introduced it or evoked happy childhood memories despite fragmented images. Despite the ubiquity of anime and their regular exposure into adulthood, only a couple of participants mentioned that hyper-sexualization of female or/and young characters were harmful. Three participants also mentioned that their parents (often mothers) had tried less exposure. Visual storytelling is proven effective for learning (Wammes et al., 2016);

however, why didn't most participants mention how gender roles and female images were portrayed in Japanese anime/films?

During the peak of the Japanese economic boom around the end of the 90s, hyper-sexualized, futuristic, or feudalistic female characters such as Motoko in *Ghost in the Shell* (Masamune, 1995-2017), Kagome and Sango in *Inuyasha* (Takahashi, 1996-2008) became popular in Japan as well as in the U.S. Popular anime series *Inuyasha* and *Bishoujo Senshi* (Beautiful Warriors) *Sailor Moon* (Takeuchi, 1991-1997) were created by women, Rumiko Takahashi, and Naoko Takeuchi respectively, as a sign of female empowerment. However, strong female warriors in series often let self-centered or harassing male characters get away with things. The confusing message has been normalized not only in the anime world but in Asian societies. A mixture of strong female images and submissive or silent actions against verbal attacks or harassment not only confuses the consumers but also can make it harder for both men and women to identify what verbal or sexual harassment look like (Takahashi, 2000; Takeuchi, 1994; Rose, 2017). Part of the “Cool Japan” (Dover, 1999) campaign included mass export of anime by further hyper-sexualizing female or young characters in addition to marketing “cute or kawaii” culture via Japanese products such as Pokemon. Despite the ubiquity of Japanese products, anime, or games, the compounded devaluation of girls, women, and children did not get enough attention. As the participants indicated that they paid attention less to the content and their images from anime were vague. However, a couple of participants who had more exposure to Japan/Japanese culture pointed out the “dark side of anime” as harmful, and that their parents were there to point out the “dark side.” A reality check may sound negative and difficult at times; however, it is an important reflective moment and needs multi-generational,

honest conversations. It is also important to explore and understand why the task for those uncomfortable reality checks fall on mothers, but not on fathers.

Hyper-sexualized female characters are not limited to Japanese anime, but profitable and prevalent in Hollywood, impacting women's self-image and pressuring women to stay strong physically and psychologically without losing beauty (Rose, 2017). Women of Asian descent have been impacted by wartime history in Asia, anti-racial immigration laws such as Chinese Exclusion of 1882, Page Act of 1875, and the Japanese-American Internment. Propaganda was used to stereotype Asians as "dirty", "strange", and devalued/sexualized women as objects (Young, 2019; PBS, 2018; Au et al., 2016).

Through the Cool-Japan campaign, the neoliberal, re-branding Japanese culture as a fun but mysterious commodity has created the blurry line between an illusion and facts, permeating Asia, and the U.S. where colonialism has intricately impacted women (Young, 2019; Chang, 2021; Hale, 2018; Hughes, 2009; Jean, 2005; Kimura, 1995). When these difficult facts were commented on by women or mothers, particularly women of Asian descent, would their children pay less attention than when comments were made by men or fathers? This question needs further research; however, this omission parallels the long-term, overdue invisibility of violence and discrimination against Asian communities, particularly women.

### **Advantages and Limitations of the Research**

First, although small sample size and restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic on research methods could create a lack of generalizability, it captured emerging themes or patterns through in-depth inquiry in immersive, authentic learning settings. Findings could lead to a starting point for further research. Second, there are few studies done on what factors influence or motivate students to take Japanese courses and on what implicit biases toward the target

culture language learners have. Third, to reduce the influences from philosophies, teaching styles, personalities of multiple instructors (including the researcher), the survey was conducted during the first week of the first-class of the three-term, sequenced first-year Japanese courses and most participants completed the surveys prior to the fall term of 2020. This population had less exposure to the Japanese language.

Most of the second-year learners and learners who were eligible to enroll in the second-year Japanese courses also completed the survey prior to the fall term of 2020 except the participants who completed all first-year Japanese courses during the winter of 2021. Thus, it was possible to capture the learners' perceptions of the target language and culture without these influences. Few studies/surveys have focused on faculty members' philosophies, theoretical frameworks, teaching styles, perceptions of the target culture and of their own, leadership styles, or intersectionality that directly or indirectly impact the changes in cultural awareness of their students. These topics need to be examined in future studies. Finally, the impact of the pandemic is widespread among staff, faculty, and students; therefore, the recruited students may not reflect the average population of Japanese language learners. The factors such as unemployment, family responsibilities, stress, lack of the Internet may influence the outcomes of the study. However, the pandemic has created more solidarity and support among peers through taking courses together; thus, community-like settings can foster students' openness to honestly explore, reflect, and inquire. All these factors helped me gather meaningful data (See Appendix A & B). In terms of gender studies, I will continue to have in-depth research studies on the language of deficiency in the target language via translation from other languages, on sexism embedded in the written language systems such as Chinese/Japanese kanji characters, and on images/roles related to anime or animated film characters.

## **Recommendations and Implications**

### **The Complexity of Learning Processes, Something Else, or Both?**

In terms of implications, from the study alone, it is not clear if language learners are attracted to the attributes that are missing in their own culture or environments, or if the emphasis toward complexity is a natural, holistic part of learning or both. There was more attraction toward anime by the first-year Japanese learners while the second-year learners or study abroad participants did not mention anime/game as the primary source of perceived images toward Japanese culture/language. Are beginning-level learners likely to seek visual storytelling such as anime because it helps them understand complex contexts better when language is limited? Or, was the anime phenomenon the result of the Cool-Japan campaign by selling the idea that anime is unique to Japan? Similarly, the complexity of Japanese interested many participants, particularly those who had more exposure to the Japanese language/culture. As I have mentioned earlier, scholars and scientists indicated that the learning process and language acquisition process are both complex (see Literature Review). In addition to neuroscientists, cognitive and language theorists, biologists (Martines & Boeckx, 2019) indicated that the innate ability to understand/utilize a language was inherently complex. We are capable of liking complexity and Japanese is not the only language that is complex. However, both the U.S. (the top economic power) and Japan (the second economic power during the Cool-Japan campaign) succeeded in marketing their language as a global, professional index similarly in terms of a capitalistic approach and differently in terms of image creation. The Cool-Japan campaign created a myth that Japan was mysteriously complex with a paradox of old and new and with intricacy and simplicity of Zen (Dover, 1999), although every culture is complex and mysterious until it is experienced. From the study alone, it is not clear if there is a difference in the

perception of the complexity of the Japanese language between the first-year learners and those who had more exposure to the target language/culture. Those who had more exposure mentioned the complexity of the language in ways that indicated their maturity in the language learning process. However, the first-year learners might have been influenced by the marketed notion of the Japanese language as a difficult, complex language. Do language learners of different proficiency levels show different levels of interest in complexity in the language learning process? More in-depth inquiries are needed to understand these questions.

Finally, all participating groups were already interested in foreign languages and committed to learning Japanese/Japanese culture. It is worthwhile to survey mechanisms of biases in other disciplines such as history, business, medicine, and engineering.

### **Through Experiences and Reflection: Go Back to the Beginning**

When the participants were asked what activities/materials, or teaching-styles they thought would help Japanese language learners understand Japanese culture/language better. One respondent summarized,

“[t]hrough experiences, human connections, emotional engagement.”

The most important recommendation for cultural literacy is to go back to the beginning of impactful events (happy or sad) memories and ask why those events have been treasured. Who was there? What was there? What did you hear, smell, see, or touch? How are those memories impacting you now?

From the study, the frequently mentioned entry point for learning something new (Japanese) was nostalgic but fragmented memories of people the participants cared about and interacted with (smell of food, voices, laughter, artifacts, photos). Until asked, the participants had not thought deeply about it. Through pausing to reflect, the sounds of the words spoken or

sung by people the participants cared about cease to stay static things. The action of recollection becomes a starting point to intricately weave the past with the present while safely exploring and understanding what we have become, who we are, what was lost on the way, and what we can build. One respondent summarized the importance of recalling and reflecting as below:

“My grandmother also kept furniture and other decorations from that time in her life, we didn't talk about it much but they made a deep impression on me as a child as something beautiful and valuable.”

A Canadian bilingual study for indigenous communities (Tulloch et al., 2017; Smith, 2012; Johnson, 2017) indicated their success in a community-based, multimodal, multigenerational, ecological approach. Younger generations learned dancing, storytelling, cooking from elders who were key figures for passing cultural heritage to future generations. In the Canadian study, colonial impact on education forced younger generations to learn English; thus, they lost touch with their heritage, language, and identity. The study bridged generations whose communication, culture, and appreciation had been fragmented. A community-based bilingual education transformed not only their community but also individuals. Therefore, from the present point where we stand, it is important to go back to the beginning of fragmented important memories.

The first-year learners had listed more images with the names of plants and animals, while those who had more exposure to the Japanese language and culture shifted more focus on characteristics of people, places, and contexts trying to find the commonality in all things and people, although they understood the complexity of humanity. However, between the shift, many participants had anecdotes regarding specific images, nostalgic artifacts, memories, sounds of voices, faces with nuanced feelings, or places. Words become meaningful because of

storytelling. Storytelling becomes more meaningful when learners have people who experience it together, which leads to collective empathy.

Natural learning occurs in an environment with human, diverse, and collaborative elements, so that learners can use the five senses to explore, analyze and synthesize information (Burgstahler & Coy, 2008; CAST, 2016; Sawaguchi, 2009; Scott et al., 2003; Zull, 2002).

Therefore, it is meaningful if learners can have a variety of options for creative projects to tell their stories through interviewing people (family members, people in their communities), making stories in small groups, or teaching the target language to someone. These activities would help them gather unspoken stories from their grandparents or people in their communities, help them appreciate the teaching/learning processes from a different perspective, and naturally encourage them to concentrate on using the language to communicate.

### **For Educators: History of Theories, Methods, Language, and Neuroscience**

According to the ACTFL report (Phillips & Abbot, 2011), between the 90s and the financial crisis, foreign language educators paid more attention to the National Standards than understanding theories and methods, building community networks, and becoming aware of the target culture. During these years when millennials and Generation z spent crucial early years of life, globally systemic inequalities widened due to reactions to historical events and consistent colonial influence (See Literature Review). The attitude of a foreign teacher influences the view of the target language/culture (Winch, 2015; Gayton, 2016). It is important to have more long-term studies on the relationship between biases of teachers/materials and students.

For educators, particularly language educators, it is essential to re-examine ideas and practices behind theories, methods, learning and teaching styles, and learning environments. These elements are white English-based and were published by people who had privileges to do

so; thus, without access to English or higher education, ideas and perspectives in other cultures and languages may have been omitted or culturally appropriated. Moreover, for methods, it is important to evaluate how those methods were used in other countries and who used them. For example, Direct Method had been used by the colonists to rob, oppress, and force the colonized people by forbidding or restricting the use of their own language. Total Physical Response (TPR), is an example of Direct Method, often being utilized for language education for children (Naeini & Shahrokhi, 2016). TPR utilized physical actions to see if the linguistic meanings were conveyed (Oflaz, 2019). Xenophobic immigration policies against Spanish-speaking immigrants utilized the restrictive direct method to produce English proficiency without understanding that the foundation of a non-native language acquisition required interaction with the native language and a humane learning environment. Yet, the history of language theories or methods is not taught or emphasized enough in terms of decolonization and equity. History education also includes the history of methods, theories, and definitions. Omitting how definitions have evolved undermines coloniality (Battiste, 2013) in education; thus, it can lead to systematic color blindness among leaders.

The perception gap toward the image of the Japanese flag parallels the lack of general history education unless they chose to find specific learning programs or environments where honest exploration was possible. Ramifications of coloniality (Battiste, 2013) are embedded in ecological systems of life while individuals go through the passage of time at different age levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, equitable language education requires a conscious effort to stay aware of historical, academic, and psychological biases and to transform with a holistic consciousness.

In terms of materials in all disciplines, not limited to those in language education, whether images are in the key materials or in the background, it is important to ask learners questions about images, photos, or vocabulary, because people have different perceptions and definitions. If there is a perception gap such as “red” and “the Japanese flag” from the survey, we can continue to inquire about possible reasons. From the survey, until being asked, some participants had not thought about image perceptions and sources of those images. Despite inclusive materials, language and culture are not static. Materials cannot represent all perspectives; however, inquiry builds a critical mind and helps learners understand that everyone is responsible to expand the world view and continue to learn. It also prevents teachers from re-creating sub-stereotypes.

### **Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Google, Facebook, and Babies**

A couple of participants indicated Google had already chosen what their preferences should be. The line between preference and bias is blurry. It is not always about racism. It is sometimes for biological survival, particularly when individuals are young infants. There is neuroscientific evidence to indicate that “out of sight, out of mind” is true. According to the brain-imaging study (Heron et al., 2011), infants, who are capable of identifying different faces of monkeys, have shifted their preferences to human faces of their race by 3.5 months. In contrast, they found that adults were less flexible to recognize unfamiliar faces such as faces not belonging to their race (Caucasian). Similarly, infants, who are capable of identifying different sounds (natural, human, or other), begin eliminating from the music map the sounds that they do not hear or recognize in their environments (Dormal et al., 2017; Johansson, 2006). Additionally, sound recognition and face recognition go hand in hand (Dormal et al., 2017; Blank et al., 2011). In terms of multimodal brain plasticity, the study on the shift from verbal to movement language

such as sign language on early deaf individuals indicated that the critical age for the establishment of the base language is during the first two years of childhood (Sadato et al., 2004). However, if their environments are linguistically, musically, naturally, and socially rich with a variety of sounds, infants will retain more sounds and can identify them (Sadato et al., 2004; Dormal et al., 2017; Heron-Dalaney et al., 2011).

All elements of life are intricately connected and essential; therefore, an ecological, multimodal, multicultural, multigenerational learning environment would allow infants to explore with five senses to discover the complexity of human and natural worlds. In contrast, an accumulation of omission, deemphasis, or fabrication compartmentalizes the world view, which individuals end up being trapped without knowing they are confined. When adults consistently omit, deemphasize, or create a series of preferences consciously or unconsciously, it would inevitably change the infants' world into a Google bubble with systematic and personal biases. Live brain imaging technology can indicate how learning foreign languages, sign language, or musical instruments strengthen connectivity and the executive areas used in complex problem-solving (Wong et al., 2016; Johansson, 2006). Communicative competence also requires EI (self-awareness, self-control, relational management, and social awareness) through meaningful human interactions in a safe, flexible, multimodal learning environment (Goleman, 2011; Wong et al., 2016; Tulloch et al., 2017). Therefore, when individuals can choose commitment to learning and reevaluate learning throughout adulthood, it stays as long-term memory and builds a network of people that they interact and learn with. Whether intentional or unintentional, what becomes out of sight leads to stay out of mind, which is the mechanism of omission, deemphasis, and biases (Heron et al., 2011).

### **Conclusion**

In summary, critical consciousness takes a long time to develop requiring frameworks (formal education) and a safe, multimodal, multigenerational, non-judgmental, loving environment where individuals can learn, explore, take risks, and reflect at all levels of ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Cultural literacy often begins with fragmented, treasured memories that we unconsciously or consciously try not to forget. It is a history of life because each of us is a culture that began a long time ago and continues to tell stories to the future.

“You must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home. ....some good, sacred memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education. If one carries many such memories with him into life, one is safe to the end of one’s last days, and if one has only good memory left in one’s heart, even that may sometimes be the means of saving us.”

Dostoyevsky, F. (1879). *The Brothers Karamazov*

As I have mentioned earlier, between the late 90s and financial crisis, political, academic, financial, social, and scientific events have created both xenophobia and evidence for learning as a synthesis of diverse learning processes that required, pre-knowledge, a safe, human environment, and multimodal inputs (Leontiev, 2006; Bransford et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016; Bhat, 2015; Snowden, 1997; Stilwell et al., 2016; Martines & Boeckx, 2019; Van Wassenhove, 2013). Events during these years included technological innovation, globalization, 9/11, the Iraq War, NCLB with an emphasis toward systematic standardization, stem research, and brain-imaging technology. During these years, systematic inequalities widened in an unprecedented level while budgets for education, particularly humanities were reduced. The required list of reading for English or World Literature did not include or hardly included Russian or Asian literature. Was that racism or politics? Around 2003, the wealthy districts that were able to purchase new textbooks began adding books such as “The Kite Runner (Hosseini, 2003)” and

“Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (Satrapi, 2000)”, however, why there was no or hardly any literature from Russia and the rest of Asia, particularly from China, Japan, Korea, Philippines, or Vietnam? Despite the difference in political views among these countries and between them and the U.S., each country has a long, complex history with profound human experiences. Literature provides us with vicarious experiences to discover and understand different perspectives and different times in history. Therefore, it is important to embrace diversity in terms of oppression, privileges, languages, cultures, history, generations, regions/countries, or other important backgrounds that create complexity and ambiguity. It is also essential for these complex populations to be able to speak up against hate/discrimination when they should.

Education has become a vehicle to omit, deemphasize, and revise. It can become a vehicle to connect, explore, and develop people. Therefore, my mind goes back to the beginning. What aspects of the target and cultures do learners emphasize while de-emphasizing or omitting others? How are implicit biases from white-English coloniality in the K to college systems influencing foreign language education in the U.S.? To explore these questions, I asked the Japanese adult language learners to reflect on the perceived images of Japan/Japanese culture and found what was omitted, deemphasized, fabricated, and unknown. However, the main theme was that many learners had picked up fragmented untold stories and feelings from people whom they had cared about, from food they ate, from souvenirs they saw, and from songs they heard. As one participant summarized, cultural literacy is about experiences, emotional engagement, and human connections. What do we or I treasure? Do we or I have preserved memories from childhood or from home/homeland? What is language? What is a country? When we speak of a

country, does that represent the entire population with abundant perspectives, languages, cultures, and histories?

Language matters because people who speak it matter. These fundamental questions lead to the connectivity of all parts of societies and the natural environment as essential, not exceptional. As long as something is exceptional or superior, a hierarchy has a dangerous consequence of devaluing the complexity of humanity, interactions with environments, well-being, learning processes, and character development. Language, culture, people, and environments are constantly evolving and changing. It is a simple fact, yet it is hard to keep it in mind. Therefore, we must continue to exercise “critical consciousness”, passing education, wisdom, and experiences to the next generations.

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## Appendix A

### Japanese Cultural Literacy Survey (First-Year Japanese Learners)<sup>17</sup>

#### Researcher

This Japanese Cultural Survey is a research project for Yukari Birkett, a doctoral student in Educational Leadership in Higher Education at the University of Washington.

#### Purpose

This anonymous semi-structured survey is designed to understand what motivates students to take Japanese courses and how they view Japanese culture/language. This survey should take you 30-45 minutes to complete. I would appreciate it if you could give in-depth answers. If you have any questions, please contact me at [yb28@uw.edu](mailto:yb28@uw.edu). Your honest feedback will help me understand key elements of cultural literacy and create an effective learning environment of foreign/international language education. The information collected was analyzed for my dissertation. The data collected cannot identify you, so your privacy is protected. You can also withdraw from the study at any time.

#### Consent to participate in Japanese Cultural Literacy Survey:

- a. **Yes, I understood the purpose of this survey and the protection of my privacy. I will consent to participate in the Japanese Cultural Literacy Survey.**
- b. **No, I will decline to participate in the Japanese Cultural Literacy Survey.**

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<sup>17</sup> Survey questions are the same for second-year Japanese learners.

### Section 1: Cultural Literacy

Q1: What are the images/words that come to mind when you hear the word, “Japan” or “Japanese”? **Please write seven words or phrases that came to your mind in the order you thought about:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Q2: Where do you think your images of Japan come from?"

Q3: Look at your list of words/phases on Q1. Which images are positive? Where are those positive images coming from?

Q4: Among your impressions of Japan, what images are negative? Where are those negative images coming from?

Q5: Which images are neither positive nor negative? Why do you think that is?

Q6: Was there a time your perception of Japan/Japanese culture changed? (positive or negative, or neutral) What impacted that change? (e.g. specific events, circumstances, information, relationships, etc.)

- a. Positive (Write explanations in text.)

- b. Neutral (Write explanations in text.)
- c. Negative (write explanations in text.)

Q7: Have you stayed in Japan more than a week? (If NO, skip to Section 2).

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q8: If you answered YES, at what age did you live or stay in Japan for the first time?

- a. 0-5
- b. 6-10
- c. 11-13
- d. 14-17
- e. 18-21
- f. Above 21

Q9: How long was the stay?

- a. Less than a month.
- b. Less than a year.
- c. More than a year.

Q10: Do you remember your first impressions on Japan/Japanese language? Were your first impressions like the responses to Q1 on the image of Japan?

## **Section 2: Language Learning**

Q11: Did you have specific events or information that helped you understand Japan/Japanese culture during the pandemic? How did those change your perception of Japan/Japanese culture?

(Please briefly explain how that information helped or did not help you in text.)

1. Yes, I had such events/information that helped me. (Write brief explanation in text.)
2. Maybe (Write brief explanation in text.)
3. No, I did not have such events/information.

Q12: Did information or activities from Japanese courses help you understand Japanese culture better? How did those help you understand Japanese culture or language better? (Please briefly explain in text.)

1. Yes. (Write brief explanation in text.)
2. Maybe (Write brief explanation in text.)
3. No.

### **Section 3: Basic Information**

Q13: What is your age? Please choose your age range.

- a) Under 18
- b) 18-20
- c) 21-29
- d) 30-39
- e) 40-49
- f) 50-59
- g) Above 60

Q14: Why are you taking a Japanese course? (You can choose more than one option.)

- a. Requirement for transfer
- b. My major
- c. Have Japanese relatives
- d. Studied Japanese at a high school
- e. Studied Japanese at a middle school
- f. Studied Japanese at a primary school
- g. Interested in foreign languages
- h. For career advancement
- i. Interested in living in Japan
- j. Interested in Japanese education abroad program
- k. Other: Please write:

Q15: What is your major?

- a. Write your major:
- b. No, I do not have a major.

Q16: Do you *frequently* speak/use more than one language *at home/work*?

- a. No, English is my primary language.
- b. speak/use more than one language (bilingual)
- c. speak/use more than two languages (tri-lingual)
- d. speak/use more than three languages (multi-lingual)

Q17: Do you have Japanese friends?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Q18: If you answered YES on Q17, please choose the closest answer to describe how you became friends (You can choose more than one option)

- a. Room/house mate(s)
- b. Relatives
- c. In the neighborhood
- d. Through mutual friends
- e. Social media (e.g. Facebook.)
- f. Went to the same school(s)
- g. Through work
- h. Through hobbies (e.g. hiking)
- i. Playing virtual video games
- j. Through anime/costume conventions
- k. Through education abroad programs
- l. Other: Please write:

Q19: Do you frequently watch Japanese movies/TV shows? (You can choose more than one.)

- a. Anime
- b. Fantasy/Science Fiction
- c. Historical dramas
- d. Music (e.g. J-pop)
- e. Horror
- f. School dramas
- g. Variety shows

h. Other: Please write:

Q20: Would like to share anything else about your impressions of Japanese culture/language?

Q21: Are you willing to participate in virtual interviews about the survey responses for my better understanding? If Yes, please go to the following Google form to provide your email address.

1. Yes. Embedded link to the Google Form: (The actual address has been deleted)
2. No.

Thank you very much for your participation!

## **Appendix B**

### **Japanese Cultural Literacy Interviews/Surveys**

#### **(Japanese Learners Who Participated in Japanese Education Abroad Programs**

##### **Prior to the Pandemic)**

#### **Researcher**

This semi-structure Japanese Cultural interview is part of a research project for Yukari Birkett, a doctoral student in Educational Leadership in Higher Education at the University of Washington.

#### **Purpose**

This semi-structured virtual interview is designed to understand what motivates students to take Japanese courses and how they view Japanese culture/language. This survey should take you 30-45 minutes to complete. I would appreciate it if you could give in-depth answers. If you have any questions, please contact me at [yb28@uw.edu](mailto:yb28@uw.edu). Your honest feedback will help me understand key elements of cultural literacy and create an effective learning environment of foreign/international language education. The information collected was analyzed for my dissertation. To protect your privacy, your actual name was replaced with a code; therefore, the data collected cannot identify you. The written survey questions was sent prior to the virtual interview. The researcher may ask you for clarification/a deeper understanding of your responses. Video features will not be used for privacy. You can also withdraw from the study at any time.

#### **Consent to participate in Japanese Cultural Literacy Interviews with the Written**

#### **Questions via Zoom (without video features):**

**A. Yes, I understood the purpose of this survey and the protection of my privacy. I will consent to participate in the Japanese Cultural Literacy Interview/Survey.**

**B. No, I will decline to participate in the Japanese Cultural Literacy Interview.**

### **Section 1: Cultural Literacy**

Q1: What are the images/words that come to mind when you hear the word, “Japan” or “Japanese”? **Please write seven words or phrases that came to your mind in the order you thought about:**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

Q2: Where do you think your images of Japan in Q1 come from?

Q3: Look at your list of words/phrases on Japan in Q1. Which images are positive? Where are those positive images coming from?

Extremely positive and why:

Moderately positive and why:

Slightly positive and why:

Q4: Among your images of Japan in Q1, which images are negative? Where are those negative images coming from?

Extremely negative and why:

Moderately negative and why:

Slightly negative and why:

Q5: Which images are neither positive nor negative? Why do you think that is?

Q6: Was there a time your perception of Japan/Japanese culture changed? (positive, negative, or neutral) What impacted that change? (e.g. specific events, circumstances, information, relationships, etc.)

Q7: At what age did you live or stay in Japan for the first time?

g. 0-10

h. 11-17

i. 18-21

j. 22-30

k. 31-40

l. 41 +

Q8: How long was the stay?

a. Less than a month

b. Less than 6 months

- c. Between 7 and 12 months
- d. Longer than a year

Q9: Do you remember your first impressions on Japan/Japanese language? Were your first impressions like the responses to Q1 on the image of Japan?

Q10: How did your first impressions change after staying or living in Japan? What contributed to the change?

### **Section 2: Learning Opportunities**

Q11: Did you have specific events that contributed to the understanding of Japan/Japanese culture during the COVID-19 pandemic? What were they? How did these events change your perception of Japan/Japanese culture?

Q12: Prior to the pandemic, what activities/events or information contributed to your understanding of Japan/Japanese culture? How did that information change your understanding of Japanese culture/language?

Q13: Did your understanding of your own culture/language change how you view Japanese culture/language? Please explain.

### **Section 3: Basic Information**

Q14: What is your age? Please choose your age range.

- h) 19-29
- i) 30-39
- j) 40-49
- k) 50-59
- l) Above 60

Q15: What is your major if you are still in school? (What was your last major?)

Please write:

No, I do/did not have a major.

Q16: How long did you study Japanese?

- l. Less than 2 years
- m. 2-4 years
- n. More than 4 years

Q17: What motivated you to continue to learn Japanese? (e.g. relationships, teachers, courses, interests, events, etc.) (You can choose more than one.)

- a. Relationships (friends, relatives, etc.)
- b. Teachers: (K-12, college, karate teacher, etc.)
- c. Courses (Japanese, international business, etc.):
- d. Interests:
- e. Events:
- f. Career:
- g. Other:

Q18: Do you *frequently* speak/use more than one language *at home/work*?

- e. No, English is my primary language.
- f. speak/use more than one language (bilingual)
- g. speak/use more than two languages (tri-lingual)
- h. speak/use more than three languages (multi-lingual)

Q19: Do you have Japanese friends? (If No, please skip to Q21).

- c. Yes
- d. No

Q20: If you answered YES on Q19, please describe how you became friends. You can choose more than one option.)

- C. Room/house mate(s)
- D. Relatives/Partners
- E. In the neighborhood
- F. Through mutual friends
- G. Social media (e.g. Facebook.)
- H. Went to the same school(s)
- I. Through work
- J. Through hobbies (e.g. hiking)
- K. Playing virtual video games
- L. Through anime conventions
- M. Through education abroad programs
- N. Other: Please write:

Q21: What books/films/shows contributed most to your current understanding of Japanese culture/language?

Q22: Through your experiences, what activities/materials, or teaching-styles do you think will help Japanese language learners understand Japanese culture/language better?

Q23: Would you like to add anything else regarding your understanding of Japanese culture?

Thank you very much for your participation!