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Morality, formality and the performance of mannerism: ethnically Japanese foreigners living the reality of Japaneseness

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Introduction

Many people have an image of Japan as group oriented rather than individualist society, and many representations of Japan have constructed it as a homogeneous and monoethnic nation. 'Uniqueness', 'monoethnicity' and 'homogeneity' became key words represented to define Japan in its 'uniqueness'. Given the amount of literature on the topic, this predominant image of Japan in the world is perhaps unsurprising, but it is also represented as a shared 'culture' without much critical analysis of the ideology it presents within Japanese society as well. This predominant image of Japan comes in part from the national identity crisis and anxiety that took place during post-war Japan as it lost the war and its previous military identity had to be dismantled. Until 1945, Japan's identity had been built up upon various form for self-praise and ethnocentrism. During the construction of the modern state in the Meiji period (1868-1912), a national unity based on new ideas about the family as under an *ie* system was promoted. Certain theories of Japaneseness, what in the post-war period becomes prominently promoted as *Nihonjinron* were also promulgated. This ideology focused on promoting Japan's superiority compared to Western societies in terms of cultural values, on the emphasize of the emperor system and the rationalization of the invasion of East Asia. In short, ultranationalism and the *kokutai* (national body) were widely promoted. Yet, it was then also considered a multi-ethnic empire that gave citizenship to people from its colonies.

The shift from a multi-ethnic to a monoethnic idea of nationhood after World War II came in the wake of Japan losing the war, its imperialism collapsing, and the country being placed under American occupation. Identity became a major focus for a large number of Japanese people in elite echelons of society and subsequently amongst Japanese people as such ideas became widely discussed in the mass media. The idea of a cultural superiority which they had been told would have led to victory had, in fact, led to the defeat. Every characteristic defining Japan's national identity that were valorised until 1945 became the reason of Japan's surrender (Befu, 2001, p.135).

In the midst of this social and cultural anxiety, the publication of *The Chrysanthemum*

and the Sword in 1946 by Ruth Benedict became a "revelatory truth about [Japanese people] themselves" (Befu, 2001, p.137). The book provided Japanese people a gaze to which to look at their behavioural traits and their supposedly cultural distinctiveness, which were presented as the reasons for their defeat. The national identity as once concerned with shame was later transformed into a self-confident one as was Japan's groupist sensibilities amidst the economic growth in the late 1960s when such cultural traits were used as forms for explanation; such, *Nihonjinron* literature, or theories of Japaneseness began to discuss more on the unique characteristics of Japan as its strength, and Japanese began to see themselves through such cultural binaries in positive ways. Articulations about monoethnicity and Japaneseness surfaced, and in the 1970s, the *Nihonjinron* literature became an impactful and powerful narrative in defining Japanese people's characteristics. Supposedly 'racial' homogeneity, a common and unique language, a monoethnic country presented as rare in the world were narratives that came to constitute the 'uniqueness' of Japan.

As a result, many authors published books about Japanese behavioural traits, such as Nakane Chie or Doi Takeo. Their publications became best-sellers, and the *Nihonjinron* literature gained popularity among Japanese people. Goodman (2005) explains this popularity by the way these authors describe ideal behavioural traits in simple ways, easy to understand at the popular level for many people, and also recognizable for many of Japanese people (p. 62). Therefore, it constructed a national identity, and a cultural nationalism that is still strongly present even today (Liu-Farrer 2020). The unique characteristics of Japanese society described in the *Nihonjinron* literature became a belief shared among Japanese people themselves, and that most Japanese try to embody such ideals in public settings, something which makes these constructed narratives and beliefs become a reality. The constructed ideology of Japaneseness consequently turned into a prominent social imaginary.

In relation to the topic and questions posed in this thesis, this Japaneseness can also be seen to have developed into a barrier for groups of people who 'don't look Japanese' according to the ideological representations. For instance, foreigners living in Japan are defined as 'foreigners' because they don't behave like Japanese people would behave in some

circumstances, or they have a different appearance compared to the supposedly Japanese person. Furthermore, among these foreigners, there are ethnically Japanese people who have a foreign background. Although they look Japanese or most could be considered Japanese, they have different cultural background which can work as a social barrier for these people living in Japan. This thesis aims to address the following questions regarding such issues of identity and belonging: to what extent are the experiences of ethnically Japanese foreigners illustrating the presence of the hegemonic discourse of Japaneseness? How do their experiences and presence raise broader questions about who and what defines what it actually means to be Japanese?

The aim of this thesis is to explore and demonstrate how embodied this ideology of Japaneseness and uniqueness, in fact still is, and the extent to which this discourse is still ingrained in Japanese society. Indeed, the discourse of Japaneseness, as well as the image of a homogeneous society is ubiquitous within Japan, as well as the world looking in on Japan. As seen from my ethnographic interview material, this is to the point that it creates discriminations towards those who are not considered Japanese. Moreover, the predominant presence of this discourse creates a pressure towards people who are considered "proper" Japanese by their appearance, but who were not brought up with a Japanese education or have never lived in Japan before. The reason we can talk about pressure for the latter is mainly due to high expectations towards them to behave like a "proper" Japanese as revealed also by the interviewees in this thesis, the way they are expected to perform their Japaneseness such as knowing and performing the basic mannerisms of social contexts and follow implicit social rules seen but not often openly spoken about in Japan. Yet, the experience of being ethnically but not culturally Japanese as foreigners raises the fundamental question of what it actually means to be 'Japanese', and who decides what it means to behave like one. This thesis focuses on such social and cultural tensions of contemporary Japan.

Chapter 1 - Japanese and non-Japanese, living the social imaginary of

Japaneseness

1.1 - The construction of an ideology and nationalism

As mentioned above, 'behaving like a Japanese' is closely linked to the construction of an ideology, in this case, the ideology of Japaneseness and the idea of national identity. The historic background, especially Japan's defeat in the war in 1945, tells us about how the national identity crisis was part of leading to the emergence of the strong belief in a 'unique' culture and the uniqueness of Japanese people as a homogenous group. As discussed, the *Nihonjinron* literature was a key factor in constructing such ideas about Japanese national identity, which resulted in the strong presence of the discourse of Japaneseness in the mind of Japanese people today. This discourse is not something that happened naturally but rather the result of constructing and disseminating ubiquitously a discourse about what it supposedly means to be Japanese.

Indeed, today even casual conversations will reveal that many Japanese people believe that homogeneity and uniqueness of the Japanese are true, and recognize all the characteristics described in the *Nihonjinron* literature. For instance, Lie (2001) shares an episode with his Japanese friend. The author noticed the presence of a large number of foreigners living and working in Japan, and the existence of multi-ethnic areas such as Yokohama and Nagasaki, and later told his Japanese friend how multi-ethnic Japan was. However, his friend insisted that all these places were port cities and therefore there were atypical. His friend later pointed out that none of these places were "really Japan" (Lie, 2001, p. 27), and that is why the author might have thought that Japan was multi-ethnic. Through his friend's answer to his observation, Lie (2001) could see that "many Japanese share […] a discourse of Japaneseness, which highlights homogeneity" (p.28). Many Japanese have in their mind the discourse of Japaneseness and the uniqueness of Japan, and therefore, they are unconsciously ignoring the existence of non-Japanese, or differences amongst Japanese people, or if they recognize them, they are explaining the non-Japanese's presence by the internationalization of Japan. By emphasizing Japan's internationalization, some Japanese try

to express their cultural uniqueness compared to other countries to highlight Japan's position in the world, and to prove their cultural superiority and homogeneity.

However, the discourse of 'Japaneseness' and the ideology of a monoethnic Japan are constructed ideas. Goodman (2005) states that the *Nihonjinron* is "a form of ideology that, rather than explaining Japanese behaviour, actually served to reinforce, legitimate and, […] possibly create it" (p. 68). Through detailed and recognizable description of Japanese people's characteristics, the *Nihonjinron* authors, as well as the government, created a culture that was legitimated to the point that unconsciously, Japanese people were inculcating the ideology of homogeneity and monoethnicity (Goodman, 2005, p. 68). The *Nihonjinron* literature was therefore a "prescription for behaviour" (Befu, 2001, p. 81) for the government and for Japanese as well, for them to promote and embody the Japaneseness which in the process created a reality of a strong sense of collective identity as Japanese. The process of legitimization and embodiment which happened from the post-war period onwards explains the reason why the belief is still deeply ingrained in Japanese people's consciousness, to the extent that the foreigners living in Japan are considered a minority group compared to the majority culture of homogeneous and monoethnic Japan. In addition, Goodman (2005) states that "making 'majority culture' means downplaying 'minority culture'" (p.69). Giving little attention to minority cultures and the issues that these groups are facing in reality is in fact also constructing and reinforcing the monoethnic belief and the sense of national identity (Goodman, 2005, p. 69).

Here, Goodman refers to national identity, and in fact, nationalism as a key factor in constructing the ideology and the discourse of Japaneseness. In the process of creating a national identity, symbols such as flag, national anthem, national emblem and so on, play an important role. Since those symbols become a representation of the nation, they need to be something that manifests the pride of the nation, a sense of community, and the representation of a commonly shared history and culture. However, Befu (2001) explains that in the case of Japan, such symbols were no longer effective in expressing national identity after World War II. Consequently, in the process of constructing Japan's national identity, on

the one hand there were the "minimum descriptive and discursive contents" (which means, the national symbols), and on the other hand the *Nihonjinron* which defines the national and cultural identity (p. 100). In Japan, the major national symbols did not, and do not have influence in unifying its people into one nation whereas the *Nihonjinron* literature influenced a lot of people including the government. Befu (2001) states that "the *Nihonjinron* as a discourse of cultural nationalism can substitute to the extent that [⋯] *Nihonjinron* can arouse readers emotionally" (p. 101) as symbols would do in most cases. The emotional interest that Befu refers to can be linked to the recognition of most Japanese people to the characteristics described in those books. Therefore, the *Nihonjinron* became the representation of a nationalistic ideology, which includes a sense of pride, giving reasons as to why one should be proud of the nation (Befu, 2001, p. 101).

Furthermore, creating a national identity has at its base the construction of the idea of a common and shared history and 'blood' to provide a sense of belonging and emotional attachment. Since the *Nihonjinron* encompasses all these criteria with, in addition, behavioural traits recognizable to most Japanese, it only created and reinforced the sentiments of national unity. Goodman (2005) goes further by stating that the *Nihonjinron* literature has, in fact, made use of the history to "construct and legitimate a sense of commonly shared culture" (p. 69). As mentioned above, the *Nihonjinron* became a prescription for behaviours for Japanese, and it has highlighted some part of the history to emphasize the way Japan and Japanese are, which resulted in the commonly shared culture of 'Japaneseness' and the reinforcement of the national unity. Thus, all the concepts described in the *Nihonjinron* literature that were embodied by the Japanese constructed Japan's majority culture and its national identity, which explains why the discourse of Japaneseness is still ubiquitous in contemporary Japan.

1.2 – The discourse of Japaneseness and Bourdieu's symbolic violence

The strong presence of the discourse of Japaneseness in the consciousness of Japanese

people is manifested through their behaviour, which people consider as *atarimae* or natural. This phenomenon is described by Pierre Bourdieu as then easily used as a form for 'symbolic violence' to enforce what is seen as correct behaviour. Symbolic violence is an expression used by Bourdieu to define the social phenomenon in which relations of domination occur by invoking a sense of authority taken to be the natural order of things. This relation of submission and domination is legitimized from both parties, and the legitimization justify therefore the procedures of inclusion and exclusion (Sapiro, 2015, p. 781) of those seen to follow the norms and those that do not. Bourdieu explains that symbolic violence functions because of three key factors: the arbitrariness of the domination (of the social order) is ignored, the domination is recognized as legitimate, and the dominated internalize the domination (1998, cited Sapiro, 2015, p. 781) as natural. Symbolic violence happens through this process of internalization and legitimization. It is important to note that symbolic violence involves the acceptance from the dominated to submit to the dominating social order, and that this submission is a result of the legitimization of the normative hierarchical order. In the case of Japan, Japaneseness is the dominant and indeed arbitrary discourse that Japanese people accept, submit to it and internalize without questioning it because people are born into this context. As we could see through the historical background of the discourse of Japaneseness, the State and the *Nihonjinron* authors propagated and created an ideology, and the dominant discourse of Japaneseness was therefore legitimized. As a result of the legitimization, Japanese people accepted the dominance of the discourse and the submission to that ideology by embodying the characteristics and behaviours considered as Japanese. This is the reason why it became natural and *atarimae* to act and be like a Japanese as described in the *Nihonjinron* literature.

Furthermore, symbolic violence involves also the creation of disparity and inequality. For instance, Bourdieu (1998, cited Sapiro, 2015, p. 781) devoted a book on masculine domination. He argues that the organization of social life and the world division has at its base masculine/female opposition. Although there are some biological differences, masculine and feminine identities are socially constructed (virility and domination for boys, effacement and

submission for girls). However, Bourdieu states that in reality, the biological differences only serve to justify the division of labour resulted from gender identities (Bourdieu, 1998, cited Sapiro, 2015, p. 781). The example of the symbolic violence in gendered division of labour and masculine domination creates inequality between gender. This illustrates how socially constructed ideas are legitimized and naturalized, and how "cultural arbitrariness takes on natural appearances" (Sapiro, 2015, p. 781) to consequently produce disparity. It is the same for the discourse of Japaneseness. The cultural arbitrariness of Japaneseness takes on natural forms; it is perceived as natural and nobody really questions its domination and that it produces unequal treatment, which becomes seen as 'natural'.

This symbolic violence did not occur only immediately after the post-war period, but rather is still relevant today. Therefore, we can assume that processes of maintaining the ideology and reproducing this discourse took place and are happening today as well. For this process to happen, many actors contributed to the *Nihonjinron* literature's reproduction. Befu (2001) cites, for example, academic scholars and college professors from prestigious universities, and *hyōronka* (intellectuals, critics) who analyse and make the literacy understandable for the general public, which includes readers and television viewers (p. 51). Befu (2001) calls them "*Nihonjinron* popularisers" (p. 55) regarding the way they expose Japanese culture from different approaches to the public. Japanese see, hear and read these approaches of the Japanese culture through media, recognize the cultural traits and internalize them to embody them afterwards. Thus, those scholars, as well as the media, are powerful actors in propagating and maintaining the ideology, as they directly influence the general public. In the meantime, foreigners' view on Japanese self-identity was also an important factor in influencing Japanese people's view on themself, since Japanese had a huge interest in how Japan is viewed by Others, in this case by foreigners (Befu, 2001, p. 57). Foreigners see Japan as Other, therefore their writings on the *Nihonjinron* give an outsider view. Thus, it can be assumed that reading those writings was a way for Japanese people to reconfirm their national identity.

Government and institutions should also be mentioned as main actors in maintaining and

supporting the *Nihonjinron* and the discourse of Japaneseness. Befu explains that the government turned the *Nihonjinron* into a hegemonic ideology, and institutions as well as the corporate establishment put it into practice. In fact, cultural medals and designations are given to people who excel in traditional and artistic fields (Befu, 2001, p. 81). This shows how the traditions incorporated in the *Nihonjinron*, and which are representing the identity of Japan, are maintained and protected by the government as a way to protect the national identity as well.

Since the *Nihonjinron* literature and the discourse of Japaneseness are maintained and supported by the abovementioned factors, it should be said that the homogeneity of ethnic Japanese is also maintained and remains the dominant ethnic group in contemporary Japan. Consequently, minority groups and other ethnic groups, such as Korean-Japanese or Ainu-Japanese, are excluded or receive unequal treatment. As Befu (2001) explains, to be culturally Japanese is defined in the *Nihonjinron* as to be Japanese-Japanese (p. 85). It highlights a strong sense of national identity and a sense of belonging to the Japanese nation. As a consequence, ethnic groups of non-Japanese and people not being fully Japanese are automatically excluded. If we analyse the discourse of Japaneseness with Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, the ideology and the strong belief in the Japaneseness involves the inclusion of the ethnically Japanese, and exclusion of the non-Japanese. Naturally, those included in the ethnically Japanese group are expected to behave like 'Japanese-Japanese', which also creates a certain pressure for people to fit into the frame constructed as Japaneseness as this thesis also investigates. From the perspective of symbolic violence, the discourse of Japaneseness both impact who are considered mainstream Japanese and also produces disparity and impacts ethnic groups of people who are as a result not regarded as fully Japanese. This thesis investigates how this plays out especially in terms of how people become subject to such arbitrary classification and categorization and often subsequent discrimination.

1.3 - Categorization and differentiation: Japanese versus non-Japanese

Ethnic groups with non-Japanese or not 'fully' Japanese people can be subject to differentiation and be categorized as 'Others'. Not behaving strictly as expected as a Japanese can be seen as strange and un-Japanese, and is considered "against normative standards of the society" (Befu, 2001, p. 79) in a country where such notions of Japaneseness is ubiquitous. In fact, Befu (2001) explains that Japanese people feel compelled to fit into what is prescribed in the *Nihonjinron* in order to be counted as a true Japanese (p. 79). In addition, the fundamental belief that the uniqueness of Japan exists reinforce the will to classify and to distinguish Japanese from non-Japanese. Therefore, if a person does not fit into what is considered to be Japanese, or should we say, to the social imaginary of Japaneseness, whether it be appearance or behaviour, they cannot be counted as Japanese. This is more evident in the case of foreigners, who obviously do not have the same cultural traits and background. This classification and categorization create an invisible but strong boundary between Japanese and the Others, and strengthens the belief that there is something unique about 'the Japanese'.

It is important to note that Japanese classify people as a Japanese or not according to different criteria. According to Lie (2001) some would consider a person Japanese by their appearance and race, for others it would be more about having Japanese nationality. Naturalization counts also as a condition for some Japanese, and others would judge on how people attempt to be part of the Japanese society, or how they try to assimilate into Japanese society (pp. 142-143). For instance, someone who can speak fluently Japanese and try to fit into following Japanese social mores and conventions can be considered Japanese although that person does not look Japanese from their appearance. For some other Japanese, the look and the 'race' are more important, therefore that same person would not be seen as Japanese. Consequently, there is still a need to classify in the consciousness of Japanese to reconfirm the uniqueness of Japanese although the image of Japaneseness can differ depending on the person and thus, the real meaning of what is to be Japanese can be raised.

This categorization is visible even in Japanese history, where there was a division between

Japanese and non-Japanese. Lie (2001) explains that during the Meiji period, while the government was constructing a nation-state, the influx of Okinawans, Burakumin and Ainu strengthened the distinction between non-Japanese and Japanese people (p. 121). From that, we can assume that in the mind of some Japanese these ethnic groups do not fit to the standards of the 'Japanese', which can explain the reason why although they are part of Japan and should be considered Japanese, these ethnic groups are subject to discrimination or unequal treatment, as somehow not fully Japanese in light of the hegemonic discourse of Japaneseness.

The consequence of such classifications can be seen through real experiences of foreigners living in Japan, who faced situation of marginalization. Liu-Farrer (2020) conducted interviews to immigrants to show how Japan is becoming an immigrant country compared to the image of a monoethnic nation. Her interviews illustrate the process of marginalization that some respondents had to pass through, which reveals the consequence of the strong discourse of Japaneseness. Some respondents working in Japan were not given any other choice than leaving Japan due to the strong pressure and high expectation at work for them to assimilate into the particular working culture in Japan (p. 114). Cases of bullying can be seen at the educational level, where children of immigrants are easily victims of bullying due to their appearance or cultural behaviour being different from Japanese ones. Some also had a difficult time at school due to their name standing out. One informant explained that he was bullied until primary school because he had a Chinese name. He then had to hide his name and change it to a Japanese one when he entered junior high school. All his friends from then thought that he was Japanese, and treated him like a Japanese student until he graduated from senior high school (Liu-Farrer, 2020, p. 177). Seeing ethnic groups being victims of discrimination at an educational level can raise the problems of the educational system and culture, especially the fact that children already have in their mind the system of classifying people into Japanese and non-Japanese. Liu-Farrer's emphasis on Japan as an immigrant country actually raised the fundamental question of the meaning of being Japanese, which will be explored in the following chapters through the interviews conducted for this thesis.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

In order to have greater insight into how people see Japan and Japanese people, the methodology used for this research after the literature review provided in Chapter 1 is based on ethnographic interviews with people living in Japan and having one or both Japanese parents. Such interviews provide new approaches into the questions people may be asking themselves through understanding the complexity of actual life experiences, and allow us to go beyond a generalized image of Japan to give a more in-depth and detailed picture of what it means to live in a society where the performance of Japaneseness through particular forms for formality and mannerism are important to be part of the society.

I chose to conduct open-ended, ethnographic interviews with nine people from abroad aiming for daily life conversations and dialogue with the interlocutors rather than as respondents to more structured, set questions. The interlocutors are from South East Asia, Europe, North and South America. They can be separated into two main groups. The first one is a group of five people who have both parents who are Japanese, and that lived abroad for more than ten years. The second one is a group of four people who have one Japanese parent, and within the Japanese context are considered as '*hafu*' (literally 'half', or mixed). The origins of the parents play a role in determining the appearance of the person, and in that case, 'looking like a Japanese person' becomes a criterion in defining one as Japanese, as was also indicated above. The *hafu* that I interviewed have a Japanese parent and a parent from another Asian country. Therefore, they were implicitly explaining that by their look, they can be considered Japanese as they are still Asian, which is not the case for *hafu* from Western countries.

The interlocutors were all born and raised in another country, and they lived there for more than ten years before coming to live in Japan, until their graduation from high school. They all went to local schools but have to some extent experienced Japanese culture at home, such as experiencing Japanese traditional festivals or learning certain mannerism. The

informants from both groups came originally to study in Japan, which was for them their first experience of living abroad alone. Some of them are currently university students, while others have already graduated and are now working in Japan. Being a student and working in Japan also present two different experiences, and Japan's working culture emerges as particularly rigid towards aiming to maintain the status quo of Japaneseness. Manners and rules are stricter in work places, and workers are expected to know and follow them. Therefore, interviews with those foreign-born Japanese working in Japan provide a deep understanding about the expectations and working environments in Japan even if they may not be representative in a statistical sense. All the nine respondents have a Japanese name. I started the research assuming that name is a key factor in determining one's identity, as having a Japanese name would lead an individual to act like a Japanese person, and that high expectations towards those individuals to behave like a Japanese person would be present.

While knowing the interlocutors beforehand, the interview started with an open question, asking them to talk about themselves, aiming to know their name, family, background and so on in simple terms. Through this question, I could know their name, both Japanese and from their own country, which could tell me how they identify themselves, learning at the same time some traits of their country's culture. Naturally, most of them came to talk about when they came to Japan, the reason behind their new journey, and their experience in Japan. I had some leading questions, such as how their experience was at first, how they felt when they just came to Japan. From these questions I could get some anecdotes, which would naturally lead to a deeper conversation. I would eventually also ask their thoughts on the meaning of being Japanese, as some of them would mention how they were considered different from Japanese in Japan.

From the interviews, it seems that the respondents all had a period in their lives when they questioned themselves about their identity, asking whether they were Japanese or not, and what this meant. The reason why they would ask themselves this question at least once tell us about the reality of a consistently strong discourse on 'Japaneseness' that continue to dictate as an underlying common sense, how one should behave in order to be Japanese something

they all came to keenly feel as a social force living in Japan

Chapter 3 – Morality and the 'unspoken': how to not cause *meiwaku* and to be 'right'

3.1 – Respecting the social rules to not stand out, to not cause trouble or *meiwaku*

In order to integrate the Japanese society, the foreign-born Japanese interviewed faced the pressure to submit to social rules. The interviews give us an understanding on how Japanese society requires people to respect the rules, otherwise they can be considered as 'un-Japanese' or as 'going out of the mold'. The idea of 'not standing out' by following the social rules, is closely related to the discourse of 'keeping the harmony', which is strongly visible within Japanese society. That discourse is thought as true and as a reality from the informants, since it is embodied by the society as a whole.

Goodman (2005) illustrates the presence of the discourse of keeping the harmony (*wa*) and not causing trouble (*meiwaku*) through the example of Nippon Steel (p. 60). In 1984, Nippon Steel published a book to explain to foreigners how Japan works. The Japanese culture described in the book is one of keeping the *wa* and avoiding friction between people. People are expected to maintain the *wa* and if they don't do so they are called *meiwaku* (Goodman, 2005, p. 60). This description of the Nippon Steel shows the way the discourse of Japaneseness is inculcated in the Japanese's mind and functions as an ideology. However, as Goodman (2005) argues, this description has at its basis the fact that Japanese society is constructed as homogeneous and monolithic.

Although it might be true that Japanese people do keep the *wa*, in the Japanese context the *wa* cannot be defined as necessarily 'harmonious' in some universal sense. It is in fact rather well-structured and internalized constrain to some sort of hierarchical rules that become seen as natural to preserve that makes for precisely for what 'harmony' means. It has to do with hierarchical status, as the *wa* involves the harmony of interpersonal relationships constructed in a hierarchical way according in particular to age, gender and seniority. People have to respect some rules and manners in order to keep these hierarchical interpersonal

relations harmonious and consequently keep the *wa.*

This way of thinking is still strongly present among Japanese people and among foreign-born Japanese, and is in fact visible across social institutions, media and social interactions. An example of keeping the *wa* to not cause trouble is the existence of social rules. The informants explained that Japanese society is organized by rules and that respecting the rules is a characteristic of Japanese people. A respondent who is a Japanese and Taiwanese *hafu*, explained that in Japan, people have to submit to everything they are asked to do ("*Nihon de wa nandemo kandemo shitagau*"). Since there are rules for everything and a certain way of doing things, the foreign-born Japanese would feel constrained to live accordingly to how Japanese people do. For instance, job hunting illustrates what it means to follow the rules and be the same as others. One interviewee, now working in Japan, gave the example of the job hunting as a particular trait of Japanese society, in the way that the society inculcates the 'right way' of doing things. Although it is not mandatory, fourth year university students must do job hunting during that time to not be out of step with others. The informant described his experience of job hunting as a pressuring process he had to go through, as he had to not only be dressed in suit like his other Japanese peers, but also learn very specific mannerisms for interviews. In fact, universities give students books on how to do job hunting. Rules on the dress code, such as the length of the skirt or the jacket, etiquettes of bowing, knocking on doors, how to sit down, when to speak are written in such manuals. Job hunting requires also a certain hairstyle, and requirements of make-up but which must appear 'natural' are specific to women. The formality of the job hunting, and the way every applicant has to look the same, is what constrain and pressure even more the foreign-born Japanese to be the same as the others so as not to stand out.

What is most difficult to understand and to respect for foreign-born Japanese are the many implicit rules. In the Japanese context, rules can be written and explicit, and yet at the same time they are related to implicit Japanese hierarchical notions of 'morality' and common sense. For example, many respondents also referred to the rule of not talking on the phone or not talking aloud on public transportation; if they do speak aloud, they feel the looks on them and

the pressure from people around them. Those are examples of rules that are imposed to people to not cause trouble to others (*meiwaku wo kakenai*), something considered common sense and behaving properly, the very core of morality among Japanese people. This feeling of obligation to submit to the social order illustrates the power of the 'unspoken', here it would be the 'implicit rules' (*anmoku no ryokai,* literally 'tacit assumption'). In fact, many mentioned the presence of 'implicit rules', how the foreign-born Japanese are expected to know these since they 'are Japanese'. One informant, who was in a faculty where only Japanese students would be accepted in that faculty at that time, shared that during classes she would share her opinion directly. However, she felt an unpleasant atmosphere after sharing her thoughts directly. She later realized that sharing an opinion with direct expressions wasn't something that Japanese students were used to, or at least, it was not something 'Japanese-like' students do since Japanese people share their thoughts through indirect expressions. She expressed herself as followed: "not saying directly one's opinion is an implicit rule (*anmoku no ryokai*) to keep the harmony and I didn't know that". This illustrates the extent to which Japanese people expect the foreign-born Japanese to know the implicit rules.

The interviews illustrated how the discourse of keeping the *wa*, seen as not causing trouble or *meiwaku* to others by breaking social expectations are strongly present in Japanese institutional settings. The foreign-born Japanese face this discourse and social pressure when they first interact with other Japanese people. Not causing trouble is closely related to the existence of implicit rules that the informants are supposed to know. Knowing the implicit rules and following them are considered for the foreign-born Japanese as a characteristic of being Japanese. Therefore, one of the informants shared that when she does not respect the implicit rules, she feels she is not a real Japanese. The implicit rules or tacit assumption in Japanese society act as a non-physical, unspoken but strong power that put people into their place to behave correctly.

3.2– How to be 'right'

In relation to the way Japanese people tend to follow the rules, the expression of 'being right' has to be mentioned. During the interviews, the foreign-born Japanese expressed that there was a social pressure to 'be right'. As discussed previously, the ideology and the social imaginary of Japaneseness are strongly present within Japanese society. Japaneseness is a lived reality that Japanese people internalize, and ought to manifest the traits described in the *Nihonjinron*. Consequently, the embodied discourse acts as a strong force that pressures the foreign-born Japanese to be right in order to be the same as other Japanese, and to conform to societal norms and expectations.

In order to conform to society, Liu-Farrer (2020) shows through her interviews that children of immigrants and foreigners feel constrained to behave in the correct way, which is in this case to behave like a Japanese, and to fit to the social standards of Japaneseness (p.181). If they do behave in the correct way, they wouldn't be seen as 'un-Japanese' and these 'non-Japanese' would be accepted from their Japanese peers. Liu-Farrer's interviews tell us about the reality of confronting the difference, the extent to which some foreigners are constrained to behave like Japanese and make up strategies to conform and assimilate into the Japanese society.

The 'correct way' that Liu-Farrer mentions was a recurrent idea expressed in the interviews conducted for this thesis. Some of the informants referred to the fact of displaying appropriate behaviour and being *tadashii* ('to be right') when it comes to their experiences of living in Japan. One of the interviewees, a *hafu* (having a mixed ancestry) from Japan and Thailand, explained that every summer break she would go to Japan for holidays, to visit her Japanese grandmother. Since she would live for a few weeks in the Japanese environment, she knew how the society was, or at least, she had experiences of living in Japan. Therefore, she didn't have any culture shock when she went for her studies in Japan. However, she confessed that she didn't have any positive image of Japan either, and didn't expect much when moving to Japan for her studies. One of the reasons is that since her young age, whenever she would go to Japan, she would feel the need to behave like any other Japanese in order to integrate

into the social setting and be expected to adapt herself to it, and felt pressure to not be seen as un-Japanese. She expressed herself as followed: "I had to be *tadashii* to integrate since young." 'To be *tadashii*' literally means 'to be right', or to behave correctly.

Here, the question of what 'to be *tadashii*' really means arises, especially in the context of Japanese society. In the interviews, the term *tadashii* and the way of displaying correct behaviour were often linked to the existence of rules mentioned above in the first section of Chapter 4. For the respondents, 'to be *tadashii*' is to respect the rules and the particular steps whenever they would go and whatever they would do, and not to go against the normative standards (Befu, 2001, p. 79). The submission to rules is what Japanese people see as *atarimae* (natural), therefore, one can stand out when not following them and can be categorized as non-Japanese when not following the rules.

'Being right' is also about following a certain pattern to live rightly. One of the informants stated that there is a "pattern for living", or a model for living in a 'good' way. For instance, the model pattern for children at school is to study and do club activities, and go to cram school while also hanging out with their friends. For those working, having a good work-life balance by succeeding at work and having a social life while also taking care of their own health through sport activities and homemade food would be the ideal lifestyle. This is often portrayed in the media, with actor and actresses showing their daily routine as models for a good way of living, and this ideal lifestyle becomes a goal to attain for many people. Another informant shared how the successful 'career woman' is promoted in the media, especially how this is beautifying overwork. She explained: "There is a *gambaru* culture in Japan. In order to be successful, you have to work hard (*gambaru*) and if you're not working hard, you are not accepted". The *gambaru* culture is something experienced by many foreign-born Japanese, which is seen as a standard in the Japanese society. It became something those Nikkei, people with Japanese lineage need to do in order to be accepted and to conform to Japanese society when in Japan; *gambaru* can be considered as a way to be *tadashii*.

The interviews reveal that the foreign-born Japanese are expected to behave in the correct way, yet, how to be *tadashii* is not clearly stated. They are expected to behave like the other

Japanese people around them, despite not having the same cultural background as their Japanese peers. Thus, to act 'rightly' or correctly is to closely follow the rules, which concerns moreover, ways of being a moral person; being a 'good' person in Japan is displaying 'right' behaviour, to know the 'common sense' or the *atarimae* of being the same as others.

Those examples of respecting the rules to be *tadashii* illustrate how following the rules and the right steps for achieving something permit an individual to be part of the social setting. This process is particularly visible in the Japanese context where there is a pervasive model for doing things 'right' as a 'Japanese'. The interviews reveal that what this correct or right behaviour means in contemporary Japan is defined by following the mainstream in order to conserve the ideal of 'Japaneseness'. If one does not follow the mainstream, the interviewees would be seen as un-Japanese. 'Doing the same as others' therefore reproduce the ideology of 'Japaneseness' and maintain the naturalness or hierarchical relations and conventions; conforming to the Japanese society and trying to behave in the correct way reinforce the discourse and facilitate the reproduction of that 'culture'.

Chapter 4 - Living the formality in the Japanese context

4.1 – Formality and the '*Tatemae*'

The interviews conducted for this thesis led also to the key theme of 'formality'. The foreign-born Japanese' experiences in Japan illustrate how Japanese society is structured through processes of a strong sense of the importance of formality, due to the expectations of *tatemae*.

The difference between *honne* (true feelings) and *tatemae* (public behaviour) discourse is strong within Japan and from an outside perspective gives an impression of formality and 'coldness'. The formality and the *tatemae* in interpersonal relationships create an invisible wall between people, what the interviewees described as 'cold' relationship or 'coldness'. In relation to the *honne* and *tatemae* discourse, Sugimoto (2020) notes three pairs in analysing

Japanese society: *tatemae* (façade) and *honne* (true feelings), *omote* (the face) and *ura* (the back), and *soto* (outside or exterior) and *uchi* (inside or interior) (pp. 54-55). *Tatemae* is the established principle whereas the *honne* refers to the true desire that cannot be expressed openly because of the *tatemae*. For the second pair, *omote* refers to the correct side and *ura* as the wrong side which is not publicly accepted. The last pair is usually used to refer to people outside or inside a group, Sugimoto (2020) explains this last pair as "them and us" (p. 55). These pairs illustrate the interpersonal relationships in Japanese society, and the publicly acceptable and inacceptable sides of life (Sugimoto, 2020, p. 56). It is possible that what a person thinks inside (*uchi*) or in the back (*ura*) can be different from what they show on the outside (*soto*) or *omote*. Thus, although publicly inacceptable, the *ura* and *uchi* can represent the true feelings or *honne* of a person. These pairs, especially the *honne* and *tatemae* pair, are linked to the feeling of 'cold' (*tsumetai* in Japanese) that some interviewees referred to.

The formality and *tatemae* make people not say their true feelings (*honne*) and create a certain distance between people. Many interviewees referred to 'coldness', whether it comes from their dorm mates or classmates. Due to a certain level of *tatemae*, some respondents mentioned that at first, creating bonds of friendship with Japanese people were a challenge since they did not express their true feeling. They felt the relationship was built as 'superficial' and 'cold', and felt a certain distance with the Japanese around them. Indeed, the formality of *tatemae* creates distance, because the speaker adjusts their level of politeness according to the person they're talking to, to the situation and depending on how close they are to that person. Moreover, as a Japanese informant born and raised in France explained, the way Japanese people don't say what they think exist with the Japanese proverb that says, "The mouth is a source of trouble" (*kuchi wa wazawai no moto*). This proverb means that one should be careful when speaking to not make unintentional or careless remarks. Careless remarks could lead to being '*shitsurei*', or being impolite in a society where politeness is part of the morality and mannerism that reflects the level of education, and one's social status. Thus, meeting a person for the first time requires a certain level of politeness in the Japanese context, this might be the reason why those foreign-born Japanese described their first impression of Japanese

people as cold.

However, what the interviewees all agreed on is the way Japanese people express themselves in an unclear way (*hakkiri iwanai*) when they do express their true feelings and thoughts. The respondents often used the expressions '*hakkiri iwanai*' (not saying clearly) or '*toomawashi ni iu*' (say things indirectly), to share their perceptive on Japanese people, as people who think before talking in order to not hurt the person in front of them and that make sure that their words don't hurt them. The interviews provided an image of Japanese behaviour that is a common impression to foreign-born Japanese of what a Japanese person is like. In reality, this image is visible in the workplace. For instance, a Korean-Japanese informant working now in Japan explained that she faced many situations when it was difficult to understand what exactly the person meant since they use specific words to soften their claim. It was especially the case when people are refusing something. They use a lot of 'cushion words' (*kusshon kotoba*) that are expressions to soften the claim and make it less blunt, and the informant finds it difficult even now after living in Japan for some years to say if the person is refusing or is meaning to say another thing. Those 'cushion words' are considered as good mannerism in the workplace, in order to be polite towards the person in front of them. This is part of keeping the *tatemae*, that can be explained as a feeling of not wanting to hurt the person they are talking to, but also illustrates a strong sense of the necessity for conformity. This illustrates precisely what Sugimoto (2020) talks about when he argues about the publicly acceptable and inacceptable. The *tatemae* represent the publicly acceptable side of life (Sugimoto, 2020, p. 55), which exists to avoid the *shitsurei* or the publicly unacceptable side. Consequently, because of a certain *tatemae*, the foreign-born Japanese find it difficult to understand what their Japanese peers are saying within this cultural schemata to draw upon Bourdieu.

What is interesting to note is that most of the interviewee described this *tatemae* of not saying the *honne* or true feelings as a feature common to most Japanese people they interact with, that also make part of their modest character, something regarded as a virtue in Japan. Many of the respondents even came to the conclusion that they actually have this trait,

explaining that this part of them is in reality very Japanese-like. One of them said: "I usually don't say what I think and I stay quite modest. Maybe this part of me is very Japanese." The modesty, as well as the formality of *tatemae* represent a strong image of Japanese people, which reflects the omnipresence of the discourse of Japaneseness, and the embodiment of the discourse which creates the reality of it. Thus, the society as a whole is composed of a certain formality, which is also strongly present in the workplace in particular as discussed in the next section.

4.2- The workplace: performance of mannerism and the respect of hierarchy

The way the society is structured with formality is clearly apparent in the workplace, where certain specific mannerism is performed in order to keep the interactions 'harmonious' according to expected hierarchical relations. Mannerism is particularly important in the Japanese context, and specifically in the workplace, to the extent that the new employees need to go through a training period to learn the basic mannerisms when entering a company (McVeigh, 2014, p. 158). Those mannerism are about language such as the usage of *keigo* (formal speech), posture, attitude (degree of bowing), and so on. McVeigh (2014) shows an example of a list of manners of respect to be followed by new employees, which are relatively illustrative of the position of the new employee in the company being at the bottom of the pyramidal structure of the company hierarchy. "Do not cross your legs or fold your arms in front of superiors or clients", "speak no more than five minutes at meetings" (McVeigh, 2014, p.158) are such examples. The existence of a training period for new employees tells us about the inculcation of mannerism that are considered as norms and standards in the Japanese workplace. Those manners will become later *atarimae* and natural for those new employees who learn to embody them, and who will come to expect their juniors to do the same. This is an infinite circle of reproduction of cultural values of the workplace, which explains why it can be so pressurising for the ethnically Japanese foreigners who starts working in Japan, but not used to such strict expectations of conformity.

What the respondents working in Japan learnt first were the rules to show respect to their superiors and to not seem disrespectful or *shitsurei*. One informant, working now in Japan, explained that during his first year of employment, he had to come thirty minutes before the starting time of work to make sure that he was at the office before his superiors and seniors. Even today, although it has been three years since he entered the company, he still has to come earlier than his superiors. Another informant, who is also working in a Japanese company, shared that although she finished her tasks and she could leave the office, she has to ask the people around her if they want any help with any other tasks. Especially during her first year, during the training period, the senior would teach the new employees to ask around before leaving the office as a manner to show respect to the seniors and to show some consideration towards them. After asking, the respondent would eventually help them and work overtime or else she would be considered rude or unmannered. According to her, leaving the office before the seniors is considered *shitsurei* and felt how as a result *zangyo* (to work overtime) has become *atarimae* (natural) in the office.

Another example illustrating mannerism in relation with one's position, is the exchange of business cards (*meishi*). A respondent described how to give and receive the *meishi*. When exchanging, the card one has to be under theirs if they are in a higher position, and when putting down the *meishi* on the table, it has to be arranged in a vertical column in a hierarchical order. Therefore, the higher the position, the higher the business card of that person would be in the column. These kinds of manners represent well the importance of the hierarchy in Japan, a characteristic of the Japanese working culture that the foreign-born Japanese have to confront. They also reveal the existence of a symbolic violence; the foreign-born Japanese are expected to know that seniors should be respected in this way and that they need to show consideration towards them through displaying such behaviour.

Thus, living in Japan and working in Japan involves the embodiment of particular mannerism which are performed in a 'natural' way. Since it is seen so strongly as natural, the foreign-born Japanese find it difficult to cope with the *atarimae*, and sometimes questions themselves as to the meaning and purpose of certain mannerisms. One of them gave me the

example of the expression "*itsumo osewa ni natte orimasu*", a business term that literally means "thank you for your constant assistance". It has to be said at the beginning of a conversation as a greeting when meeting a person of another company, during a phone call or in a mail. He explained that he sometimes wonders why he has to use that expression although he himself has never talked to that person or anyone from that company. Japanese people learn these expressions for the reason of it being good manners and the norm; for people from a different cultural background, the usage of such expression for the purpose of mannerism is questionable, and becomes seen as superficial and overly formal.

Therefore, these interviews reveal their more intricate nature of the attention paid to formality that structures Japanese working spaces and broader society. The performance of mannerism and the formality are well structured in the way that it is inculcated in the employees, and that people are expected and constrained to perform those in many spheres of life. The performance of mannerism is seen as *atarimae* and its inculcation in the people's mind represents how it is preserving the discourse of Japaneseess as one of well-mannered people who know how to behave correctly but also presents a highly conservative and conformist sociality.

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Conclusion

The interviews reveal that the definition of being Japanese is based on the fact of knowing the *atarimae*, which involves notions of morality and formality. The experience of foreign-born Japanese demonstrates the omnipresence of a strong discourse of Japaneseness; they have to confront the symbolic violence of the social order to which they are pressured to submit, and they are expected to fit the Japanese mainstream standards. Those standards are those of knowing the 'morality' of respecting the rules and to not cause trouble or *meiwaku* to others. If those ethnically Japanese foreigners act based on this notion of morality, as discussed, they behave 'correctly' and therefore can be considered as 'good' and thereby

Japanese. Yet, this social-cultural construction of morality as something embodied by specific proper mannerism and following protocol seen as natural and *atarimae* in Japanese society, is not the case for the ethnically Japanese foreigners. Morality as *atarimae* cultural sensibilities play a central role in differentiating people as 'un-Japanese'. Consequently, the foreign-born Japanese can feel a certain categorization and a fissure between them and the Japanese growing up in Japanese society.

The interviews also illustrate the way the society is structured with a lot of attention paid to formality, making us understand how Japaneseness is strongly internalized cultural and social dynamics, and the extent to which it is embodied by the Japanese in their everyday behaviour. Although it is believed that the discourse of *tatemae* as being Japanese-like actually exists in society, the interviews reveal that the discourse is in fact lived through embodiment in daily interactions.

The performance of mannerism, especially in the workplace give us an understanding of the importance put on respecting the hierarchical status order. The speech level, the action of bowing, are all performed according to the person's position in the social hierarchy. These are taught to new employees during their training period; therefore, the foreign-born Japanese are also expected to learn and apply such mannerism when entering the workforce. The expectations towards the foreign-born Japanese, as well as the inculcation of mannerism and thereby what is considered moral to Japanese people consequently permit the reproduction of the discourse of Japanese ethno-nationalism.

Thus, the foreign-born Japanese confront this lived reality of Japaneseness in the everyday. Their experiences illustrate the expectations towards them to fit to the standards and to conform to the common sense or *atarimae*, and to embody the Japaneseness as well so as to fit in, which itself is regarded as a virtue, or moral behaviour. Those of them who have lived more than five years in Japan even stated that they are becoming more and more 'Japanese', due to this conformity and social pressure, although their definition of the 'Japanese' is in fact also an imagined reality but nevertheless becoming real through *tatemae* pressure to fit in.

However, in a globalized world like today, more and more 'non-Japanese' people will live

and are living in Japan. The country is no longer one of being monoethnic, if it ever were, thus, the ethnonationalist discourse is clearly not appropriate even if still seems to resonate so strongly in many institutional settings. Therefore, there is a need to accept that there is not only one definition of being 'Japanese'. The traditional definition is being challenged, as well as the imagined reality of the discourse of Japaneseness, perhaps being reproduced so strongly due to the challenges of a more diverse Japan. Nevertheless, the issues of why it is still strongly believed and experienced, why there should be only one type of 'Japanese' and why there is a need to reproduce this discourse need to be further explored.

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