

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Language and cultural capital in the discursive maintenance of Japanese identity

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Abstract

This paper explains how the possession of linguistic and cultural capital, real and imagined, works to “make” people Japanese and reify the boundary of Japanese identity. Drawing on case studies of celebrities with multiple heritage and ethnographic data, this paper shows how discursive associations with possessing cultural capital (re)create boundaries of Japanese identity, incorporating potential out-group members and excluding ostensible in-group members. The paper argues that the possession of native-level cultural capital will become an important way of differentiating “Japanese” from Others henceforth. These discursive processes apply old hegemonic ideologies in novel ways, allowing for the perpetuation of extant identity discourses and cultural institutions to be reproduced with new faces. It also argues that cultural capital is a more practical way of categorizing Japanese people from Others than identity constructions such as race and ethnicity. In doing so, it also demonstrates how Japanese people possess multiple understandings of Japanese authenticity, which both facilitates and hinders the absorption of potential Others into the collective.

Key words: Diversity; ethnicity; identity; immigration; Japan

Racial and ethnic homogeneity in Japan is not an objective fact, it is instead a construct of those who are motivated to promote a certain cultural conception of Japan (Befu 2001, p. 69).

Introduction

Japan’s population has been shrinking since the early 2000s. This population decline is expected to compound dramatically throughout the twenty-first century. This decline has prompted increased inflow of foreign workers. Today, there are around 3 million registered foreigners in Japan according to official census data, which comprises roughly 2–3% of Japan’s population (Japanese Statistics Bureau 2020). Many of these foreigners have married Japanese people and have settled in Japan. Correspondingly, the number of mixed people in Japan is rising.

Although no official data exist, the number of mixed people in Japan has risen substantially over the past three decades. The award-winning documentary film *Hāfu: The Mixed Experience in Japan* (2013), which portrayed the lives of mixed Japanese people, estimates that there are 20,000 mixed people born annually in Japan. Others estimate that one in thirty children born in Japan is of mixed heritage (Saber 2015). Although this may seem insignificant, the numbers will compound. Mixed people are also appearing in more visible roles, are coming from more diverse backgrounds, and are generating novel questions concerning the identity of mixed people, Japan as a whole, and the positionality of such people in Japanese society.

This paper is concerned with the ways mixed people are being discursively made “Japanese” through real and imagined associations with possessing linguistic and cultural capital. In doing so, it explores the ramifications of these processes by highlighting how language and cultural capital function categorically and pragmatically to differentiate Japanese from non-Japanese people. I suggest that what will emerge is an environment in which there are large numbers of culturally native but phenotypically different people in Japan. As a result, rather than engendering large-scale social issues or serious multiculturalism, the Japanese status quo will persist relatively unscathed but with a different appearance. These processes uphold the Japanese identity boundary and do so in ways that quietly elide ostensible Others into the Japanese category. This paper examines the conditions surrounding some of Japan’s most prominent mixed celebrities and presents ethnographic data from Japanese people who demonstrate how the boundary of Japanese identity functions differentially today pragmatically and conceptually. It uses cultural capital to frame this discussion to show how discourses redefine categorical identity boundaries.

How mixed people are being subsumed into the Japanese collective has largely been absent from previous research. Most studies have focused on issues mixed people face in Japan, such as bullying, exclusion, and marginalization, and Othering (Kimura 2021; Murphy-Shigematsu 2000, 2008; Okamura 2017; Williams 2017, Vol. 2; Yamashiro 2017). While these observations are important, they are also only part of the story. This paper suggests that paying attention to these similarities will offer insights into the ways Japanese society is making people Japanese and working to minimize discord, in some situations, that Japan’s impending demographic changes will induce. Thus, Japan’s old institutions will be sustained relatively unscathed but will proceed, literally, with a new face.

Discursive hegemony: making of Japanese identity

After Japan’s defeat in World War II, the nation found itself searching for a new identity. Stripped of its colonial territories, it was no longer able to evoke notions of a superior imperial identity it was able to in years prior. It was at this time that theorization about Japanese identity gained increasing attention and the body of literature and public discourse known as *nihonjinron* became more mainstream. *Nihonjinron* can be translated as “theories of what it means to be Japanese.” These works flourished during the postwar period and sought to empirically demonstrate the uniqueness of Japan’s population. *Nihonjinron* writers postulated that the Japanese population was inherently exceptional from other populations for many reasons, including its alleged genetic uniqueness, unique connections with Japan’s geography and history, the complexity of the Japanese language, and particular cultural practices (see Befu 2001; Dale 1986; Miller 1982). These ideas provided an important substance in constructing postwar Japanese identity. It was in this context that ideas espousing Japan’s alleged homogeneity and cultural exceptionality emerged (Befu 2001; Oguma 1995).

Such identity discourses were constructed on essentialist ideas, which have had considerable implications for notions of contemporary Japanese identity. Harumi Befu, author of an important inquiry into the nature of *nihonjinron*, notes that the “ethos” of *nihonjinron* ideology is expressed in the form of Japanese terminology, such as *Yamato damashii* (spirit of Japan), *kokoro* (“the heart” of Japan or the Japanese), and *Nihon seishin* (Japanese spirit) (Befu 2001, pp. 31–32). This ethos is comprised of these abstract psychocultural constructs that discursively reference the “symbolic essence of Japan” (Befu 2001, p. 32). Such terms bind Japanese people to the collective in conceptually powerful ways that function to establish the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) of Japan.

One such psychocultural ethos is the Japanese notion of *kokoro*. *Kokoro* is a difficult concept to translate that embodies English sentiments of “heart,” suggesting the existence of an inner force that guides one’s actions and identity. Befu notes that “heart” is “obviously used metaphorically, as one might in the expression ‘heart of America’ or ‘heart of Russia,’ with the focus on fondness and sentimentality, spiritual and emotional overtones distilling the spirit of Japanese culture” (Befu 2001, p. 32). Speaking of the *nihonjinron* authors, Befu observes:

even though [*nihonjinron*] authors and compilers of accounts of notable figures in Japanese history do not tell us why they selected the chosen figures or what about them qualifies them as manifesting “the heart of Japan” or “the heart of the Japanese,” the term *kokoro* still resonates among Japanese readers. It points to the locus and the substance of quintessential “Japanliness” – the crux of Japanese culture (Befu 2001, p. 33, emphasis added).

In constructing postwar identity, such associations with psychocultural traits served to buttress notions of Japanese uniqueness and national exceptionalism, linking people, culture, and national body based on these shared and discursive characteristics.

Language also played an important role in constructing notions of identity and uniqueness (Gottlieb 2005; Miller 1982). This engenders a psychological and social connection in the form of Japanese identity that postulates there is an important correspondence between being Japanese and speaking the Japanese language, which if not satisfied creates perceptual tensions and confusions in the minds of Japanese actors (Kondo 1986; Takamori 2015; Yamashiro 2017). Befu observes that “since...there is supposedly a perfect isomorphism between speakers of the Japanese language and bearers of the Japanese culture, whatever is unique about the language is also unique to the people and culture” (Befu 2001, p. 35). Why language is important to Japanese uniqueness is because it is connected with unique “thought processes,” “social structure,” “logicality,” and “communication patterns” (Befu 2001, pp. 32–39). Roy Andrew Miller noted that:

To speak and use the Japanese language is to be a Japanese; to be a Japanese is to speak and to use the Japanese language. So long as each of these two balanced assumptions is maintained they reinforce each other; but if either of them is disturbed in the slightest, both collapse (Miller 1982, p. 71).

As will be shown below, this reference to language has had material consequences in the form of conceptual categorizations.

Much *nihonjinron* writing connects these unique psychocultural and linguistic traits to ethnoracial homogeneity. In doing so, Japan’s diversity is downplayed to strategically conceptualize Japan as a space absent of diversity (Befu 2001, p. 69; Lie 2001; Oguma 1995; Yoshino 1992). Befu discusses a *nihonjinron* writer, linguist Suzuki Takao, who identified racial homogeneity as being the first component of Japan’s many homogenous facets (Suzuki 1980). Befu explains that Suzuki “considers the Ainu population too small...to be of any consequence. He does not believe that Koreans constitute a problem...because the majority of Koreans are culturally and linguistically so assimilated so assimilated to be indistinguishable from Japanese” (Befu 2001, p. 69). Here, categorical Others are overlooked, downplayed, or simply absorbed into the collective based on their small numbers and indistinguishability from the Japanese majority (see also Kelly 2013). I suggest that the same processes are continuing, and will continue, and that discursive associations with cultural capital will enable this into the future.

Finally, the ideas about Japaneseness entangled with these identity discourses are ever-changing and reactionary. Befu again notes:

a given person’s *nihonjinron* model is not a static one, but is constantly changing in a sort of feedback loop, being revised over and over as the person’s experiences increase, and with exposure to more *nihonjinron* literature or new situations relevant to the formation of *nihonjinron* (Befu 2001, p. 77).

This suggests that Japanese people who maintain such discourses and ideologies do so reflexively, incorporating lived experiences and new information into their constructions and understandings of them. As Japan’s population continues to shrink and further diversify, Japanese people will be exposed to a much broader range of people and experiences with cultural Others in the form of

foreigners and mixed people. It is essential to contemplate how these discourses change accordingly and what effects they have. I argue that this reflexive feedback loop will allow notions of Japanese identity to be remade, with ostensible Others being subsumed into the collective and without considerable disruption to the social status quo. We will not see a “multicultural” or “diverse” Japan, but instead, Japanese cultural institutions largely intact but with different looking people participating in them.

Linguistic and cultural capital

The processes responsible for developing postwar Japanese identity have come to associate certain forms of capital with categorical belonging. These associations manifest most clearly in the form of cultural capital and how linguistic and cultural capital inform notions of similarity and difference. Pierre Bourdieu defined cultural capital as forms of capital based on skills, traits, and intangible assets that could ultimately be converted to economic capital (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu was concerned with how material possessions and credentials translated into economic capital. However, possessing certain forms of capital can also be beneficial for sociocultural reasons, which may or may not correspond to the possession of economic capital but the possession of which would lead to greater benefits among those within particular cultural milieus. Not considering these other, non-economic outcomes that can be gleaned from capital possession, risks reducing people to a form of economic reductionism whereby highly subjective personal aspirations are overlooked.

One such form of this cultural capital is linguistic capital. Bourdieu saw schools, for instance, as playing a prominent role in “changing and in reproducing social and cultural inequalities from one generation to the next” (Harker 1990, p. 86). Schools aid in developing one’s “habitus,” which lead people to acquire skills, qualifications, mannerism, and predilections that reproduce their places in society (Bourdieu 1984; Harker 1990). Schools and society instill certain linguistic and cultural practices that people enact and outwardly project in daily life. While this is not true universally (Bourdieu having observed that there are exceptions, himself among them), it is useful to contemplate how scholastic and cultural socialization works to instill within children certain forms of being that semiotically signify to others important sociocultural information (DiMaggio 1979; Silver 2005). While cultural capital is often used to explain discrepancies, it has also been linked to increased assimilation among some second-generation migrants (Nauck 2001).

Bourdieu saw the possession of such capital as offering insights into the (re)productions of discretely economic aspects of society, but here I wish to explore the more cultural ways that the possession, exhibition, and discursive projection of cultural capital – in the form of native-level language and cultural skills, both real and imagined – work to redefine identity boundaries. While economic outcomes *may* converge with the projection and possession of such capital, it is by no means the only noteworthy outcome. In Japan, the effects of the cultural and social outcomes may offer even greater insights for understanding the workings of Japanese society than an economic approach. This paper explores the conceptuality and materiality of the intersection of these phenomena to consider the ways that the boundary of Japanese identity is being altered by the presence of diverse people in Japan.

Japanese identity and native-level cultural capital

Linguistic and cultural capital in the form of native-level language and cultural fluency has historically functioned as a boundary for differentiating Japanese people from non-Japanese people. While previous studies have broached the dynamic ways that language corresponds to notions of Japanese identity (Adachi 2005; Donahue 1998; Gottlieb 2005; Green 2015; Kondo 1986; Miller 1982; Takamori 2015; Yoshino 1992), there remains much to be learned about the ways that cultural capital has operated as an identity boundary in contemporary Japan (Barth 1969). Although constructed identity categories such as race, ethnicity, and nationality have been important in shaping ideas *about* Japanese identity, language and cultural fluency provide these notions with a substances *out of which* they can be constructed. Considering how boundaries operate to define group identities is more useful than looking at

the ways cultural phenomena in themselves define in-group membership and is potentially more precise than looking to abstract identity constructions.

Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is useful because it helps explain how the Japanese identity boundary is established, maintained, and reified contemporarily and reflexively. It also highlights a heretofore unobserved distinction in the literature: the difference between "native" and "fluent" levels of cultural capital. This is important because Japanese people make psychological and cultural associations that correspond to different types of cultural capital possession. For instance, many of 3 million foreigners living in Japan are fluent in Japanese and can handle any situation in their daily lives without difficulty. However, few will ever be mistaken as Japanese based on their possession of such capital, and this is especially true for foreigners who do not phenotypically "pass" as Japanese. There exists a notion among many Japanese that "you have to be born a Japanese to appreciate the subtlety of Japanese thinking" (Yoshino 1992, p. 117). Many Japanese people continue to perceive foreigners as unable to "truly" understand Japanese because of its supposed inherent difficulties and, even if they do reach fluency, it is assumed they will be incapable of understanding the cultural nuances that correspond with Japanese sociolinguistic norms (Befu 2001; Donahue 1998; Gottlieb 2005; Miller 1982).

The same distinction is at work when construction notions of Japaneseness are juxtaposed against *hāfu* and *nikkeijin* identities. *Nikkeijin* is a term to describe ethnic Japanese living outside of Japan, and it is commonly evoked to refer to the hundreds of thousands of Latin American *nikkeijin* who were incentivized to migrate to Japan in the 1990s (Roth 2002; Tsuda 2003). However, *nikkeijin* of all backgrounds maintain a fluid and precarious place in the Japanese identity spectrum. In Japan, there are myriad ways Otherness is constructed and engaged, and this is similarly the case for people of Japanese descent.

Hāfu also exist in this precarious Japanese identity space and are often absorbed by proxy into the "Japanese" category on the basis of their linguistic and cultural similarity. In a study on mixed Japanese people's identities in Japan, Jane H. Yamashiro noted that one half-Japanese, half-American woman, Sara, distinguished herself from Japanese-Americans on the basis of her linguistic abilities, stating explicitly that she was "*hāfu*, not Japanese-American" and that Japanese-Americans are not Japanese in any way "other than ethnically" (see Yamashiro 2017, pp. 53–54). When people asked Yamashiro's informant why she spoke Japanese so well, she simply replied, "Because I am *hāfu*" (Yamashiro 2017, p. 55).

Here, language skills distinguish *hāfu* as categorically closer to the Japanese majority than Japanese-Americans and other groups in the Japanese diaspora, who are perceived as members of their respective birth countries rather than Japan. Others have noted how the language skills of mixed peoples also work to bring them closer to mainstream Japanese but not unproblematically (see Green 2017).

Possessing cultural capital thus offers a criterion that distinguishes insiders from outsiders. Native sociolinguistic capital involves speaking Japanese flawlessly, without grammatical errors, and deploying appropriate levels of politeness in given situations, among others. There are also cultural (behavioral) components involved in producing native-level communication. As will be shown, failing to exhibit proper mannerisms, wearing atypical clothing, and engaging in "not Japanese" behavior can exclude one from being categorically Japanese despite their ostensible ethnoracial congruity. Thus, people can cross the Japanese identity boundary based on their possession and exhibition of such cultural and linguistic capital.

Historically, language and culture have been important mechanisms through which the Japanese state has tried to "make" certain groups more "Japanese." For instance, state officials implemented conscious efforts to "Japanize" domestic minority populations and assimilate them through the adoption of the mainstream Japanese language and cultural practices. Discussing Okinawans, Nanette Gottlieb, citing Koji Aikyo, notes that:

because they had their own language, culture and history, the people of Okinawa had to endure excessive measures as the Japanese government work to make them "Japanese." For example...a

student who spoke even a word of the Okinawan language was forced to wear a dialect placard (*hōgen fuda*) around his or her neck, enduring humiliation until another student made the same mistake and was in turn, forced to assume the role of class dance (Gottlieb 2005, p. 24, citing Aikyo 1998).

Similar processes were at work in the “Japanization” of the Ainu. Forced linguistic assimilation policies in Japan’s northernmost island of Hokkaido have led to the Ainu language becoming all but moribund and have forcefully erased much of the Ainu’s cultural heritage (Htun 2012; Siddle 1996). There are less than 100 native Ainu speakers alive today and approximations of the number of people with Ainu ancestry are difficult to ascertain due to intermixing with Japanese people and unwillingness to reveal one’s Ainu ancestry. Such practices were also at work in Japan’s colonies, where colonial administrators implemented repressive language and cultural assimilation policies. The most stringent of these were implemented on the Korean Peninsula, where for a time, Korean language and cultural practices were banned in the late 1930s, forcing Koreans to use Japanese as part of an effort to shape Koreans into good “subjects” of the emperor (Kim-Rivera 2002; Lie 2008).

In such ways, forced linguistic and cultural assimilation have been important for incorporating subjugated, non-Japanese populations into the Japanese collective. If the state could force these people to speak Japanese, abandon their native cultural practices, and adopt Japanese cultural norms, it would lead to a more unified empire. Japan’s colonial empire came to be very diverse, and the colonized populations that fell under this umbrella were thought to be tangible components of Japan’s empire project, albeit subjugated ones. This diverse form of collectivity exists in stark contrast to contemporary notions of Japanese identity, which emerged in the postwar period and emphasized essentialist notions ethn racial homogeneity (Lie 2001; Oguma 1995).

These identity ideologies have consequences for the way Others are accepted into or rejected from accessing Japanese collectivity and how they are perceived. Kosaku Yoshino explains that one of his interlocutor’s “first reactions to [ethnic Koreans and Chinese in Japan] were...very negative,” stating:

Although Chinese and Japanese look alike, we have very different customs and mentalities. Unlike the Continentals who are *ōzappa* (relaxed enough not to be concerned about small points), we Japanese have more delicate feelings. It is important to know how differences for the sake of better mutual understanding...No matter how long they live here, I think they will remain Chinese or Koreans. After all, we are different *minzoku* (ethnic/racial groups) (Yoshino 1992, pp. 118–19).

However, when this interlocutor’s “attention was drawn to...those former Koreans and Chinese who had become naturalized and passed as Japanese,” they recognized that Koreans and Chinese could “become Japanese” (*nihonjin ni nareru*): “As long as we are not informed of their former origins, it is true that they can become Japanese” (Yoshino 1992, p. 119). This obviously contradicts much of the homogeneity discourses that have been so loudly evoked in constructions of postwar Japanese identity (Befu 2001; Oguma 1995).

Ethnic Koreans and other minorities in Japan often rely on “passing” as a livelihood strategy (Lie 2008; Ryang 2008). This has been true historically and remains true today. On one occasion, I was teaching a class in Japan and a student introduced themselves to the rest of the class using a Japanese name. However, when I checked the class roster, no such student was listed. On further examination, the student’s ID number was in fact on the roster, but their name was written in katakana and Chinese. This student was presenting themselves as Japanese to their classmates. I dare not inquire about the student’s reason for doing so, but it was clear that the student was making a conscious effort to “pass” as Japanese through their self-introduction and the use of Japanese characters on their name tag. “Passing” is beneficial to those people who are capable and willing to do so. If such people do not “pass,” they have historically been Othered and relegated to the social margins.

Possessing native-level Japanese language and cultural capital has allowed ostensible Others to be received as Japanese, despite their non-Japanese backgrounds. While the degree of acceptance is certainly variable, this nonetheless facilitates their incorporation into the Japanese collective. This means people can be subsumed into the Japanese collective on the basis of their ability to “pass.” The same is true of the reverse situation: the absence of language and cultural nativeness can exclude otherwise ostensibly Japanese people from the Japanese collectivity and distinguish them as a categorical Other.

Several examples highlight how apparently “Japanese” people are excluded and Othered due to their lack of sociolinguistic capital. First, Japanese returnee children (*kikokushijo*) failing to be accepted by their Japanese classmates has been well-documented (Goodman 1990; Kidder 1992). *Kikokushijo* refers to Japanese children raised abroad who then returned to Japan after being socialized and attending school outside of Japan. Problems arose because such children were not socialized in Japanese schools and did not have the same upbringing as their Japanese. Others have explained the crucial role that education plays in socializing children to be functioning members of Japanese society (Burdelski 2010; Hendry 1986). This lack of socialization equipped such children with mannerisms and norms that distinguished them as being different. For example, one of Louise Kidder’s interlocutors noted of the returnees that:

Their manners of walking, sitting, and gesturing should be less vivid, confident, or spontaneous. Their body language should express more humility, restraint, and respect. Their speech must do more to honor the listener and humble the self (Kidder 1992, p. 391).

Another of Kidder’s interlocutors noted that she could observe returnees “by the way they walk,” further explaining that, “Many friends who went to the U.S. came back and walked with their toes out, like a man, and it looks cool...not girlish and with big steps. Girlish is with toes or parallel, and not much space between steps” (Kidder 1992, p. 386). Another described themselves as “irremediably transformed” and unable to develop the cultural habits necessary to pass as a Japanese person (Kidder 1992, p. 392). For such people, there are considerable difficulties in integrating into society upon their return.

Second, *nikkeijin*, Japanese-Americans and Japanese-Latin Americans alike, have both been marginalized and excluded from the Japanese mainstream collective, though in different ways. In the 1990s, Japanese-Latin Americans, were incentivized by the Japanese government to come to Japan to fill growing labor shortages in manual labor industries. Having been surprised by the large influx of foreign workers from other parts of Asia that entered Japan during the 1980s, policymakers, public officials, and the general public became concerned with the growing numbers of foreigners residing in Japan. Stories soon emerged linking foreigners to criminal activities and social disorder, some of which were truer than others (Shipper 2008). It was presumed that because Japanese-Latin Americans were ethnically Japanese that they would be able to smoothly integrated into Japanese society and would not bring the same problems migrants did in the 1980s.

Soon after these *nikkeijin* arrived, however, these premises proved misguided. The *nikkeijin* were unable to smoothly integrate into Japanese society and work culture – many did not speak Japanese fluently and were unfamiliar with contemporary Japanese work and cultural norms. There were constant issues with the *nikkeijin* and efforts to integrate them based on their shared ancestry were largely unsuccessful (Tsuda 2003). By the early 2000s, the Japanese government was offering *nikkeijin* economic incentives to leave Japan indefinitely (Ishikawa 2012).

Previous research has shown that Latin-American *nikkeijin* have been excluded from the Japanese collective on the basis of their lack of language and cultural abilities. Because these *nikkeijin* lacked Japanese language abilities, cultural knowledge, and awareness of contemporary Japanese workplace norms, the fact that they were different from the mainstream population became readily apparent. One Japanese-Brazilian informant in Japan reported to Meiko Nishida (2017, p. 197) that: “[t]he Japanese in Japan are prejudiced...they...look down on the *Nikkeijin* for coming from a different cultural background, being unable to speak Japanese, and not being culturally Japanese, despite their

Japanese face.” Even in cases of Japanese-Latin Americans who do speak Japanese, the language they use is linguistically different than the standard language variety spoken in Japan today (Adachi 2005; DeCarvalho 2003; Tsuda 2003). Thus, the Latin-American *nikkeijin*'s lack of cultural capital, language skills, and knowledge of Japanese norms led to them being Othered by mainstream society.

Behavior has also played a role in marginalizing the *nikkeijin* from the Japanese collective. For example, Angelo Akimitsu Ishi (2008, p. 119) notes that young Japanese-Brazilians in Japan were criticized by Japanese for buying cars and other extravagant items, and even Japanese academics “condemned the young migrants’ behavior, defining them as people ‘lost in consumption,’ primarily concerned with ‘enjoying life’ – as if ‘expending money’ were a ‘dirty act.’” Ishi notes that this is part of the cultural differences between Japanese-Brazilians and Japanese that reinforces the cultural distance between the two groups (pp. 119–20). Elsewhere, others have highlighted how Latin American *nikkeijin*'s unfamiliarity with Japanese work norms and workplace behavior further led to their marginalization and being viewed as different (Tsuda 2003).

Japanese-Americans have also felt marginalization and exclusion in Japan despite their Japanese ancestry and American background. This sometimes comes at a higher price, since Japanese-Americans are often perceived more favorably in Japan than Japanese-descent peoples from other places. Ayako Takamori (2015) notes that Japanese people experience “cognitive dissonance” when they encounter Japanese-Americans unable to speak Japanese well. Yamashiro (2017) observed that many Japanese-Americans are unable to acclimate themselves to Japanese cultural norms and encounter marginalization because of their lack of Japanese abilities. Some Japanese-Americans have even pretended *not* to speak Japanese as well as they actually could to avoid some of the social responsibilities that someone with a high level of linguistic ability would be expected to take up (Takamori 2015, p. 497). Any prestige associated with America in the abstract wanes quickly once Japanese people recognize their lack of native-level linguistic facility and cultural capital.

These examples show how language, culture, and behavioral factors supersede notions of ethnoracial similarity to construct and enforce the boundary of Japaneseness. They also show how the Japanese language has been “imagined and represented” in ways that map onto identity ideologies (Miller 2015, p. 387). Understanding language, culture, and behavior as forms of cultural capital is appropriate because it provides Japanese identity with a substance through which people are categorized and engaged. This is especially true when compared with abstract and elusive identity constructions, such as race, ethnicity, and nationality. Empirically, it is impossible to determine in any meaningful sense whether someone is a member of the Japanese “race.” On the contrary, it can readily be determined whether one possesses the linguistic and cultural capital necessary to act according to the status quo. While phenotypic incongruity may complicate one’s acceptance as “Japanese,” I suggest that this will fade over time and in ways that will move the benchmark for who is considered “Japanese.” This will effectively move the boundary of Japanese identity to one contingent much more on cultural and linguistic fluency than on other variables, especially when compared to the past. As will be shown below, these real and imagined forms of cultural capital function discursively in multiple ways to define group membership.

Mixed celebrities and national representation

In Japan, although seeing mixed people in the public spotlight is not fundamentally new (Kelly 2013; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008), the past decade has seen an especially profound and diverse proliferation of highly visible celebrities of mixed ancestry. This increased presence has generated renewed debates about the role of mixed people in Japanese society and to what extent they should be considered “Japanese.” The celebrities discussed below have been selected as case studies because they demonstrate some of the clearest ways that these discursive processes in question can be seen at work: namely, that multifarious actors use discursive associations with language and cultural capital to make these people more “Japanese” than would have been otherwise permitted historically.

Ariana Miyamoto

In 2015, Ariana Miyamoto, born to an African-American father and Japanese mother, was crowned the winner of Miss Universe Japan. Her victory led to an expected public outcry with many commentators saying that she was not “Japanese enough” to have won. Miyamoto is taller, darker, possesses distinctive facial features not common in Japan, and she has a different physique to those common among Japanese women. Commenters questioned why she was selected and whether or not it was appropriate to select a mixed person to represent Japan. Jaya Z. Powell has presented some of the derogatory sentiments directed toward Miyamoto after her victory. These include comments such as “An Asian beauty would feel better to me,” “I don’t get that feeling like, ‘Wow! She’s beautiful!’” “She’s really pretty, but I’m kind of disappointed she’s representing Japan. I would have liked to see someone with a Japanese aesthetic,” “A pure Japanese would be better to represent Japan (...),” and “She looks like a *gaijin* [foreigner]” (Powell 2015, pp. 3–4).

In response to this criticism Miyamoto responded by saying that:

“Although my appearance is foreign, my *kokoro* is Japanese. I feel this way when I do things such as give up my seat to others. I want to wear a kimono in international contests” she said appearing with the spirit of a lovable woman¹ (Takahashi 2015).

In making a claim as to why she should be allowed to represent Japan, Miyamoto professes that her *kokoro* (heart, spirit, soul) is Japanese. In doing so, Miyamoto is drawing on discursive identity associations referencing both abstract notions of a Japanese “soul” and also her practical ability to demonstrate her possession of cultural capital despite having a “foreign outward appearance.” As noted, *kokoro* has been an important notion for constructing Japanese identity and conveying the supposed essence of Japaneseness.

Identity has played an important role in Miyamoto’s life. She has spoken about several events that raised her identity consciousness. She cites that the suicide of one of her closest friends, who was also mixed, compelled her to compete in Miss Japan, stating that she was “determined to eliminate prejudice and discrimination by taking to the stage” and that despite discrimination, she nonetheless “felt” Japanese, especially so juxtaposed to her experiences living in America:

“I was born and raised in Japan. Although I went to school in America, I returned to Japan during holidays. I would always feel relieved when I returned to Japan thinking ‘Ah. I am Japanese, aren’t I?’ Because I felt I was Japanese, I chose Japanese to be a Japanese national” (Takahashi 2015).

Despite criticism, Miyamoto has maintained a fanbase, and the judges of the contest selected her as the winner *despite* the criticism that they surely know her selection would induce. A *New York Times* segment featuring Miyamoto references Stephen Diaz, a Japan-based pageant reporter, noted:

[Diaz] said that Ms. Miyamoto dominated a contest that required contestants to show off their dance moves and don elegant evening gowns, in addition to the obligatory bikini competition. I mean, we were all thinking, this is Japan. They’re not going to crown a black girl...But then she was so far above the other contestants (Fackler 2015).

Miyamoto’s identity tensions are emblematic of Japan’s future. We must remember that the judges of this contest selected her because she gave Japan the best chance to win. They wielded considerable power, which they chose to exert, by selecting such a controversial winner. These more open-minded judges stand in contrast to the comments demonstrated by Powell above. This tension will play out in greater ways over the next decade as more and more mixed people are prominently featured in Japanese life.

¹All translations are by the author.

Tellingly, Priyanka Yoshikawa won Miss World Japan in 2016, and Aisha Harumi Tochigi won Miss Universe Japan in 2020. Yoshikawa was born to a Bengali-Indian father and Japanese mother, and Tochigi was born to a Ghanaian father and Japanese mother. Even more striking is the fact that four out of the top five placements in the 2020 Miss Universe Japan contest were mixed; second place was given to Raimu Kaminashi (half-Nigerian), third place was given to Yuki Sonoda (half-Filipino), and fifth place was given to Marina Little (New Zealander-Japanese). If the conservative voices were gaining influence in Japan, it is highly unlikely any of these women would have won these contests or placed as high as they did.

Naomi Osaka

Perhaps Japan's most unique example of a mixed celebrity is also one of the most well-known. Naomi Osaka was born in Japan to a Haitian father and Japanese mother but was raised in the United States. Osaka rose to fame when she defeated Serena Williams at the US Open in 2018. Although Osaka was a dual citizen by birth, she renounced her American citizenship and retained her Japanese citizenship in early 2020 so that she can represent Japan henceforth. Osaka maintains a large fanbase in Japan, and fans can be seen lining up outside of her performances and events to enthusiastically show their support for her.

What makes Osaka's reception especially noteworthy is her obvious *lack* of Japanese cultural capital, a fact which highlights the importance of the *perceived* presence of cultural capital. Osaka usually does not appear in public speaking more than a few Japanese words, and her mannerisms resemble more of a quirky American teenager than a Japanese tennis star. While Osaka can receive reporter's questions in Japanese, she has tended to reply to them in English, much to their dismay (Sarkar 2016). Osaka, nonetheless, has persistently professed interest in admiration for her Japanese heritage and notes that she is a fan of "manga and [Japanese] movies" (Larmer 2018). She has promised her Japanese fans she will get better at speaking Japanese and speak more Japanese in the future. This lack of cultural capital cuts her off from having the same level of interaction and correspondence with the Japanese public as much as Miyamoto.

Despite this lack of capital, similar discursive processes are at work, this time by Japanese commentators themselves, who "make" her more "Japanese" than she otherwise appears. This is done through drawing associations between her Japanese heritage, her behavior, and her alleged possession of characteristics. During Osaka's 2018 match with Serena Williams, Williams acted aggressively toward Osaka and the umpire because of what Williams perceived to be unfair and bad calls. Williams "received a code violation for coaching, a penalty for breaking her racquet, and was further penalized for having insulted the umpire by calling him a 'liar' and a 'thief'" (Maegaard, Milani, and Mortensen 2019, p. 2). Confronted with this aggression, Osaka remained composed and ultimately won the match. The fact that Osaka remained so calm and was able to win in the face of this aggressiveness was interpreted by some Japanese commentators as proof of her "Japanese" characteristics, which in turn validated her as "Japanese." Mie Hiramoto explains that "Osaka was portrayed as a passive receiver of the event" and was met with a barrage of booing when she received her trophy, to which Osaka "[hid] her face weeping" (Hiramoto 2019, p. 1), an action to which Williams came to her defense and sternly asked the crowd to stop. When subsequently speaking to reporters, Osaka "apologized to the audience for the way the match ended, betraying their expectations. In this way, Osaka showed sympathy towards the audience, who was obviously there to see Williams win the game" (Hiramoto 2019, p. 1). Hiramoto adds:

Osaka was associated with Japanese culture for her apologetic behavior to the point that the media quoted her Japanese mother saying: "*Her soul is Japanese (although she does not look like one, does not live in Japan, or does not speak Japanese well)*" (Hiramoto 2019, pp. 1–2, quoted originally in Rich 2018, emphasis added).

If there were doubts concerning whether Osaka was worthy of representing Japan, according to these voices, her behavior (i.e., ability to maintain calm and professional in the face of hostility) is what established her as Japanese.

Further complicating Osaka's case is the fact that it is not improbable that her reason for maintaining her Japanese citizenship and renouncing her American citizenship has much to do with professional reasons. Japan does not allow dual citizenship. A *Reuters* report noted that her father "advised her to represent the country of her birth because of the opportunities available to her" (Sarkar 2016). Although the family has denied that Osaka renounced her American citizenship for financial reasons, it is hard to overlook the fact that Osaka faces considerably less competition in the Japanese tennis scene. A *New York Times Magazine* article featuring Osaka noted that massive endorsements of Japanese tennis stars are well-known and that she would face much greater competition if she represented the United States (Larmer 2018). Despite Osaka's sociolinguistic ambiguity and her possible motives for adopting Japanese citizenship, her support has not waned and public sentiment surrounding her decision to become Japanese is not under a high level of public scrutiny. While Osaka has been subjected to racial remarks like Miyamoto (Reuters 2019), she remains a popular figure in Japan.

In Osaka's case, a mix of behavioral attributes, Japanese ancestry, and cultural affinity are discursively used to make her more "Japanese." Lack of linguistic and cultural capital is compensated through conceptual associations that mark her as a member of the Japanese collective based on culture, here in the form of psychological attributes, behavioral characteristics, and ancestral affinity. This demonstrates how Japanese actors themselves embark on efforts to "make" ostensible Others more Japanese in contexts that are advantageous to them – Osaka's victory US Open victory in 2020 being a case in point.

Cultural capital and the reinforcement of the Japanese boundary

From 2013 to 2017, I conducted fieldwork in Japan, interviewing foreigners living in Japan to understand their experiences and interviewing Japanese people to understand how they were experiencing and interpreting Japan's demographic changes. I lived in Japan for an additional 4 years, where further insights were ascertained, formally and informally. The data below come from interviews with interlocutors during this time.

On one occasion, I was conducting an informal interview with Maika² (mostly in English), a Japanese office worker in her mid-thirties. We began discussing a mutual acquaintance, Emma, who is half-Japanese and half-white-American. Emma was raised entirely in Japan, only venturing to the United States during holidays. Phenotypically, Emma has limited ability to "pass" as a non-mixed person; she has lighter hair than most Japanese, much rounder and lighter eyes, and is taller than most Japanese women and many Japanese men. I asked Maika whether she considered Emma "Japanese," not expounding further, to which she replied definitively and affirmatively: "Oh yeah, she's definitely Japanese...even though her father is American, she is super Japanese. In her dress style, in her manners...she is even more Japanese than me!" Upon hearing this, I asked Maika to explain what she meant by this – saying someone is "super Japanese" seemed like a highly subjective interpretation. Maika added:

It's because she is so Japanese, you know? Like how she *talks* and *act[s]*, and how she *thinks*. Some of my friends *don't think like a Japanese*. Even me, I don't think like Japanese, but [she] does. So, I think she is Japanese.

For Maika, Emma's appearance did not matter as much as the way Emma talks, acts, thinks, dresses, and behaves. Maika categorized Emma as Japanese based on these behavioral characteristics and no

²All names appearing in this paper are pseudonyms.

reference was made to Emma's physical features. The fact that Emma behaved in a certain way distinguished her as a tangible Japanese person.

Similarly, I once asked a Japanese university student (in Japanese), Kentaro, whether he thought Asuka Cambridge, a half-Jamaican and half-Japanese track-and-field athlete who was a member of Japan's silver medal-winning track team at the 2016 Olympics, was "Japanese." Kentaro contemplated for a moment and responded:

Hmmm, I haven't thought about it much, but whenever I see him on television he speaks Japanese, he's always with his Japanese teammates, and his name is Asuka, so I guess he is Japanese. Oh, and when he speaks Japanese, I can feel that he is Japanese too.

To this, I asked specifically about his father's heritage, asking: "You know that Cambridge's father is Jamaican, right?" Kentaro replied, "Yes, I know, his father is Jamaican, but besides that, he seems like a Japanese person. His outward appearance is a little bit different, but I still think he's Japanese."

For Kentaro, Cambridge's way of speaking, that he appeared with his Japanese teammates, that his name "Asuka" sounded Japanese, and that Kentaro could "feel" he was Japanese led him to think of Cambridge as being "Japanese." As with Maika, behavior, language, cultural projection, and evoking the feeling that one is Japanese led Kentaro to categorically consider Cambridge as a Japanese person. Physical attributes were absent from his assessment of Cambridge's inclusion.

These sentiments share striking resemblance to the discursive processes above that "made" Miyamoto and Osaka more Japanese than they would otherwise be historically. Language, culture, and behavior were used to reconstruct the Japanese identity boundary to associate ambivalent people into the collective on their possession of these traits – having a Japanese "soul" and being "super Japanese."

Elsewhere, I observed the opposite at work in the exclusion of Japanese people based on their behaviors (i.e., their perceived lack of Japanese cultural capital). An example of this can be seen in Hitomi, a Japanese woman married to an American and who spent several years living in California. She explained (in a mix of English and Japanese):

When [Japanese people] see me with my husband and my son, people think I am not Japanese. I am usually speaking English with them, and my husband looks really like a foreigner. Long hair, dreadlocks, dresses like a hippy. Sometimes Japanese ask me really stupid questions like: "Even though you're not Japanese, your son understands Japanese?!" or "Can you use a Japanese toilet?" Then I tell them I am Japanese born and raised, and they are so surprised and apologetic. They thought I was a foreigner.

Hitomi is thus excluded from being Japanese because of her behavior, her appearance, and the presence of her husband. She also noted that one of her high school friends said that she "wasn't Japanese anymore" after having lived in America and marrying a foreigner; she was not sure if this was an insult or a compliment:

One of my friends from high school told me at a *nomikai* [drinking party] that I became a *gaijin* [foreigner], *gaijin ni natta* [became a foreigner], after I came back from California. She said my appearance was different and I was talking different, and even that the way I play with my son is different from Japanese mothers... She said I wasn't Japanese anymore, and then she laughed. She always tried to [date] foreigners, so I didn't know if she was being jealous or insulting me...

The same cultural associations that identify some as Japanese also exclude some Japanese as Others despite their shared ancestry. Discursive maintenance of the identity boundary allows for porousness, and people are included or excluded according to their particular circumstances.

Hitomi did not possess a staunchly anti-Japanese attitude that led her to rebel or react in socially subversive ways. Other women have taken such an approach and are very happy to use these discursive elements to redefine themselves as distinctly *not* Japanese in protest. One American man married to a Japanese woman explained how his wife could not stand living in Japan on their move back to the country, and the couple subsequently had to relocate to Australia (mostly on the urging of his wife). This man met his wife in the United States and obtained a teaching job in Japan, which he thought would be better for her and for raising a family. However, when they returned, his wife felt incredibly constrained and soon wanted to leave. She protested against what was expected of her by Japanese cultural norms and was appalled by the gender discrimination in Japan's workforce and her lack of career trajectory. The man said his wife felt "very out of place" and that she started wearing short sleeve shirts that exposed her tattoos and other clothes that were considered inappropriate for a Japanese office. The man confessed to me, "I knew we had to get out before she got into trouble with someone."

Strategic use of cultural capital to reify boundaries

These examples demonstrate that contemporary Japanese identity discourses are being reformulated in response to Japan's changing demographics. By categorizing people as "more Japanese" than they would have been in the immediate postwar era, these processes aim to reconstruct notions of Japaneseness in ways that are advantageous to Japan and allow for minimal disruption to the status quo. Linguistic and cultural capital function as a conceptual boundary for defining or excluding people. Native-level capital helps actualize these associations.

What makes these processes especially impactful is that they are being used by *both* Japanese and mixed people themselves. Japanese people project onto Others identity associations in ways that are capable of absorbing them into (or excluding them from) the collective. This is most obvious in Naomi Osaka, whose "Japanese soul" and "Japanese behavior" validated her alleged "Japaneseness" despite much else besides her ancestry. Reversely, Japanese actors also exclude people on their lack of such capital, as observed in returnees, Japanese-Latin Americans, Japanese-Americans, and Hitomi. Non-mixed Japanese hold power to (recreate) the Japanese identity boundary by determining where and how these associations manifest. The placement of such a boundary is sensitive to contextual factors that consider the individual in question and the peculiarities of their relationship to the majority.

Mixed people themselves also make such discursive associations to project a Japanese identity outward toward the majority in a Goffmanian sense. Miyamoto's profession that her *kokoro* is Japanese, and Emma's outward projection of a "super Japanese" appearance are calculated efforts to construct a self-image in ways that draw on "Japanese" cultural capital to access the collective. These people are making claims on Japanese identity based on the ways they present themselves to the non-mixed majority, showing that their presence does not greatly disrupt the status quo in an effort to grant them access.

These efforts are also being made by mixed people as a means to distinguish themselves from other Japanese-descent peoples in Japan. Sara's proclamation that she speaks Japanese so well "because she is *hāfu*" not only makes a claim to Japanese identity because of her Japanese background and sociolinguistic capital, but it also educates Japanese about the difference between *hāfu* and *nikkeijin* in a way that elucidates the closer positionality of being *hāfu* to mainstream Japanese. By demonstrating and asserting linguistic and cultural capital to lay claims to notions of Japaneseness, as well as the inevitable acceptance of such claims by at least some Japanese, the boundary of Japanese identity is being renegotiated in ways that will lead many to reconceptualize it and act upon it. People like Sara highlight that not every Japanese-descent person is identical categorically, and the fact that some possess higher levels of language and cultural skills can lead to a negotiation of the boundary of Japanese identity.

These cases demonstrate the mechanisms underlying the Japanese identity boundary as it currently exists. We see that discursive power to “make” people Japanese plays a significant role in reifying this boundary, even in the absence of actual cultural capital. Although native-level linguistic and cultural capital greatly aids these discursive makings, they are not always requisite if Japanese actors deem someone worthy of being Japanese. Naomi Osaka shows that even broad references to behavior perceived as “Japanese” can lead to the construction of people as Japanese – as in Osaka’s response to Williams. Cultural capital is important, but it is also not all-determining. Osaka, however, is exceptional, and most cases involving the discursive making of people Japanese are not as exceptional.

Cultural and linguistic capital will continue to be important for these processes to function in the future. Possessing native-level cultural capital will serve as the lubricant for the inclusion of mixed people into the collective when it is advantageous, and these processes will become more pronounced as Japan’s demographics change and as more mixed and non-Japanese people are reared in Japan. Cultural capital will continue to serve as the practical substance out of which the boundary of Japanese is constructed, subsuming more diverse peoples so as to maintain the sociocultural status quo.

This is in many ways the case because cultural capital offers a more accurate and accessible standard from which to distinguish group members, especially compared to ambivalent references to identity constructs such as race or ethnicity. While race and ethnicity have worked to conceptually define Japanese identity historically, their applications have lacked substance and have been haphazardly applied (Weiner 1995). That people can move in and out of a “racial” category (*à la* Yoshino 1992) demonstrates a serious lack of conceptual tangibility to such associations. References to whether people belong to a Japanese “race” or “ethnicity” are absent of any serious substance and are often claimed based on arbitrary facts. Even when such traits are evoked, they are imprecisely applied. Thus, these are not static categories but instead are constructed in ways contingent on the context. This imprecision, however, is much less open to interpretation in the case of cultural capital: it is either there or it is not. People like Miyamoto and Cambridge may confuse non-mixed Japanese people by their phenotype *and* possession of such capital, but there is no question that their ability to speak and act like a native differentiate them from categorical Others who lack such capital. Any serious efforts to determine who is or who is not Japanese need to recognize these points and inquire accordingly. Otherwise, taking claims of racial and ethnic identity at face value risks obfuscating the ways that Japanese identity boundaries function pragmatically.

If my argument is correct, these conditions will lead to a movement in the boundary of Japanese identity, as well as what constitutes passing as “Japanese.” As more mixed people and foreigners permeate deeper into Japanese society, judgments about who is and who is not “Japanese” will become more premised on the possession of such cultural capital rather than on other abstract and elusive constructed identity categories. Such categories may still be evoked conceptually, but the people that will be included in them will differ. This will allow more people to be discursively and materially elided into the Japanese category in order to “make” more people Japanese. What will emerge is a Japanese identity with the same cultural practices but a new face.

We must also consider the aggregate of these processes. These identity remakings are happening across time and space in ways that can produce more profound social changes than they can in isolation. While mixed people in Japan remain marginal, as more mainstream Japanese people learn from those like Sara or come to possess attitudes toward people like Emma, there will be greater potential for collective changes to occur. Again, we must be cautious to not conceive of a utopic form of Japanese identity that embraces all forms of physical and cultural Otherness, but at least hypothetically this construction of identity will have much greater leniency as these processes unfold.

There are also some important attitudinal differences between age groups. Younger Japanese tend to have more open attitudes toward diversity than older generations (Green 2017; Green and Kadoya 2015). Additionally, younger Japanese are statistically more likely to have mixed classmates and to befriend people of mixed parentage. This is especially true in urban areas like Tokyo and Osaka.

Considered in aggregate, we must think about what will happen in Japan as these interactions and processes happen more frequently over time and in more dynamic ways.

As noted, most research on Japanese–Other relationships has emphasized the Japanese majority’s xenophobia, racism, and discrimination, which have had adverse consequences for Japan’s foreign and minority populations. One may question to what extent I am ignoring or downplaying the effects of this racism and why this perspective differs. While in the cases of the celebrities above subsuming mixed people into the collective may be a matter of competitive advantage, the more fundamental reason is that doing so also allows for a perpetuation of the status quo. Anyone who has spent time in Japan knows that the nation’s cultural tempo is slow to change. Japan’s population will look very different in 2050, when 8–27% of its population may be of non-Japanese ancestry (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, p. 8). This poses a radical threat to notions of Japanese identity such as those found in *Nihonjinron* and the nation’s existing cultural institutions, and many Japanese are aware of this. By selectively subsuming certain people (i.e., those with native-level language and cultural abilities) into the collective, such risks are considerably weakened, and there is greater likelihood that the hegemonic practices of today can continue into tomorrow.

There will certainly be backlash as these processes unfold. Far-right politicians and public commentators will emerge just as they have throughout history. However, such voices in Japan are not new; scholars have been observing this for decades. While these studies have raised much-needed attention to the plight of Japan’s minorities, we also must not forget that such voice represent a fraction of Japanese people. The exact amount of that fraction is debatable, but it is merely a part of the ideologies that “Japanese” people maintain.

We should not assume these hostile voices reflect what most Japanese people feel or that most Japanese people will accept embrace these views uncritically – some will, but many will not. “Japanese people” maintain highly nuanced and idiosyncratic attitudes toward diversity, foreign and cultural Otherness, and mixed people. Studies have shown that negative or neutral attitudes are capable of changing through direct and meaningful contact between these two parties (Burgess 2008; Capobianco 2017; Faier 2009; Green 2015; Hansen 2020; Świtek 2016). Such findings relate back to Befu’s observed feedback loop allowing hegemonic identity discourses to operate. As more encounters unfold in ways that compel Japanese people to reconsider the positionality of Others within their conceptual identity frameworks, there is greater likelihood for said Others to be incorporated. It will be much easier to reconstruct extant identity discourses and ideologies that incorporate a wider range of people than to construct one based on a “multicultural” or “diverse” society. This is why I argue Japan’s cultural institutions and wider identity will remain largely intact but proceed with a different appearance.

Additionally, just as conservative voices will rise, so too will more progressive ones – ones that construct an imagine of a diverse Japan antithetical to such voices and which incorporate a greater range of people into the collective. Again, this is not to suggest that a harmonious and multicultural Japan will emerge, but it also asks commentators to not over-exaggerate the impact and presence of those who possess hostile views. The evidence presented here shows that people who several decades ago may have been Othered are being made Japanese by Japanese actors. These processes offer a way for Japanese society to manage the risks of its diversification while maintaining present institutions as much as possible.

Still further, many mixed people lack a serious form of non-Japanese identity with which to readily identify. While more mixed people are identifying with a “*hāfu*” identity (or are trying to), the Japanese half of this identity plays a vital role in their self-identification. Miyamoto felt much more Japanese after her sojourn with her father in the United States during high school than she did American, which compelled her to accept a Japanese nationality and recognize her identity as a Japanese person. Another example of this can be seen in the case of rising mixed-Japanese baseball star Louis Okoye, who was born to a Japanese mother and Igbo-Nigerian father, who has recently been featured by Nigerian news channel’s OakTV. In an aptly titled YouTube video (that has since been taken down), “Meet Nigerian baseball star who can’t speak English, local dialect,” Okoye travels

to Nigeria to meet with young baseball players in Abuja. Okoye speaks through a Japanese translator, who translates his Japanese into English for the Nigerian audiences. The video and the commenters lament his inability to speak English or his father's native Igbo. Such cases, however, are not uncommon and will become increasingly more common as foreigners and Japanese intermarry and as more diverse people appear in Japanese society.

Lastly, these insights demonstrate the cultural applications of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, one that emphasizes discretely sociocultural ramifications of cultural capital possession. Cultural capital provides a theory to discursively define an ethno-national identity boundary that differentiates in-group from out-group members. There are thus other applications of this concept than exploring the nature and mechanisms behind socioeconomic inequalities.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how the possession of native-level linguistic and cultural capital functions as a boundary for Japanese identity. Using case studies of mixed Japanese people, it has shown how both Japanese people and mixed people themselves deploy these discursive associations and reference language, behavior, and abstract identity traits to make claims to Japanese identity in ways that separate in-group from out-group members. Through such calculated discursive associations, Others are "becoming" Japanese, which I argue will perpetuate the existing cultural status quo and minimize the effects of Japan's diversification.

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