

# Multicultural Japan? Discourse and the 'Myth' of Homogeneity [Indonesian Translation Available]

**Chris Burgess**

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It is not sufficient to fight against myths by destroying one myth and replacing it with another, as in, for example, criticising the myth of the homogenous nation by replacing it with the myth of the mixed nation (Oguma 2002: 349)

### Introduction

Recent years have seen a trend towards the stabilisation of global migration flows (OECD 2005: 17/53). One factor behind this trend may be the growing atmosphere of global anxiety and fear, fuelled by media reports of terrorist atrocities, bird flu, and nuclear proliferation. Such an atmosphere exacerbates the process of exclusion, opposition, and hierarchisation that is known as Othering (Cahoone 1996: 16). This is particularly evident in attitudes and policies towards migration, specifically in the imposition of much stricter immigration controls and the emergence of extremist anti-immigrant movements in many nations.

Japan, an economic superpower with a sophisticated media infrastructure, has hardly been immune to these global currents. By contrast, the dominant academic discourse on Japan has, in general, continued to frame itself in a political ideal of a 'multicultural Japan',

one which dismisses the popular discourse of 'homogeneous Japan' as myth and which draws on 'factual' demographic and economic data to argue for the inevitability of further migration. This paper examines the discrepancy between an increasingly negative global discourse on migration and an unwaveringly positive 'multicultural Japan' discourse. I argue that a failure to acknowledge popular discourse as a crucial element in the construction of Japanese social reality can lead to a distorted understanding of migrants and migration in Japan.

### 1. Nihonjinron and 'Multicultural Japan'

In the field of Japanese Studies, one prominent discourse is that of a 'multicultural Japan'. Much of this can be traced back to a number of critiques (e.g. Aoki 1990; Befu 1987; Dale 1986; Mouer and Sugimoto 1986; Yoshino 1992) of Nihonjinron, a genre of writing discussing Japanese cultural uniqueness. Mouer and Sugimoto (1986: 406) define Nihonjinron as having two central tenets: (a) Japanese society is 'uniquely' unique and (b) group orientation is the dominant cultural pattern which shapes behaviour. A central premise of Nihonjinron is that the Japanese are a homogeneous people (*tan'itsu minzoku*) who constitute a racially unified nation (*tan'itsu minzoku kokka*). Ironically, it has been pointed out (Revell 1997: 74) that the origins of this post-war discussion on national identity are not Japanese but rather American, specifically Ruth Benedict's (1946) *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.

Although Nihonjinron is a convenient

shorthand, writings are diverse and varied covering a number of major themes. For example, Fujiwara's (2005) best-selling 'Style of a Nation', which emphasises, bushido-style, the importance of *individual* (rather than group) feeling or spirit (*jyochō*), advertises itself as 'epoch-making' (*kakkiteki*) Nihon(jin)ron. In an often cited 1978 survey by the Nomura Research Institute, writings on national character, desire and satisfaction, work ethics, saving, time, and even foreigners' views on Japanese economic activities were all subsumed under the Nihonjinron label (Wikipedia 2006a). Revell (1997: 74) notes that in the Nomura survey, often used as evidence for the pervasiveness of the genre, any book which had 'Japanese' in the title or which discussed 'obviously Japanese concepts' was classified as Nihonjinron (see also Yoshino 1992: 227). In fact, Revell (1997: 74) argues that most Japanese are not even aware that they are reading a definable body of literature, and may need reminding. Thus, what one expert (Befu, 2001: 14) characterises narrowly as a species of cultural nationalism which is presumably found everywhere,[2] has, for academics and publishers, come to broadly encompass almost any text - rarely state-originated, sometimes academic or pseudo-academic, mostly popular, occasionally crackpot - on Japanese society or identity. As Clammer (2001:10/66) points out, Nihonjinron has come, for better or worse, to be representative of *all* indigenous thinking; almost all Japanese social thought has come to be seen through the lenses of Nihonjinron and "anything remotely nativist is immediately classified as (in a negative sense) Nihonjinron."

Although typically referred to as a 'discourse', Nihonjinron appears to lack the unity or internal coherence to qualify as a single system of knowledge. Nevertheless, the publication of the Nihonjinron critiques listed above was followed by a large number of books placing themselves in direct opposition to - and seeking to refute - the Nihonjinron 'discourse'. The first

wave of writings in this mould were primarily by Japanese scholars (e.g. Komai 1992; Oguma 1995; Onuma 1993) who were almost uniformly concerned with 'overcoming' the 'myth of homogeneity' (*tan'itsu minzoku no shinwa*). In 1995, two books, both jointly edited by John Maher (Maher and Macdonald 1995; Maher and Yashiro 1995), focussed on the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity in Japanese society, combined in Japanese as *Towards a New Order: Language and Cultural Diversity in Japan* (Maher and Honna 1994). Like the first wave of Japanese writings, Maher's project was framed largely as a response to a 'dangerous' Nihonjinron:

The purpose of this volume is to accelerate the burial process that will finish off a chronic dependency on the invented tradition of monolingualism and monoculturalism (Maher and Yashiro 1995: 2)

Michael Weiner (1997), in *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, continued in this vein, challenging the 'dominant paradigm' of homogeneity by emphasising the diversity that exists in Japanese society. Weiner (1997: xiii) argued that Japan was home to diverse populations despite "a master narrative of 'racial' and cultural homogeneity which precludes the existence of minorities." We are rarely told *who* has actually said that Japan is homogenous, as evidenced by the lack of references. Yet, today, writers queue up to debunk the 'myth' of homogeneity, which has come to represent a straw man *par-excellence*.

From the mid-1990s, a number of books about migrant settlement in Japan began to appear (e.g. Komai 1995b; Miyajima and Kajita 1996; Weiner and Hanami 1998). Soon after, the word 'multicultural' became quite common in writings on Japan. In a volume which promised to offer a 'multicultural perspective' on 'Nihonjinron at the end of the Twentieth Century', Mouer and Sugimoto (1995: 242), the

first to critically examine the Nihonjinron genre systematically, titled a section of their paper 'Multicultural Japan'. Although they seemed to be pointing to nothing more than the existence of social variation in Japanese society, it marked the start of a 'multicultural Japan' boom. For example, in 1996, Denoon *et al* published *Multicultural Japan*, a book which purported to challenge the 'conventional' view of Japanese society as being monocultural and homogenous (McCormack 1996). Like Mouer and Sugimoto, the term 'multicultural' was used in order to stress the variation and diversity present in Japanese society, a diversity which, they were keen to stress, had a long history. Sugimoto (1999: 93) defines the 'multicultural paradigm' as one that:

embraces all ethnic minorities of the underlying Japanese population...Multiculturality here...comprises the so-called subcultural groupings, including for example, female culture, part-time workers' culture, physically handicapped people's culture, youth culture, homosexual culture and so on.

The problem was that while some writers (e.g. Sugimoto 1997: chapter 1) continued to use 'multicultural society' as a simple shorthand for variation in society, which has always existed, others began to use it to describe the emergence of the kind of political ideal in Japan which originated in countries like Australia, Canada, and the United States in the 1970s. In the case of Japan, the emergence of 'multiculturalism' as a political ideal is often traced to the influx of racially distinct - that is, visually foreign - Asian workers in the late 1980s (Lie 2001: 18). Examples of work in this genre include the edited volume by Douglass and Roberts (2000), subtitled 'the advent of a multicultural society', Hiroshi Komai's (2006) *Gurobarujidai no Nihon-gata Tabunkakyoseishakai* (Japanese Style Multicultural Society in the Global Era), and

Graburn *et al.*'s (forthcoming) edited volume which looks at the 'growing and contested forms of multiculturalism' as newcomers transform Japan at the grassroots level. Here, multiculturalism refers not so much to a state of society but rather to 'the adoption of an ideal form of public policy' (Graburn and Ertl forthcoming) in response to increased numbers of foreign workers and other migrants. Below, I analyse the two senses in which 'multicultural Japan' is used, namely as variation, which has always existed (1.1) and as a new political ideal (1.2).

### 1.1 'Multicultural Japan' as Social Variation

The idea that social variation exists in Japanese society is uncontroversial. As Morris-Suzuki (1998: 156/192) notes, if culture is taken to mean the possession of the same knowledge, values, and experiences then any national society is by definition multicultural: culture is always 'multi' by its very nature. Nevertheless, the focus on difference, which has always existed in Japan, can perhaps be taken too far. Ryang (2005: 10/201) calls for caution in what she calls the 'recent and powerful trend of representing Japan from a...pluralistic angle' with its ever-increasing celebration of diversity, marginals, and minorities. In the first place, the overriding concern with *ethnic* minorities tends, as Clammer (2001: 7) points out, to occlude other dimensions of difference such as gender and class,[3] as well as drawing attention away from the ways difference itself is maintained. But even the inclusion of multiple forms of difference has its pitfalls. Citing Maher and MacDonald's (1995) *Diversity in Japanese Culture and Language* as an example, Ryang highlights the danger in conflating (and ignoring internal differences within) highly diverse subcultural groups, such as anorexic women, returnee children, the Ainu, and 'Koreans':

Terms such as 'diversity' and

‘marginalization’ need to be placed in proper perspective...a mere lumping together of the marginals as an appendix to the mainstream can be counterproductive, as it obscures the historic and social specificity of the discrimination and oppression each group has experienced (Ryang 2005: 202/3)

A further problem is that the ‘multicultural Japan’ discourse, by framing itself in direct opposition to the Nihonjinron ‘discourse’, to some extent legitimises and reinforces the latter genre and opens itself up to some of the same problems found in the very ideology it seeks to debunk:

[Mouer and Sugimoto] still choose to frame their argument in terms of a debate with the Nihonjinron even though it is the (false) assumptions of this that they are supposed to be attacking...so the Nihonjinron is kept in the foreground of academic debate, especially internationally, by those who deny its legitimacy...Paradoxically the concentration by scholars on the Nihonjinron...has actually succeeded in strengthening rather than undermining the view of Japan as a culturally and sociologically monolithic entity (Clammer 2001: 67)

Clammer (2001: 25/96) goes on to note that much work in Japanese Studies is still dominated by a ‘categorical mode’, a focus on ‘classificatory principles’ which are supposed to somehow capture the ‘reality’ that actually constitutes Japan. Thus, just as Nihonjinron writings use key words, such as *amae*, *kanjinshugi*, *bokashi*, *ganbari*, to encapsulate the essence of Japanese society, so too avowedly anti-Nihonjinron writers continue to attempt to explain Japanese society through concepts such as *ie*, *seishin*, *wrapping*, and *uchi/soto*:

[T]he attempt to propose a model of Japanese society as a counterpart to the nihonjinron premise is wrought with as many flaws as is nihonjinron itself, in that it basically remains within the same dead-end generalization (Ryang 2005: 220)

Ryang (2005: 158/84) further remarks that while it would be intellectually risky, indeed nonsensical, to present a view of, say, US society under one all-embracing principle this does not seem to be the case for writings about Japan. One can speculate that the recent emphasis on ‘diversity’ in Japan, because of the way it is framed in contrast to a dominant mainstream ‘homogeneity’, has merely served to reify so-called ‘minorities’, tacitly reaffirming the monocultural image of Japan and encouraging further stereotypical generalisations.

## 1.2 ‘Multicultural Japan’ as Political Ideal

As pointed out earlier, whereas some writers use the term ‘multicultural Japan’ as a simple shorthand for social variation, which has long existed, others use it to refer more specifically to a new political ideology – and the policies which accompany it – that has apparently arisen in response to the growing visibility of migrants in Japanese society. Multiculturalism describes both an ideal (an ideology) and the actual official policies adopted by the governments of ‘settlement’ countries from the 1970s. While different versions exist, most multiculturalisms are at root a celebration of – and a lesson on the importance of maintaining – equality and cultural diversity. In a multicultural society, co-existence, tolerance, mutual respect, and cultural exchange are seen as bringing great benefits to the nation as a whole. Although support for multiculturalism is not necessarily the same thing as support for immigration, in practice a belief in the doctrine of multiculturalism underlies a belief in the value of migration.

In testing the validity of the term ‘multicultural Japan’ as used in this latter sense, we may ask three questions. First (1.2.1), does there exist a popular ideology in Japan that sees ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity together with migration as positive? Second (1.2.2), in concrete terms what kind of ‘multicultural’ policies have been adopted in the country, particular in terms of treatment of non-citizens and ethnic groups? Third (1.2.3), are there a large number of migrants present in (and transforming) Japanese society and is this number growing?

### 1.2.1 Discourses of Multiculturalism

In terms of the first question, it is important to remember that a discourse is not ‘true’ or ‘false’,<sup>[4]</sup> and that discourses themselves become social reality or conventional knowledge as they are internalised, circulated, and utilised by a population. For example, as Ryang (2005: 29/chapter 2) and Goodman (1992:5) point out, Benedict’s *Chrysanthemum*, which sold something like 2.3 million copies in Japanese, has been so widely disseminated and internalised by ordinary Japanese that it contributed to the creation of a particular worldview. It is therefore disingenuous for Nihonjinron critics to describe it, in one breath, as a ‘master narrative’ or ‘overarching discourse’ (Weiner 1997) which ‘continues to be both dominant and pervasive’ (Sugimoto 1997: ix), and then in the next to dismiss it as a ‘myth’, ‘illusion’, or ‘empirically false’ (Clammer 2001: 3). It is crucial to recognise that dominant ideologies are not something ‘false’ that are separate from the ‘real’ Japanese culture but rather make up a system of thought that reflects and constitutes everyday reality.

One illustration of the importance of not seeing discourse as ‘true’ or ‘false’ comes from the content of and reactions to comments by mainstream politicians regarding Japan’s ‘homogeneity’. In 1986, then Prime-Minister Nakasone remarked that Japan’s high standard

of education was due to its racial homogeneity, in contrast to America where the presence of blacks and Puerto Ricans resulted in low standards. Almost twenty years later, in October 2005, Internal Affairs and Communications Minister, and later Foreign Minister Aso Taro, described Japan as having ‘one nation, one civilisation, one language, one culture, and one race’ (*Daily Yomiuri* 2005b).<sup>[5]</sup> Finally, in February 2007, the Education Minister, Ibuki Bunmei, praised Japan’s racial homogeneity. What was notable about all these comments is that they were largely uncontroversial domestically. The comments received little attention in the mainstream Japanese language press, and the complaints of the Ainu organisation *Utari Kyokai* went largely unheard. In Nakasone’s case, the Japanese press only picked up the story after it had started making waves in the American media. Other comments, such as those in April 2000 by Tokyo Mayor Ishihara, suggesting that foreigners could start riots if the capital was hit by a big earthquake, garnered considerably more domestic media attention, but mainly because of his reference to *sangokujin*, a derogatory term to refer to people from Taiwan and Korea living in Japan. Later, a UK reporter noted in front of a bemused Ishihara that if a British politician had made such a remark there would have been a big outcry (*Asahi Shimbun* 2000). However, in none of these cases was resignation ever mooted as a serious possibility since all three were speaking *within* a conventional popular discourse<sup>[6]</sup> which views Japan as homogeneous and foreign crime as a threat to public security.

Turning to contemporary public attitudes towards migration, recent surveys consistently show Japanese as conservative on this issue. Opinion polls show that the number of people who feel anxious about public security (*chian*) has doubled since 1998 (Sekai 2004: 147). In a recent Cabinet Office survey (2006), 84.3% thought public safety had worsened over the past ten years, with the largest number (55.1%)



putting this down to ‘a rise in crimes by foreigners visiting Japan’ (see also *Yomiuri Shimbun* 2005). In another Cabinet Office poll (*Daily Yomiuri* 2004b) designed to gauge public opinion on whether to accept more foreign labour in the near future, only 16.7% thought Japan should unconditionally accept foreigners, though a majority did support the acceptance of more *skilled* foreign labour. However, even this support was largely conditional, with many stating that Japan does not yet have the appropriate infrastructure to deal with an influx of foreign workers. Similar results were found in polls sponsored by Keidanren [7] (*Japan Times* 2004a) and the Ministry of Justice (Homusho Nyukoku Kanrikyoko 2005), which found support for more skilled labour, caution about an influx of unskilled labour, and a desire for stricter immigration controls. Overall, the phrase that one hears most often in these discussions is the need for more public debate (*kokuminteki giron*) before any consensus can be reached, a finding which suggests that the absence of any *popular* discourse on multiculturalism. This is not to deny the existence of alternative discourses, such as the *kokusaika* of the 1980s, or to disparage the excellent work of many local NGOs who, engaging in the *tabunka shakai* discourse, work tirelessly to help and support non-Japanese living in Japan. The point is that, given rising anxiety around the world, increasingly negative global attitudes towards migration and multiculturalism, plus widely-publicised incidents such as the autumn 2005 ethnic riots in France, media-savvy *mainstream* Japanese seem highly unlikely to adopt multiculturalist ideology anytime soon.

### 1.2.2 Policies of Multiculturalism

If multiculturalism as a discourse at the national level is largely absent in Japan, then one might expect concrete policies to be equally absent. Policies that have been adopted in ‘settlement’ countries where multiculturalism was, in the past at least,

promoted as official government policy include:

- dual citizenship
- government support for newspapers, television, and radio in minority languages
- support for minority festivals, holidays, and celebrations
- acceptance of traditional and religious dress in schools and society in general
- support for arts from cultures around the world
- programs to encourage minority representation in the larger society, in politics, education, and the work force
- liberal immigration policy, admission of refugees
- respect for international law

Source: Adapted from Wikipedia (2006b) [8]

First, Japan does not officially recognise dual citizenship. Since 1985, children of one Japanese and one non-Japanese parent have been able to obtain dual nationality, but they are required to choose one or other when they reach twenty. Second, there is little evidence of government support for ‘ethnic’ media. Moriguchi’s (1997) ‘Ethnic Media Guide’ lists around 160 publications in 15 languages, while Shiramizu (2000; 2004) puts the number at around 200, mostly in English, Chinese, Korean, and Portuguese, often accompanied with Japanese translations. However, while some publishers do boast a full-time staff with sales in the tens of thousands, the majority of publications are small local affairs run by volunteers or NGOs with small circulations. The key point is the lack of *national* government support, and the corresponding lack of national ethnic media, although *local* governments do put out multilingual newsletters, magazines, and brochures. “Local governments in the regions most affected by the new immigration are filling the gap”, writes Pak (2000: 244), “left by the national government’s unwillingness to consider what is to be done with foreign migrants living in

Japan.”

The theme of national government *laissez-faire* extends to other potential multiculturalist policies. Support for minority festivals, holidays, and celebrations is practically unheard of, though most localities, often with NGO support, do hold *kokusai koryu* (international exchange) events where foreign culture is introduced. There is certainly an intense grassroots interest and activity around all sorts of foreign cultural practice (music, food, language) which may, ironically, be motivated by a sense of the constraints of a relatively ‘homogeneous’ Japanese society and culture. Moreover, since 2002, *Kokusai Rikai Kyoiku* (Education for International Understanding) lessons have been a common feature in *sogogakushu* (general studies) classes in schools. However, critics of what is sometimes termed ‘multicultural education’ (Fukatsu 2003: 24; Mitsuaki and Akuzawa 2001: 104/5; Nukaga 2003: 89/90) and ‘international exchange’ (Nakamatsu 2002; Suzuki 2000) both see these school and community ‘events’ as more likely to reinforce stereotypes than dispel them.[9] Finally, as far as acceptance of traditional and religious dress in schools and society in general goes, continued incidents of verbal and physical violence towards students wearing the traditional Korean *Chima-Chogori* (Song 2003) exemplify the lack of tolerance in the public sphere.

On a more positive note, Japan’s support for arts from cultures around the world is notable. For example, the Agency for Cultural Affairs spends considerable amounts on promoting international cultural exchange, as well as promoting indigenous Ainu culture. National exchange years see performers, artists, and ‘cultural specialists’ invited to come to Japan from overseas, while upcoming artists of exceptional talent are sponsored to come and study in Japan. In particular, the 2005 Expo in Aichi Prefecture was a resounding success,

introducing some 22 million visitors to culture and organisations from around the world.

The next example of multiculturalism in practice was official support for programs to encourage minority representation in the larger society, in politics, education, and the work force. Taking the largest minority population in Japan – Koreans – as an example, the record is not good. Many observers (Komai 2001: chapter 1) have noted the existence of an institutionalised racism against Koreans in Japan, resulting in discrimination in areas like schooling, employment, marriage, and housing. At the political level, Fukuoka (2000: xxiv/253) highlights three key areas. The first relates to the issue of giving Special Permanent Residents (most of whom are Korean) the right to vote in local government elections (Fukuoka 2000: 258/9). Although many ‘settlement’ countries do not give non-citizens voting rights, *zainichi* individuals represent a unique historical case. Indeed, the South Korean government has consistently pushed Japan on this issue. However, the matter has been regularly put off in the diet where bills have not been presented due to ‘lack of time’ (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2004b). Given growing resistance to Korean suffrage (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2004c), particularly against the background of worsening ties with both North and South Korea, dwindling political will means that legislation is becoming more and more unlikely.[10]

The second area highlighted by Fukuoka concerns the issue of graduates of Korean ethnic private schools being unable to sit entrance examinations for Japanese national universities without first taking a separate qualifying test (Fukuoka 2000, 254/5). Currently, Korean schools are classed as ‘miscellaneous’ and there is no accreditation scheme to give these students equal status with Japanese school graduates, limiting their access to higher education and ultimately career choices. In actual fact, as Japanese

universities compete for a shrinking pool of students, they have been more willing to accept graduates from different kinds of schools. This has prompted MEXT to officially recognise a small but increasing number of ‘Western style’ international schools. Nevertheless, this may be viewed more as a reaction to circumstances than any active multicultural policy; the fact is that, until 2003, the government did not recognise any non-Japanese schools as accredited educational institutions and still doesn’t recognise Korean (or other) ethnic schools (Morris-Suzuki 2003; Arita 2003).

The third area relates to the employment of foreign residents as public officials. In November 1996, the Ministry of Home Affairs changed the nationality clause in public employment laws to allow local governments to hire non-Japanese health workers, maternity nurses, and nurses (Gurowitz 1999: 441). That same year, the Tokyo District Court rejected a case brought by Chong Hyang Gyun, the first foreigner to be employed as a health care worker in the metropolitan government, whose 1994 application to take a promotion exam had been refused (*Daily Yomiuri* 2005a). The following year, the Tokyo High Court reversed the judgement and ruled that there was no constitutional reason to deny non-Japanese nationals access to public positions aside from those involved in the direct exercise of public power (see also Kagawa 2001: 101; *Yomiuri Shimbun* 1997). However, in 2005 the Supreme Court ruled that it *was* constitutional to deny her the opportunity to take the test on the grounds that she was not Japanese (*Daily Yomiuri* 2005a). The ruling reportedly shocked other local governments, such as Kochi, Kawanashi, and Kawasaki, who had begun to relax regulations on foreigners in managerial positions.

Against these moves to limit non-Japanese access to public positions, the decision by Japan to accept (up to) 1,000 Filipino nurses and caregivers from April 2007 suggests, at

first glance, a more liberal immigration policy (*Daily Yomiuri* 2006d). The decision, part of a recently signed FTA, echoes the proposal of a key government panel on deregulation to allow foreigners to work in the area of social welfare and nursing to cope with the ageing population (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2006). On the one hand, the decision represents a practical reaction to economic factors, namely a growing demand in the welfare sector and a shrinking domestic labour supply. However, the same law imposed requirements – such as becoming fluent in Japanese and passing state-supervised exams or related courses within a certain period – that are sufficiently severe to raise doubts as to whether many Filipinos will actually be able to settle in Japan as workers. Other developments, such as pre-clearance immigration checks (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2004a), tougher penalties for illegal aliens (*Daily Yomiuri* 2004a), a new online database on foreigners (*Daily Yomiuri* 2005d), the fingerprinting and photographing of foreign entrants (*Daily Yomiuri* 2006a), and the introduction of a new ID card system for foreigners (*Daily Yomiuri* 2006e) all suggest, in line with recent global movements, toughening of an already strict immigration policy.

Japan’s tough immigration policy is also illustrated by the number of refugees and asylum seekers it accepts. In the period from 1982 – when Japan first started accepting refugees – until 2004, Japan processed 3,544 applications for refugees status, but accepted only 313, less than 10% (Japan-Almanac 2005: 90). Although conditions for recognition were relaxed in April 2004, in 2005 only 46 individuals were awarded refugee status (JAR 2006: see also Iwasaki 2006). In contrast, the US admitted 53,813 persons as refugees and 25,257 as asylum seekers in 2005 alone (Statistics 2006).

Another example of Japan’s less than multicultural policy framework is its attitude towards international law. For example, it was not until 1995 that Japan became one of the



last countries to ratify the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERC) which went into effect in 1969 (Sugimoto 1997: 189). In October 1999, the ICERC was applied for the first time by a domestic court when awarding a Brazilian journalist ¥1.5 million after being thrown out of a shop because she was a ‘foreigner’ (Yomiuri Shimbun 1999). However, more recent legal rulings on racial discrimination cases have denied that local governments have a duty to meet the requirements of the ICERC (Arudo 2004). The government has shown no inclination to create a domestic version of the Convention, something that ratification obliges it to do. Consequently, Japan may be the only developed country in which racial discrimination is not illegal.

This overview of the existence - or rather absence of - multicultural policies at the state level, suggests that, in practical terms, there is little concrete evidence of multiculturalism at work in contemporary Japan. Indeed, one of the ironies of the ‘multicultural Japan’ discourse is that proponents typically spend many pages painting a very un-multicultural picture of Japan seemingly without realising that this effectively undermines their ‘multicultural Japan’ argument. Befu’s (2006) chapter in *Japan’s Diversity Dilemmas* is a case in point: the chapter details a litany of discriminatory practices in housing, employment, education, medical services, and citizenship law enough to shatter the ‘multicultural Japan’ image many times over. Often, after a long list of complaints, critics make a volte-face and cite an example of some modest - and almost always local - development which is then hailed as a sign of Japan’s transformation into a multicultural society. Williams (1993: 93), for example, sees the 1992 decision by the Osaka City Government to allow non-Japanese graduates to sit the entrance examinations for local government employment as signalling a seismic shift in the concept of Japanese

citizenship. Similarly, Clammer (2001: 31) cites the example of the discontinuation of the requirement to fingerprint foreign residents[11] as a sign that “Japan, like it or not, is becoming an increasingly plural society.” In fact, what Japan *is becoming* or *will become* is not clear: what is clear is what these writers *want* it to become.

### 1.2.3 Migrants and Multiculturalism

In testing whether Japan is multicultural in the political sense, my third and final question referred to the continued and growing presence of migrants. Here, migration statistics are the obvious place to start. In fact, despite a number of tomes focusing on ‘multi-ethnic Japan’ (e.g. Lie 2001; Murphy-Shigematsu 2004), the ‘multicultural Japan’ discourse may come as something of a surprise to scholars of migration who typically view Japan, when considering it at all, as an exceptional or ‘negative’ case (Bartram 2000). Statistics seem to support the fact that Japan is one of the few industrialised countries not to have experienced the tremendous inflow of international migrants characteristic of other developed countries:

**Table 1: International Migration in G8 Countries plus Australia, Korea[12]**

	Migrant Stock (2005) (estimate)		Number of Refugees (2004)	Net Migration (2000-2005) (average annual)	
	Number	% of pop.		Number	Rate per 1000
Canada	6106	18.9	141	210	6.7
France	6471	10.7	140	60	1.0
Germany	10144	12.3	877	220	2.7
Italy	2519	4.3	16	120	2.1
<b>Japan</b>	<b>2040</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>0.4</b>
Russia	12080	8.4	2	80	0.6
UK	5408	9.1	289	137	2.3
US	38355	12.9	421	1160	4.0
Australia	4097	20.3	63	100	5.1
Korea	551	1.2	0	-16	-0.3

Source: (United Nations 2006)

Note: Numbers in thousands. Migrant stock refers to those born outside the country, except in the case of Japan and Germany, where the data refers to non-citizens. Net migration is the annual number of immigrants minus the annual number of emigrants.

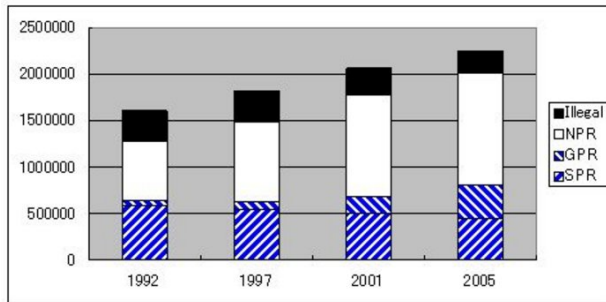
Some problems exist with regard to the comparability of the data in Table 1, particularly regarding the definition of ‘migrant’. In the so-called settlement countries (Australia, US, Canada), only ‘permanent’ migrants are counted in the official immigration statistics, while in others anyone enrolled on a municipal population register (compulsory after staying a minimum period) is counted (OECD 2005: 116). Thus, in the former case, international students would not be classed as migrants while in the latter they would. Moreover, in the ‘settlement’ countries immigrants are considered to be persons who are foreign-born, regardless of nationality, while in other countries immigrants are considered to be persons of foreign nationality. Thus, we see a difference in the concept of ‘foreigner’, this being someone outside the country in the case of ‘settlement’ countries but including those inside the country in the case of the ‘non-settlement’ countries.

In light of the above qualifications, the data in Table 1 requires re-evaluation when looking at Japan. In the first place, numbers for migrant stock and net migration include all non-permanent residents (*hi'eijusha*), such as students, trainees, and ‘entertainers’, who registered within the designated ninety-day period (NPR in Figure 1). In Japan, this group of migrants far outnumbers *eijusha* or permanent residents (GPR and SPR in Figure 1). If non-permanent individuals were included in data for the settlement countries, the difference between Japan and these countries would be even more pronounced.

Second, because the Japanese data in Table 1 refers only to non-citizens, those born abroad but who later naturalised are absent from the statistics. In practice, because Japan has a relatively low number of naturalisations, the vast majority of these being Japan-born Koreans, this doesn’t distort the figures too much. Indeed, in the absence of place-of-birth data, the OECD assumes that the country of

nationality is the country of birth (OECD 2005: 119); however, they point out that this new method of calculation will “tend to overestimate the number of foreign-born relative to other countries because persons born in Japan...to foreigners will tend also to be recorded as foreign and thus be classified as foreign born.”[13] Given such statistical inconsistencies, in July 2003 the OECD (2005: 120) unveiled what they claimed to be the first internationally comparable data set. Here, the percentage of non-citizens in Japan is calculated at just 1.0%, even lower than the 1.6% figure for ‘migrant stock’ in the United Nations data above.

The statistics suggest that, at the present time, Japan is a *relatively* homogenous country in terms of migration and ethnicity. Polls back this up. For example, in a (2000) Cabinet Office survey, only 9.7% of respondents said they had opportunities to speak or interact with foreigners; over 40% said they hardly ever had the chance to even *see* foreigners. Of course, some foreign residents, such as second or third generation Koreans and Chinese, are physically and culturally indistinguishable from Japanese; however, of interest here is the degree of assimilation and the *perception* of relative monoculturalism. This suggests that it is too early to claim, as some have (for example, Douglass and Roberts 2000), that the ‘multicultural age’ has already come to Japan. However, is it possible to say, as Yamanaka (2002, 2/22) does, that “Japan stands at the crossroads of becoming a multicultural society...the dawn of becoming a multi-ethnic society”? Has the country reached what Brody (2002:107) calls ‘a crisis of multiculturalism’, a crisis in which Japan “must reconcile traditional ideas of ethnic membership with the reality of a large population of culturally different ‘co-ethnics’”? Certainly, although Japan is currently a country of low migration, in recent years numbers have risen:



**Figure 1: Changes in Numbers of Foreign Residents in Japan, 1992-2005**

Source: The 2005 figure for illegals is from *Homusho* (2005: 7/20). Other 2005 data is from *Homusho Nyukoku Kanrikyoku* (2006). Non-2005 data is taken from Burgess (2003: 16).

Notes: GPR=General Permanent Residents and SPR=Special Permanent Residents: together these two make up the permanent resident (*eijyusha*) category. NPR=non-permanent residents (*hi'eijyusha*) The figure for illegals is a government estimate.

Figure 1 shows that since 1992 the total number of foreign residents (combining both legal *and* illegal[14]) has grown by 40%, from 1.29% of the population in 1992 to 1.76% in 2005. But the percentage increase is large precisely because the numbers start from a very low base. Moreover, with the total population entering a long period of decline, the percentage of foreigners in the total population will continue to rise even if their numbers stabilise.

Regarding the prospect of a significant rise in the number of newcomers, many observers have cited a number of factors - a rapidly ageing society, a plummeting birth-rate, a low-wage service sector, income disparities - which make the future large-scale import of foreign labour 'inevitable'. For Arudo (*Japan Times* 2004b), a strong critic of the 'homogeneous Japan' discourse, arguing for or against more migration 'is like arguing for or against the

sunrise':

Japan's future as a multiethnic society is inevitable...not only is cheap foreign labor an intrinsic part of the Japanese economy, but also, as the regional economic superpower, Japan is still by itself about the same size as all the other Asian economies combined. The economic pull for immigrants is irresistible. Immigration to Japan is already happening and it will not stop...the trends favoring immigration are irreversible. (Arudo 2006)

Murphy-Shigematsu takes a similar position:

While Japan remains one of the least diverse industrialized nations with ethnic and national minorities comprising 3%[15] of the total population, monumental change is imminent. A massive influx of foreigners in the coming years will be necessary to meet the needs of a rapidly aging population. Just maintaining the size of the working population will require 600,000 immigrants a year. In this scenario, immigrants will comprise more than 30% of the Japanese population by 2050.(Murphy-Shigematsu 2004: 51)

Arudo's conviction and Murphy-Shigematsu's projections are in line with an oft quoted UN report (2000a) entitled *Replacement Migration: Is it a Solution to Declining and Aging Populations?* The report offers five scenarios. Murphy-Shigematsu refers to scenario 4, which sees the working population remain constant at the 1995 level. Scenario 3, in which the population remains at the 2005 level, would require 381,000 immigrants a year between 2005 and 2050. Scenarios 1 and 2, which assume no net migration to Japan from 1995 to 2050, forecast a doubling of the population aged 65 or older and a drop of more than half in the ratio of the working-age population to

the retired population, resulting in a significant annual drop in GDP.

There are a number of problems with the UN report. First, the study is based on 1995 fertility levels and assumes zero net migration after 1995. In fact, fertility rates are likely to rise according to government (*Japan Times* 2007; *Daily Yomiuri* 2004c; 2006c) and United Nations (2004: 209) forecasts and, as Figure 1 showed, migration has been increasing since 1995. Chapple (2004: footnote 27) also points out that the UN figures are only estimates and such labour projections are vulnerable to changes in economic cycles, technology and the like, citing past government forecasts of labour shortages which were way off the mark (Komai 1995a: 213). "It should also be noted", Chapple adds, citing Koshiro's (1998: 168) analysis of a government study of the social costs of allowing in half a million foreign workers, "that the financial burden involved with increasing migration would exceed 1 trillion yen." A later United Nations (2000b: 9) document points out that while the calculations found in the original report are demographically valid they are (1) economically unrealistic and, more significantly in the context of this paper, (2) politically unacceptable/infeasible.

The key point is that although the practical, logical, and rational answer to ageing populations in developed countries may be more migration, both the local and the global discourse on migration limit the kind of political solutions actually possible. Indeed, the UN report itself (2000a: 50) recognises that the kind of figures being talked about are 'unlikely' for Japan, a country with no post-war precedent for admitting and assimilating large numbers of foreigners. Indeed, the May 2006 interim report of the Justice Ministry's panel discussing long-term policies for accepting overseas workers recommended that the ratio of foreign residents to the total population should not exceed 3% (*Japan Times* 2006b). In other words, talk of 17%, 30%, or (in scenario 5) 87%

of the total population of Japan being migrants is not only unrealistic but also, in a number of senses, politically and popularly 'unsayable' and unthinkable. Sometimes this grasp of discursive reality is more apparent in journalistic than academic writing. For example, in an article in the *New York Times* titled 'Insular Japan Needs but Resists Migration', Komai Hiroshi, probably Japan's leading expert on migration, is quoted as follows:

The kind of figures the demographers talk about are unimaginable for Japan...In a quarter-century we have only absorbed one million immigrants (Komai, quoted in French 2003)

Komai's belief that Japan cannot absorb newcomers is based on a realistic appraisal of the country's social limitations, including those of its workplace culture and educational system.

A final claim frequently heard in the 'Japan is becoming multicultural' argument is that that newcomers 'threaten' or 'challenge' the idea of homogeneity (e.g., Clammer 2001: 177; Ishiwata 2004). However, this is by no means obvious; as Tsuda (2003) points out in his work on the Nikkeijin, 'Japan's newest ethnic minority', the increasing presence of migrants can, conversely, serve to maintain and reinforce local ethnic identities and nationalist discourses. I would also argue that the idea that the presence of a foreign population has 'spurred fierce debate about human rights' and 'promoted reflection on the nature of Japanese society and ethnic attitudes' (Clammer 2001: 133) has more currency in the English-language than the Japanese language press. One finding that emerged from my (Burgess 2003) study of international marriage migrants in Yamagata was that while the migrants themselves were active in transforming hearts and minds at the grassroots level, their children were growing up, almost without



exception, as monolingual and monocultural, assimilated within a generation.

### 1.3 Multicultural Japan?

To sum up the preceding discussion, we can say that, on balance, Japan does not appear to be particularly multicultural in terms of either discourse (1.2.1), policy (1.2.2), or people (1.2.3). Moreover, even a brief consideration of the way the wind is blowing, both domestically and globally, suggests that Japan, despite the presence of substantial numbers of NGOs and many local governments working for progressive causes, is unlikely to become 'multicultural' any time soon. This begs the question of whether those writing in the 'multicultural Japan' vein are not being descriptive but rather prescriptive: not saying what Japan *is* like but what it *should, ought to, or must* be like.[16] This may be partly due to the fact that many non-Japanese writers on Japan are from America, Australia, the UK or other countries with a multicultural tradition who either consciously or unconsciously believe in the multicultural ideal. On a broader level, there is also the danger that those in the west who write about the east will slip into a superior/inferior binary. The influence of Orientalism on the western tradition of Japanese studies has received far too little attention to date (Minear 1980; Susser 1998). As Clammer (2001:10) points out, dismissing all Nihonjinron, parts of which represent genuine indigenous epistemology, outright as 'nationalist nonsense' smacks of 'ethnocentrism, neo-colonialism, and even racism'. Indeed, carrying the multicultural discourse to its logical conclusion risks, according to Sugimoto (1999: 94), research that is insensitive to Eurocentric or other forms of cultural imperialism.[17]

Aside from the dangers of prescription and Orientalism creeping into research, the fact that scholars are often based in metropolitan areas may also introduce an element of 'urban

bias' to their research. As I have written elsewhere (2007a), a great deal of the research on migrants and minorities in Japan has tended to focus on what have been called 'diversity points' (Tsuneyoshi 2004: 56) or *shuju toshi*, urban areas with large visible concentrations of non-Japanese, such as Kanagawa Prefecture (Kawasaki City), Shizuoka Prefecture (Hamamatsu City), Gunma Prefecture (Ota City), as well as Tokyo and Osaka. Because the literature disproportionately focuses on such high migration localities, Japan will inevitably appear more 'multicultural' than it actually is. This is not to say that such work does not have importance; rather, in order to construct a broader, more balanced, picture of Japanese society it is *also* important to look at what is happening (or not happening) *outside* of such areas. In particular, it is important to acknowledge the real differences between rural and urban experiences. As polls (*e.g.* Cabinet-Office 2000) show, there is a growing gap between the cities, where more people say they have opportunities to interact with foreigners, and towns and villages, where respondents say foreigners are hardly ever seen.

In a recent H-Japan posting (29/6/06), Earl Kinmonth refers to statements in an article in *The Guardian* (2005) on the lack of visible difference in the street in Japan as 'utterly moronic' and 'bordering on the racist'. Kinmonth then goes on to describe the high visibility of foreigners in his own area, Kitaward in Tokyo. This kind of aggressive, emotional response to any suggestion of ethnic homogeneity in Japan is characteristic of what Clammer (2001: 49/96) calls the 'vigorous polemics' and 'hostility' typically shown towards Nihonjinron. Such polemics illustrate the danger of replacing one discourse - homogeneity - with another - multiculturalism - without first having an understanding of how discourse itself functions. As Oguma pointed out in the quote at the very start of this essay, destroying one discourse and replacing it with another is insufficient. Certainly, as Ryang



(2005: 201) warns, caution is required before celebrating this new direction in Japanese studies, since assuming an image of a ‘multicultural, multiethnic Japan’ can be as essentialistic as the image of a monocultural Japan.

In the literature on invented tradition – a theory concerning the social construction of reality – it has been pointed out (Notehelfer 1999: 436/7) that ideologies can never be 100% pure fabrication: in order to be successful they need to ‘resonate with inherited experience’ among the general populace, be ‘deeply rooted in the lives and experiences of ordinary people’. As it turns out, Japan *is*, ethnically speaking, a relatively homogenous country and visible physical difference in daily life, at least outside the ‘diversity points’, remains low. For Oguma (2002: 348), the main reason for Japan’s relative homogeneity lies in the international conditions of the past century. Certainly, we are obliged as scholars to empirically identify and critically – and objectively – assess the phenomenon we look at. But ultimately, debating whether Japan is or is not ‘homogeneous’, whatever that may mean, is less interesting than the question of how and why people have come to believe this: “the process of formation”, writes Ryang (2005: 45), “is a more important object of analysis than the true-or-false verification of its content.”

### **Conclusion: The Changing Face(s) of Migration**

In their (1986) work, Mouer and Sugimoto identify two competing images of Japanese society: the ‘great tradition’ of ‘homogenous Japan’ and the ‘little traditions’ that might today correspond to the label ‘multicultural Japan’. Twenty years on it is not too much to say that the dominant academic discourse on Japan is not of ‘homogeneous Japan’ but of ‘multicultural Japan’. Just as a discourse makes it possible to construct a topic in a certain way, it also limits the other ways in which the topic

can be constructed (Hall 1992: 292/3). Thus, it is difficult – if not quite taboo – to challenge the conventional wisdom or ‘common-sense’ view in academia that states that ethnic homogeneity is a ‘myth’ and that Japan is – or is at least will inevitably become – multicultural. This discourse contrasts not only with the popular local discourse in Japan, which generally sees the country as homogenous, but also with the dominant global discourse on migration, which in recent years has become increasingly negative.

This paper was an attempt to (1) encourage reflection on the way academic discourse restricts and shapes what we do – and even can – write as academics and (2) show how local and global popular discourse, far from being ‘false’ or ‘myth’, has a central role in the construction of Japanese social reality. In the study of migration in Japan in particular, future work would benefit from a consideration of how popular discourse can put up psychological barriers, override ‘rational’ argument, and create its own social reality, even when the result is seemingly detrimental to the national self-interest.

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*This is a revised and condensed version of Burgess “The Discourse(s) of Migration: Changing Constructions of the Other since 9/11”, Kokusai Kankeigaku Kenkyu (The Study of International Relations, Tsuda College), 33 (March). Posted on Japan Focus, March 24,*

2007.

## Notes

[1] This is a revised and condensed version of Burgess (2007b), which contains much more detail on the concept of discourse in general and global discourse(s) of migration in particular. I would like to point out that the author's own publications have, until now, been firmly located in the 'multicultural Japan' discourse. It is only recently that I have come to question my position. I would like to thank Mark Selden and Joshua H. Roth for comments on earlier drafts. *Japan Focus* is unable to handle macrons; I apologise for any misunderstandings that may arise in the text because of this.

[2] "It is by no means established", concludes Revell (1997: 74), "that discussion of culture is any more prevalent in Japan than the discussion of the importance of culture in any other country." The difference is of course that in Japan the discussion has a label while outside Japan it does not.

[3] These 'other' dimensions of difference may be equally, if not more important, than ethnicity in understanding the position of minorities in Japan. "The low status of most of Japan's minority groups", writes Goodman's (1990: 9), "can be more closely related to their class marginality than the cultural or ethnic reasons normally cited."

[4] Usually discourse is distinguished from ideology because of the latter's traditional distinction between true ('scientific') statements and false ('ideological') statements (Hall 1992a: 292/3). However, this definition is difficult to maintain. As Ryang (2005: 45) argues, ideology is better seen not as 'false consciousness' but rather as a real system of thought which creates its own reality. For example, by treating the concept of 'national character' as an (state) ideological discursive

formation or field "in which scholars and lay people alike widely participate" she emphasises that the concept is not somehow separate from the 'real' Japanese culture but rather has real substance (Ryang 2005: 45/60).

[5] Aso later clarified his remarks saying that he had meant that Japan was *relatively* homogeneous. However, because *Nihonjinron* is framed as diametrically opposed to the 'multicultural Japan' discourse, the weaker position is buried and we only hear of 'strenuous government and nationalist led attempts to argue that Japan is a totally homogeneous culture' (Clammer 2001: 146). This creates something of a demon, disguising the fact, to paraphrase Clammer (2001: 53), that *Nihonjinron* is, most of the time, 'little more than nostalgia writ large.'

[6] The statements on Japan's homogeneity do, I believe, possess a coherence sufficient to qualify as a discourse. I would argue that this discourse on homogeneity is not the same thing as the much broader and internally disparate *Nihonjinron*, which is more like a series of varied and sometimes contradictory discourses.

[7] Nippon Keidanren, Japan's most powerful business lobby, has been one of the loudest voices calling for more foreign workers. The previous chairman, Hiroshi Okuda, called for workers of all occupations to be admitted. However, the new chairman, Mitarai Fujio is thought to be less open to the idea of bringing in large numbers of foreign workers, mirroring the global shift in the discourse(s) of migration (*Japan Times* 2006a).

[8] This is not, of course, intended as an exclusive or even inclusive list. For example, not all societies considered (now or in the past) to be 'multicultural' accept or accepted dual nationality (See Scalise and Honjo 2004).

[9] For more of the problems of terms like *kokusaika* (internationalisation), *kokusai koryu* (international exchange), *ibunka* (different

culture), *kyosei* (co-existence), and *tabunka* (multiculturalism) see Burgess (2004b). Given the centrality of these terms in discussions on diversity in Japan – for example, *tabunka kyosei* is the official slogan of Kawasaki City – it is disappointing to see them so often accepted at face value with little or no critical analysis.

[10] Again, it is local governments who are taking the lead in this area. For example, in 2005 Osaka Prefecture granted foreign residents who have lived in the nation for more than three years the right to vote in a local referendum, reportedly the first such move in the nation (*Daily Yomiuri* 2005c). Moreover, other ‘diversity points’, such as Kawasaki and Hamamatsu, have already established foreign residents’ assemblies to give these individuals a voice in local affairs (Pak 1998; 2000). Finally, recent moves by Miyagi Prefecture to enact a set of bylaws to promote multiculturalism are reportedly a first for any branch or level of Japanese government (J.F. Morris, H-Japan, 29/1/07). Clearly, it is important not to dismiss these developments in the direction of multiculturalism; my concern is that often *too much* importance is attached to such these ‘baby steps’.

[11] Compulsory fingerprinting was abolished for all foreign residents from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2000. However, in the May 2006 revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law, fingerprinting was re-introduced for all but Special Permanent Residents as a counter-terrorism measure.

[12] The question of whether these particular countries provide a good comparison is a valid one: there are many possible bases for comparison. Certainly, it is true that the ‘settlement’ countries are, thanks to high migration, ‘unique’ in their high levels of ethnic and racial diversity (Sugimoto 1997: 30). Sugimoto (1997: 8) puts Japan somewhere in the middle band of countries in terms of ‘estimated proportions of ethnic and pseudo-

ethnic groups’ (without defining ‘pseudo-ethnic groups’). Earl Kinmonth (H-Japan, 2/7/06) also argues that comparisons of migrants in countries that share common borders (like Europe) with countries that are geographically isolated (like Japan) are unfair. However, the point that these critics miss is that countries like Austria, Bangladesh, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Greece, Iceland, Libya, and Portugal (Sugimoto’s ‘bottom’ band) or Korea, Mexico, Hungary, or Slovakia (Kinmonth) make a poor comparison with a Japan which boasts the 9<sup>th</sup> largest population and the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest economy. If we accept that wage differentials between home and host countries are a key ‘pull’ factor for migrants, then the best comparisons for Japan, which in terms of net wealth per head has by far the richest citizens in the world (*Daily Yomiuri* 2006b), lie with the G8 countries which represent about 65% of the world economy.

[13] Certainly, the situation of *zainichi* Koreans, as the largest ethnic minority in Japan, needs to be considered carefully; however, for the purpose of a comparison of international migration only first generation Koreans can be considered migrants. In other words, something like a quarter of Japanese migrant stock consists of *zainichi* 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> generation individuals who are, in general, highly assimilated.

[14] The estimate for illegal migrants – mostly overstayers – has fallen significantly in recent years, from 323,090 in 1992 to 240,000 in 2005. This is interesting, as it contradicts one of the central tenets of the ‘foreign crime’ (*gaikokujin hanzai*) discourse, namely that *rising* numbers of illegals has made Japan less safe. This is one case when a statement in a particular discourse can be shown to be empirically false. Nevertheless, the discourse continues to have social reality; the perception that illegals are rising remains strong (Ellis and Hamai 2007). The Japan Immigration Association position that the presence of illegal

foreigners is “the big threat for the Japanese society to be dealt with immediately”(Nyukan-Kyokai 2005: 60) continues to drive policy. This means that to some extent the government is forced to maintain a policy targeting a group which, statistically, is rapidly shrinking.

[15] Murphy-Shigematsu’s estimate that national and ethnic minorities make up 3% of the total population translates into 3.8 million people. The main ethnic groups in Japan are the Ryukyujin (1.3 million), Korean and Chinese ‘oldcomers’ (451,909), and the Ainu (24,000), giving a total of 1,775,909. Even factoring in the 300,000+ Koreans who, according to Shipper (2002: 55) have become naturalised Japanese citizens since 1952, and perhaps another 50,000+ non-Korean naturalisations, the total still only comes to 2,125,909. Only by including non-permanent and illegal residents do we get a figure approaching 3.8 million.

[16] For Befu (2006:7), it is the Nihonjinron assumption that Japan *should* (his italics) remain mono-ethnic and culturally homogeneous that lies behind discriminatory practices against foreigners. It is therefore ironic that his own argument relies on an equally prescriptive premise of what he personally thinks Japan *should* be like.

[17] Oguma, who has shed much light on the emergence of the discourse of homogeneity, is also critical of ‘idealised’ multicultural models. “The idea that the shortcomings of the Emperor System and Japanese society will be overcome”, he (Oguma 2002: 346) writes, “only if Japan is internationalised, the consciousness of pure blood is destroyed, and Japan becomes a multi-national state, is based on a misunderstanding of the Great Japanese Empire. This idea is not only wrong, but dangerous”. Oguma’s translator, David Askew (2002), concludes that what is required is an historical understanding of the various concepts of what “Japanese” means: “[M]any criticisms of the myth of ethnic homogeneity have been developed from the

baseless optimism that the destruction of this myth will serve as a panacea for Japan’s problems.”

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