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Chapter 9

Deconstructing the Japanese National Discourse: Laymen’s Beliefs and Ideology

Rotem Kownar

Nihonjinron is a currently vast discourse that takes place within the Japanese society and seeks to account for the particular characteristics of its culture, behavior, and national character. Nihonjinron also serves as a broadly based ideological support for Japan’s nationalism through its ethnocentric emphasis on the nation as the preeminent collective identity of the people. In recent decades, many studies have critically examined the world of Nihonjinron and its producers. This chapter, by contrast, reviews the rather neglected realm of Nihonjinron “consumers,” namely, the people who adhere to Nihonjinron as a national ideology and believe in its tenets. Based on the results of several surveys, the chapter examines the contemporary functions of Nihonjinron and speculates about its future trends.

The Japanese have a consuming interest in their national and cultural identity, almost unique in its magnitude. The current vast discourse that seeks to account for the particular characteristics of Japanese society, culture, and national character is called Nihonjinron (but sometimes also referred to as Nihonron, Nihon Bunkaron, or Nihon Shakairon), which means literally “theories of the Japanese (people).” Nihonjinron also serves as a broadly based ideological support for Japan’s nationalism through its ethnocentric emphasis on the nation as the preeminent collective identity of the people. Overall, it has become a societal force shaping the way Japanese regard themselves. As a reflection of the concern for Japan’s cultural and ethnic identity, contemporary Nihonjinron discourse can be tracked back to prewar writings, the late Meiji era quest for identity, and even earlier texts (for review, see Minami, 1976, 1980, 1994). Nevertheless, only in the last three
decades has Nihonjinron emerged as hegemonic ideology, an “industry” whose
main producers are intellectuals and whose consumers are the masses.
A dated compilation of monographs in this genre published between 1945 and
1978 contains 698 titles, of which 25% were published in the three years that
preceded the compilation (Nomura Sōgo Konkyū, 1978). Although in recent years
Nihonjinron literature may have leveled off a bit, it still seems to be extremely
popular. Numerous studies have explored the content of these writings critically,
skeptizing the motives and background for their “production.” In this chapter,
however, I review a rather neglected aspect of Nihonjinron: its “consumers,”
Japan’s mainstream population. My focus is to identify the adherents of
Nihonjinron and to examine the extent to which their profiles match the functions
Nihonjinron is supposed to serve. In order to deal with these issues, I initially
review the content of Nihonjinron and its role as national ideology.

PREMISES OF NIHONJINRON

Nihonjinron deals with a wide range of social phenomena (from “race,” social
structure, and language, to ecology, economy, psychology, and even international
relations) under a common denominator. This varied and complex discourse
views Japanese culture as a unique and unparalleled product of racial, historical,
and ethnic elements that underscores the essence of current social phenomena.
This fundamental approach is followed by several premises about the nature of
Japanese society (for extensive inquiry of Nihonjinron tenets, see Bech, 1987;
Dale, 1986; Miller, 1982; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986).

The first premise is that the Japanese are homogeneous people (tanetsu min-
zoku) and that Japan as a nation is culturally homogeneous (chōhitsu, or chōhitsu).
This notion implies that the Japanese invariably share a single language, religion,
and lifestyle, and belong to a single race. Although this assumption is based,
least culturally, on certain aspects of reality, Nihonjinron writers tend to overlook
class, gender, regional, and other variations, to mention only a few, as well as to
ignore the existence of underprivileged minorities within Japanese society.

The second premise asserts a strong nexus between the land of Japan, the peo-
ple, and their culture. Nihonjinron writers maintain that Japanese culture as mani-
fested by language and social customs, can be carried only by Japanese who are
the result of the specific amalgam of the Japanese archipelago. These people
share the same genetic pool (“blood”), the assumption goes, and only they can
master the language and all the nuances of the culture. As such, the second premi-
ise equates land, people, and culture in such a way that people defined as non-
Japanese (“foreigners”) not only can never master Japanese culture and language,
but due to their “foreignness” can never become “real” Japanese (Befu, 1993).

The third premise treats the Japanese society as a vertically constructed group
and regards the Japanese as group-oriented. It states that the Japanese prefer to
act within the framework of a hierarchically organized group in which relations
are based on warm dependency and trust. The hierarchical structure of the
Japanese society is often perceived as the basis of social order as well as the mold
of behavior and personality (see the writings of Ben Dusan, 1970; Doi, 1971;

Given these premises, Nihonjinron is profoundly ethnocentric. Although phys-
ical anthropology does not recognize a “Japanese race,” Nihonjinron thinkers
have long tended to perceive the Japanese as a distinct group in racial terms and
to elaborate on the special relations between race and culture in Japan (Oblas,
1995). There are some unpleasant similarities between this approach and earlier
ideology. During the ultranationalistic period that ended with Japan’s surrender
in 1945, racial homogeneity was associated with the ideology of “family-nation,”
according to which all Japanese were related by “blood.” Japan’s “racial vigor,”
it was then maintained, was the predominant factor in Japan’s attainment of a dis-
tinguished position among nations (Dower, 1986; Hayashida, 1976).

The current ethnocentric character of Nihonjinron is amplified by its reliance
on comparisons between Japanese culture and other referent cultures, predomi-
nantly Western ones. These comparisons with other cultures lead to a fourth
premise focusing on uniqueness. Japan and consequently the Japanese people
are perceived as “unique,” a notion that principally, but until recently not explicitly,
has implied superiority over other cultures. At the same time, due to their emphasi-
sis on “we” (in-group) versus “them” (out-group), Nihonjinron has a special
place for foreigners. They, and especially Westerners, are used as an antithetical
representation of the essence of Japanese society, and only through comparison with
them, through the construction of their (foreign) image, Japanese identity can be
defined and affirmed.

NIHONJINRON AS MANIFESTATION
OF JAPANESE NATIONALISM

The short review of the scope of Nihonjinron should be sufficient to suggest
that it represents the very ideology of contemporary Japanese nationalism. It
offers a comprehensive worldview that deals with and accounts for all that
nationalism is about: tradition, culture, nation, and stance vis-à-vis the outside
world. By continuously confounding race, ethnicity, and nation, Nihonjinron cre-
ates a strong source of nationalism uniting society, culture, and “blood.”
There is wide agreement among various critics of Nihonjinron on the insep-
arrability of Nihonjinron from Japanese nationalism. They may differ on the degree
to which it reflects nationalism, partly because no one has defined or thoroughly
examined contemporary Japanese “nationalism.” In his controversial critique of
Nihonjinron promulgators, Peter Dale contends that Nihonjinron constitutes “the
In contrast, Kosaku Yoshino (1992) refers to Nihonjinron as cultural nationalism
and distinguishes between this form of nationalism (which he also refers to as
“secondary nationalism”) and original nationalism (“primary nationalism”). Befu (1987, 1993) argues that Nihonjinron is the core ideology of Japanese nationalism, but like most discursive nationalism or nationalistic ideologies, it represents passive nationalism, in a sense that they lack an intense emotional element. Nihonjinron invokes only a modicum of emotive content, and yet may be an indispensable precursor to a full-fledged, emotion-laden nationalism. It is almost inevitable that its emphasis on cultural uniqueness and racial distinctiveness, especially when used to account for Japan’s indisputable achievements in recent decades, is destined to enhance nationalist sentiments.

To stress further the role of Nihonjinron in Japanese nationalism, I argue that it is, in fact, the hegemonic ideology in contemporary Japan. Not only are its tenets endorsed by the political establishment and the economic elite, as Yoshino claims, but also there is virtually no other ideology that competes with Nihonjinron (Befu, 1993). For this reason, Nihonjinron thinker, Yamamoto Shichichi (Ben Dasan, 1970) went as far as to call it “Japanese religion” (Nihonkyō). Regardless of their religious affiliation, he argued, all Japanese subscribe to the cultural theology of Japan because they invariably accept the basic tenets of Japanese culture.

The Worldview of Nihonjinron Consumers

While some Nihonjinron is serious academic discourse, a great bulk of it is produced by academics, journalists, critics, businessmen, and politicians for popular consumption. Since the early 1980s, there have been an increasing number of studies that critically examined the world of Nihonjinron and its producers, their historical and ideological milieu, and the methodology and social function of their writings (e.g., Befu, 1987; Dale, 1986; Kawamura, 1982; Miller, 1982; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986; Sugimoto & Mouer, 1982; Yoshino, 1992).

In contrast, only a few studies have examined the characteristics of Nihonjinron “consumers,” that is, the people who adhere to Nihonjinron as a national ideology and believe in its tenets. The most extensive and well-known research endeavor in this category is the massive nine national surveys conducted every 5 years since 1953 by the governmental Research Committee for the Study of the Japanese National Character (Tōkei Sūri Kenkyūjo Kokuminsei Chōsa Inkai, 1961, 1970, 1975, 1982, 1992, 1994). The “National Character” surveys are an especially invaluable source of information because they have sampled the whole adult population of Japan, have been conducted every 5 years over a period of four decades, and have supplied a breakdown of each response according to gender, age, education, region, city size, and even (occasionally) cohort comparison (e.g., Tōkei Sūri Kenkyūjo Kokuminsei Chōsa Inkai, 1985).

Nevertheless, because these surveys have dedicated only a few questions to attitudes toward the nation and race, they offer limited insight to the character and reception of the central tenets of Nihonjinron among the Japanese population. Pertaining to Nihonjinron, the National Character surveys examined self-images, national status vis-à-vis the West, and evaluation of Japan’s economic achievement, standard of living, and emotional life. Reflecting the new trends toward internationalization in Japan, two recent surveys conducted in 1988 and 1993 for the first time incorporated questions on attitudes toward marriage with a foreigner and whether the respondents had been abroad.

Also, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) conducted two national surveys regarding the “consciousness of the Japanese people,” which incorporated a few nationalism-related items (NHK Sōgō Hōsō Yoron Chūsa, 1975, 1980). The NHK surveys found high correlation between positive attitude toward the emperor, attachment to Japan, and feeling of national superiority. More important to our case, they provided a breakdown of the responses according to several variables. Age and, to a lesser extent, gender, education, profession, and political affiliation were the most important factors in determining attitude toward the emperor, and feelings of national superiority, yet were barely significant in regard to attachment to Japan (because the response was very high across all respondents). Although only seven questions were used and responses were somewhat contradictory, the NHK surveys indicated that younger, more educated respondents, members of left-wing parties, and women had weaker nationalistic attitude. They also revealed a slight increase in nationalistic attitudes (but a decrease in respect for the emperor) within the 5-year period from the first survey in 1975.

Using data from seven National Character surveys conducted between 1953 and 1983, as well as the two “consciousness of the Japanese people” NHK surveys, John Gano (1987) examined in his doctoral thesis the effect of generational change, region, period (change with the lapse of time) on Japanese post-war nationalistic attitudes. Gano found age (labeled as “experiential effect”) to be the crucial factor in determining nationalistic attitudes. In 10 out of 16 questions Gano examined, he found that the oldest generation, those who experienced the war as adults, expressed stronger nationalistic attitudes than the younger generations, whereas in two questions, the younger generation’s tendency to converge with the attitudes of the old (“maturation effect”) was the main factor determining attitudinal change. In addition, in nine questions he found attitude change in all groups with the lapse of time (“period effect”). Overall, Gano concluded that postwar Japanese public opinion “shows strongly declining support for every element relating to the ‘layer’ of the modernizing ideology, both by period and by experiential effects” (Gano, 1987, p. 439) and, at the same time, maintains or increases its level of support for “the elements of the ‘core’ social system underlying traditional Japanese nationalism” (p. 442).

Yoshino (1992), in his important book Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan, approached Nihonjinron as a discourse of “thinking elites” who mobilize the ordinary sections of the population by transmitting to them their ideas of national identity. To illustrate his thesis, Yoshino examined responses to ideas of national distinctiveness among a sample of 71 educators (mainly high school
headmasters) and businesspeople, the majority of whom were males and of middle age or above. Based on interviews and a few quantitative questions, Yoshino found various differences between the businesspeople and educators in the way they were exposed to and reacted to Nihonjinron tenets. Compared with the educators, the businesspeople indicated much more “active interest” in Nihonjinron literature (75% vs. 29%), whereas relatively more educators indicated “no interest at all” (17% vs. 3%). Moreover, the businesspeople tended to express their ideas regarding Japanese uniqueness in abstract and holistic terms, whereas the educators did so also in terms of arts and everyday customs. Yoshino also observed that younger educators were more informed on Nihonjinron than older educators, and that younger respondents, in general, were more indifferent toward the subject of nationalism and “old” nationalism in particular.

Yoshino concluded that Nihonjinron stimulated, if not created, the active consciousness of Japanese identity of some of the respondents as well as their perceptions and expressions of it. As for the differences found between the two groups, he suggested that the fact that businesspeople showed greater interest in Nihonjinron was because they deal with organizational and cross-cultural issues. As for individual differences, Yoshino argued that a person’s inclination to become a social bearer of cultural nationalism depends on the presence of conscious critical attitudes toward ideas of Japanese uniqueness. Despite the pioneering character of this study, its results are suggestive at best. This is largely because of its empirical shortcomings, such as the absence of comparative raw data and statistical analysis, the small and nonrandom sample, as well as the limited range of respondents, which preclude further comparisons.

Another contribution to the study of Nihonjinron consumers is Leo Loveady’s (1990, 1997) research on Japanese attitudes toward contacts with foreign language and their relation to cultural ethnocentrism. Loveady identified, among other things, the social features (age, educational level, gender, and occupation) of 461 adult respondents who disclosed their attitudes toward contact with foreign culture and language. He found that respondents with higher educational background and higher occupations, and those aged 18–29, were somewhat more tolerant to foreign culture and language contact with English, although attitudinal disparity did not feature prominently in his study.

The Nishinomiya Survey

The most prominent endeavor hitherto to explore the Weltanschauung of Nihonjinron consumers was set forth at the end of the 1980s by a team led by American anthropologist Harumi Befu and Japanese sociologist Kazufumi Manabe. These researchers composed a questionnaire comprised of more than 200 items regarding familiarity with Nihonjinron ideas, adoption of its general attitudes, and belief in its tenets. The questionnaires were then distributed to a random sample of 2,400 adults in Nishinomiya, a city with a population of nearly a half million, serving as a “bedroom community” being midway between Osaka and Kobe. Nearly 1,000 adults from a wide range of age, occupation, education, and level of standard of living responded to the questionnaire and their answers were analyzed. The huge amount of raw data accumulated in this survey has yet to be fully exhausted as to its yield or relevant studies. For further details on the method, demographic structure of the sample, and descriptive results, see Manabe and Befu (1992); for statistical analysis, see Kowner, Befu, & Manabe (1999); McConnell, Kwon, Befu, and Manabe (1988); and Manabe, Befu, and McConnell (1989).

The findings of the Nishinomiya survey are highly important since it has been the only research to examine thoroughly the permeation and acceptance of Nihonjinron tenets into the mainstream Japanese population. The Nishinomiya survey revealed high familiarity of the respondents with Nihonjinron literature, promulgators, and ideas. Many of the respondents were familiar with Nihonjinron writers such as Kandaichi Haruhiko (78%), Aida Yuji (50%), and Doi Takeo (20%), and a surprising number of them read Nihonjinron material such as The Japanese and the Jews (Ben-Dasan, 1970) (30%) and The Structure of Amaz (Doi, 1971) (20%). They were also familiar with Nihonjinron tenets such as homogeneity of the people (72%) and uniqueness of the culture (57%).

At the same time, this survey also indicated that not all Japanese, as often has been claimed by Nihonjinron critics, think and behave in the way Nihonjinron authors write about Japan. When asked, for example, whether they expressed the proposition of homogeneity of the Japanese, only 38% of the respondents said “yes.” Thus, although much has been made of the homogeneity notion in Nihonjinron, it seems to only apply to a third of the population, while most other people either know about it but do not believe in it, or do not even know about it.

The Nishinomiya study identified two distinct features of Japanese public attitudes toward Nihonjinron: interest and belief. Naturally, interest in Nihonjinron surpasses belief. While 82% of the sample expressed interest in Nihonjinron, only about half of the sample expressed belief in its tenets. Thus, a clear message is that interest in Nihonjinron, such as that reflected by the sale of Nihonjinron books, does not mean that all who read about it necessarily agree with it. In contrast, perhaps to what one may expect from nationalistic attitudes, interest and belief seem to be correlated negatively. In other words, those who show high interest in Nihonjinron tenets do not believe in its tenets as much as those with lesser interest, and vice versa. This distinction is of great importance because interest in Nihonjinron, especially the widespread availability of books on this topic, has been often taken as an indicator of the strength of Japanese nationalism in general and ultranationalism in particular (Kowner, Befu, & Manabe, 1999).

The Nishinomiya survey also examined the idea of a “true Japanese,” namely, what are the requisites for being Japanese and how strict are they? A few studies have sought to identify the requirements for being Japanese. In a survey conducted in 1973, Cullen Tadao Hayashiha asked a sample of 313 adults, mainly from
Tokyo and its vicinity, to indicate the most important conditions for being considered a Japanese. Of the six conditions specified, respondents rated national character as the most important, blood relations with other Japanese second, and then particular physical characteristics, Japanese citizenship, and birth in Japan, with language fluency being the least important condition (Hayashida, 1976).

Loew (Kidder, 1992) sought to identify those subtle criteria by interviewing youth who, after a long stay abroad, found they were no longer considered “real Japanese” and felt marked as marginal. Their experiences of being discriminated as different stemmed from their insufficient adherence to certain social norms. First, they were somewhat physically marked, often by a different hairstyle or even color and by a different code of dress. Similarly, they behaved differently, acting more confident and expressive, while becoming more direct and less polite. The Nishimori survey asked its respondents to rate their personal (“self-norm”) and public (“societal”) view regarding the relevance of 10 criteria to one’s Japanese identity. The most relevant (“absolutely necessary”) criteria were: Japanese citizenship, Japanese language competency, Japanese name, having both parents Japanese, having a Japanese father, having a Japanese mother, living in Japan for some duration, and Japanese physical appearance. The least relevant criterion was to be born in Japan, and yet, none received 100% endorsement. In fact, many of the criteria, especially when rated as a public view, received less than 25% endorsement, a finding that underscores the point made earlier that Nihonjinron tenets are not uniformly supported by the majority of the Japanese population. Interestingly, although the ranking order of the criteria in the personal and public view was virtually identical, respondents believed that the public view is more conservative than their own personal opinions (Manabe, Befu, & McConnell, 1989).

Finally, it is interesting to illustrate the profile of the people who are interested in Nihonjinron ideology and believe in it. The typical person found to be highly exposed to Nihonjinron tenets and to manifest a greater interest in this topic tend to be an older and more educated male, who has been abroad, and has foreign acquaintances. By contrast, the person found to believe in Nihonjinron tenets and support them tends to be an older and less educated person, who has not been abroad, and does not have foreign acquaintances. The survey did not find appreciable sex differences, and the few statistically significant differences found were small.

FUNCTIONS OF NIHONJINRON AS REFLECTED BY ITS CONSUMERS

The resurgence of the Nihonjinron discourse in recent decades is an outcome of its ability to fulfill much of the needs of both its producers and consumers. Further, the tremendous popularity of Nihonjinron at present suggests that there has been a continuous process of mutual feedback between these two parties, a process that inevitably culminates into a multifunctional discourse.

Certain Nihonjinron writings are evidently the outcome of an identity quest. Befu (1995) discusses the current Nihonjinron in historical perspective, in which the present is only one phase in the long swing that has characterized the Japanese identity. The relative strength of Japanese vis-a-vis a referent civilization, China in the past and the West since the Meiji Restoration, has been instrumental in defining Japan in a positive or negative light. Since the 1970s, Japan’s economical “miracle” and social stability prompted the decline of postwar negative introspection and the reemergence of national self-confidence. It is in this milieu, Befu asserts, that Nihonjinron has attempted to challenge perceived Western dominance by demonstrating the singular character of Japanese culture and social institutions (1984).

Despite its strong emphasis on national supremacy, Nihonjinron betrays some doubts as well. Yoshino (1992) argues that the main purpose of Nihonjinron, as cultural nationalism, is to regenerate the national community, by strengthening and even recreating the Japanese cultural identity in an era when it is felt to be lacking or threatened. Although this contention seems at first to be at odds with the economic success and international prominence Japan has gained recently, it is hard to miss the identity crisis Japanese society has experienced in the same period. Among the manifold reasons for the urgent quest for identity one may point out rapid urbanization; loss of traditional values and instead a full-fledged acceptance of values and behavior of a postindustrial, postmodern (but not necessarily “Western”) society; and growing regional and global responsibility despite the existence of ambiguous attitudes toward foreign contacts (Befu, 1984; Ogawa, 1984; Stroeh, 1995).

Japanese tradition plays an important role in Nihonjinron’s account for current characteristics of Japanese society. It often presents an idealized picture of the old family system, communal life, and the past in general, stressing their unbroken ties with present institutions (Crawcour, 1980). This attempt to reconstruct the past and to link it with present circumstances is not particular to Japan. Hobsbawm (1983) went as far as to note that “the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the ‘invention of tradition’” (p. 14; cited by Yoshino, 1992). As a discourse that weaves old and newly invented tradition into current national identity, Nihonjinron fills an acutely felt vacuum, partly due to the absence of clearly defined and accepted major national symbols in contemporary Japan, such as the flag, the national anthem, and even the imperial institution (Befu, 1992). For this function, Nihonjinron attracts particularly the old generation, which seems to be more at loss at times of rapid transition. Moreover, members of the “war generation” group formed their national identity during a period of transnational consciousness and seem to keep a positive disposition toward symbols and practices associated with “old
nationalism." Thus, it is no wonder that in a period characterized by constant transitions, urban alienation, and destruction of the old family structure, members of the older generation show the greatest need for traditional values and firm national identity.

Wide agreement exists among Nihonjinron critics regarding its ideological role, even though they may differ on the question as to which segments of society benefit from its promulgation (Befu, 1987; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986). There is no doubt that the establishment and big corporations (and, one may argue, the society as a whole) do benefit from the masses’ belief in a hegemonic ideology, such as Nihonjinron, that advocates social harmony and homogeneity and consequently reduces conflict and threat to the status quo (Halliday, 1975; Kawamura, 1982). Indeed, the government and large firms in Japan have offered active support to various institutions that promote Nihonjinron tenets (Mouer & Sugimoto, 1995). The findings of a gap between consumers with high interest and consumers with strong belief in Nihonjinron tenets indicate that Nihonjinron is perceived by a wide range of the elite and adjacent classes as an agent of social control. Promulgated by a large number of educated middle-class Japanese, Nihonjinron reinforces the norms of the society. Notwithstanding its descriptive stance, the normative overtones of Nihonjinron writings are rather explicit and tell the Japanese, in John Davis’s words, “who they ought to be and how they ought to behave” (1983, p. 216).

The people the Nishinomiya survey identified as showing greater interest and exposure to Nihonjinron largely belong to the Japanese “intelligentsia” (which may correspond to Yoshino’s category of “thinking elites”). These people, similar to members of any intelligentsia, “possess some form of further or higher education and use their educational diplomas to gain a livelihood through vocations or activity, thereby disseminating and applying the ideas and paradigms created by intellectuals” (Smith, 1981, p. 108). Thus, through their knowledge of Nihonjinron tenets, but not necessarily because of their belief in them, they fulfill their role as members of a specific social strata, lower in hierarchy than the thin layer of genuine progenitors of ideas, but much above the gullible masses who are more prone to accept Nihonjinron tenets.

Finally, the fact that much of the Nihonjinron writings have been generated out of the authors’ own experiences in foreign countries or their encounters with foreigners in Japan prompted Davis (1983) to suggest that Nihonjinron is aimed primarily at a reading public with some international experience. This may be an overstatement, yet indeed over the last few decades, Nihonjinron has increasingly dealt with the domain of international relations and Japan’s “internationalization,” chiefly because of Japan’s ever-growing involvement in the international arena (Befu, 1983; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1983). Nihonjinron writings furnish Japanese who live overseas or merely maintain foreign contacts, and to a lesser extent also foreigners who deal with Japan, with cultural explanations regarding their difficulties in intercultural communication with each other, as well as justification for Japanese “national” behavior (Inamura, 1980; Ishihara & Morita, 1989).

Here, too, the establishment has assumed a substantial role in promoting Nihonjinron concepts overseas in various ways, such as funding translation of Nihonjinron publications, supporting foreign and local scholars who conduct research on issues within the umbrella of Nihonjinron, and sponsoring performances of “unique” Japanese art forms around the world (Sugimoto & Mouer, 1989). This function may account for the greater interest in Nihonjinron found among those who represent Japan vis-à-vis the world: members of the intelligentsia and, in our case, those who have been abroad and have foreign contact. Having knowledge of Nihonjinron tenets not only provides them with instant solutions to questions and even threats from foreigners, but also supplies them with simplified answers to doubts they may have regarding their own identity.

CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES AND FUTURE TRENDS

In view of the multiple role the Nihonjinron discourse plays for either the establishment or individual consumers, its tremendous prevalence and acceptance in contemporary Japanese society should not be a surprise. What is the course of Nihonjinron in the near future?

The Nishinomiya study provided a few clues regarding certain trends among Nihonjinron consumers. The fact that both exposure and interest in Nihonjinron are greater among older people suggests perhaps that adherence to Nihonjinron may decline in the future. This is not as simple as it appears to be; first, because age is only one out of many determinants of adherence, and second because adherence may change with time. Gano (1987) demonstrated that there is a slight tendency for generations to converge with the attitudes of the old (“maturational effect”) and, more importantly, an attitude change in all age groups with the lapse of time (“period effect”). For this effect, Gano concluded that “the ‘core’ values of traditional Japanese nationalism are alive and strong and growing stronger among all generations of postwar Japanese.” (1987, p. 445).

There are other indications for probable weakening of Nihonjinron beliefs in the future. Since the Nishinomiya survey was conducted, a large number of Japanese traveled abroad (38% of the respondents in the National Character Survey of 1993 traveled abroad vs. 28% in the survey of 1988, and in 1995 alone, about 16 million Japanese went abroad), a phenomenon that suggests a slight reduction of the belief, but not necessarily interest, in the tenets of Nihonjinron. Likewise, the widespread educational attainment in contemporary Japan may decrease the acceptance level of Nihonjinron tenets among the emerging young generation.

These trends notwithstanding, the future of Nihonjinron inevitably will be affected predominantly by the domestic and international situation of Japan. Continuous affluence, stability, and successful involvement of Japan in global
affairs may decrease consumers' need for Nihonjinron. In contrast, increasing international competition or economic depression, among other things, may intensify adherence to its tenets. A case in point may be the recent economic stagnation in Japan since the mid-1990s. My thesis suggests that such a situation should intensify, at least slightly, nationalistic attitudes as reflected in an increase in Nihonjinron tenets. While continued research into current Nihonjinron beliefs is encouraged, there are recently some indirect indicators to support this contention, such as the growing acceptance of the Kinnigay national anthem and use of the Hinomaru (the rising sun) flag in schools, wartime symbols once disparaged by many Japanese.

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Korea—a Mistrusted Minority in Japan: Hopes and Challenges for Japan’s True Internationalization

Soo-im Lee

As the new millennium dawns, Jihō (information) is the latest buzzword in Japan, succeeding the catchy kokusaika (internationalization). Collapse of the Japanese economy in the 1990s forced the Japanese to seek greater accountability and information disclosure in business and in other spheres of society. One area, however, has remained only dimly, if at all, lit in Japanese consciousness: the status and plight of the Korean minority in Japan. Few Japanese know about the Koreans’ historical background and the cause of their presence in Japanese society. Because Koreans are physically indistinguishable from Japanese and many use Japanese assumed names to avoid likely discrimination, their existence has become practically invisible in Japanese society. Japanese lack awareness of minority problems in their own country, influenced by myths of cultural homogeneity and racial purity, which are still firmly believed by many Japanese. This chapter focuses on two related topics: (1) the superiority and inferiority relationship between Japanese and Koreans from historical perspectives, and (2) the changing consciousness of national identity held by young Japanese and Koreans. Young Japanese have fewer negative feelings toward Koreans than do older people, while young Koreans experience an identity crisis as they try to work out an ethnic identity. Also discussed is government policy concerning foreign residents in light of naturalization procedures, that is still obscure from public view.