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The Human Profile of Japanese Nationalism: A Study of *Nihonjinron* Followers

The current vast discourse that seeks to account for the particular characteristics of Japanese society and also serves as a broadly based ideological stance for Japan's nationalism is called *Nihonjinron*. Based on a survey of 937 adult respondents, we sought to identify which segments of Japanese society are susceptible to the tenets of *Nihonjinron*, and which sociocultural disposition determines ethnocentric and nationalistic attitudes as underpinned by *Nihonjinron* tenets. Our findings indicate stronger adherence among the old generation as well as a negative correlation between interest in, on one hand, and belief in *Nihonjinron*, on the other. The present article discusses the various functions *Nihonjinron* is assumed to serve in light of these findings.

What is *Nihonjinron*?

The Japanese consuming interest in their national and cultural identity seems almost unique in its magnitude. The current vast discourse that seeks to account for the particular characteristics of Japanese society, culture, and national character is called *Nihonjinron* (but sometimes also referred to as *Nihonron*, *Nihon Bunkaron*, or *Nihon Shakairon*), which means literally 'theories of the Japanese (people)'. *Nihonjinron* also serves as a broadly-based ideological support for Japan's nationalism through its ethnocentric emphasis on the nation as the preeminent collective identity of the people. Overall it has

become a societal force shaping the way Japanese regard themselves.

As a reflection of the concern for Japan's cultural and ethnic identity, contemporary *Nihonjinron* discourse can be tracked back to Prewar writings, the late Meiji era quest for identity, and even earlier texts (for review, see Minami, 1976, 1980, 1994). Nevertheless, only in the last three decades has *Nihonjinron* emerged as hegemonic ideology, an 'industry' whose main producers are intellectuals and consumers are the masses. Although in recent years *Nihonjinron* literature may have leveled off a bit, it still seems to be extremely popular. Numerous studies have critically explored the content of these writings, scrutinizing the motives and background for their 'production'.

Since the 1980s numerous studies have critically explored the content of these writings, scrutinizing the motives and background for their 'production'. This study, however, is aimed at a rather neglected aspect of *Nihonjinron*: its 'consumers', Japan's mainstream population. Our focus in this article is to identify the adherents of *Nihonjinron* and to examine the extent to which their profile matches the functions *Nihonjinron* are supposed to serve. In order to deal with these issues, we initially review the content of *Nihonjinron* and its role as national ideology.

The Tenets of a Nationalist Ideology

Nihonjinron deals with a wide range of social phenomena (from 'race', social structure, language, to ecology, economy, psychology, and even international relations) under a common denominator. This varied and complex discourse treats Japanese culture as a unique and unparalleled product of racial, historical, and climatic elements that underlies the essence of current social phenomena. This fundamental approach is followed by several premises about the nature of Japanese society.

The first premise is that the Japanese are homogeneous people (*tan'itsu minzoku*) and that Japan as a nation is culturally homogeneous (*tôshitsu*, or *dôshitsu*). This notion implies that the Japanese share invariably a single language, religion, and lifestyle, and belong to a single race. Although this assumption is based, at least culturally, on certain aspects

of reality, *Nihonjinron* writers tend to overlook class, gender, regional, and other variation, to mention only few, as well as to ignore the existence of under-privileged minorities within Japanese society. The second premise asserts a strong nexus between the land of Japan, the people, and their culture. *Nihonjinron* writers maintain that Japanese culture, as manifested by language and social customs, can be carried only by Japanese who are the result of the specific amalgam of the Japanese archipelago (Befu, 1993). The short review of the scope of *Nihonjinron* should be sufficient to suggest that it represents the very ideology of contemporary Japanese nationalism. They offer a comprehensive worldview which deals with and accounts for all that nationalism is about: tradition, culture, nation, and stance vis-à-vis the outside world. By continuously confounding race, ethnicity, and nation, *Nihonjinron* create a strong source of nationalism uniting society, culture, and 'blood'. There is wide agreement among various critics of *Nihonjinron* on the inseparability of *Nihonjinron* from Japanese nationalism. They may differ on the degree to which it reflects nationalism, partly because no one has defined or thoroughly examined contemporary Japanese 'nationalism'. Dale contends that *Nihonjinron* constitutes "the commercialized expression" of modern Japanese nationalism (Dale, 1986:14), whereas Yoshino (1992) refers to *Nihonjinron* as cultural nationalism, and distinguishes between this form of nationalism (which he also refers to as 'secondary nationalism') and original nationalism ('primary nationalism'). To stress further the role of *Nihonjinron* in Japanese nationalism, we argue that it is, in fact, the hegemonic ideology in contemporary Japan. Not only are its tenets endorsed by the political establishment and the economical elite (Yoshino, 1992), but also there is virtually no other ideology that competes with *Nihonjinron* (Befu, 1993).

The *Nihonjinron* 'Economy': Producers vs. Consumers

While some *Nihonjinron* is serious academic discourse, a great bulk of it is produced by academics, journalists, critics, businessmen, and politicians for popular consumption. Since the early 1980s, there has been an increasing number of studies which critically examine the world of *Nihonjinron* and its producers, its historical and ideological milieu, and the

methodology and social function of its writings (e.g., Befu, 1987; Dale, 1986; Kawamura, 1982; Miller, 1982; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986; Sugimoto & Mouer, 1982; Yoshino, 1992).

In contrast, only a few studies have examined the characteristics of *Nihonjinron* 'consumers', that is, the people who adhere to *Nihonjinron* as a national ideology and believe in its tenets. The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) conducted two national surveys regarding the 'consciousness of the Japanese people' which incorporated a few nationalism-related items (NHK Sôgô Hôsô Yoron Chôsajo, 1975, 1980). The NHK surveys found high correlation between positive attitude toward the emperor, attachment to Japan, and feeling of national superiority. The most prominent research endeavor in this category is the massive nine national surveys conducted every five years since 1953 by the Research Committee for the Study of the Japanese National Character (Tôkei Sûri Kenkyûjo Kokuminsei Chôsa Iinkai, 1961, 1970, 1975, 1982, 1992, 1994). The 'National Character' surveys are especially an invaluable source of information because they have sampled the whole adult population of Japan, been conducted every five years over a period of four decades, and have supplied a breakdown of each response according to gender, age, education level, region, city size, and even (occasional) cohort comparison (e.g., Tôkei Sûri Kenkyûjo Kokuminsei Chôsa Iinkai, 1985).

Using data from seven 'National Character' surveys conducted between 1953-1983 as well as the two 'consciousness of the Japanese people' NHK surveys, Gano (1987) examined the effect of generational change, maturation, and period (change with the lapse of time) on Japanese postwar nationalistic attitudes. Gano found age ('experiential effect') to be the crucial factor in determining nationalistic attitudes. In 10 out of 16 questions Gano examined, he found that the oldest generation, who experienced the war as adults, expressed stronger nationalistic attitudes than the younger generations, whereas in two questions, the younger generation's tendency to converge with the attitudes of the old ('maturation effect') was the main factor determining attitudinal change. In addition, in nine questions he found attitude change in all groups with the lapse of time ('period effect'). Overall, Gano concluded that postwar Japanese public opinion "shows strongly declining support for every element relating to the "layer" of the modernizing ideology,

both by period and by experiential effects" (Gano 1987:439), and at the same time, maintains or increases its level of support for "the elements of the "core" social system underlying traditional Japanese nationalism." (Gano 1987:442).

Yoshino (1992) approached *Nihonjinron* as a discourse of 'thinking elites', who mobilize the ordinary sections of the population by transmitting them their ideas of national identity. To illustrate his thesis, he examined responses to ideas of national distinctiveness among a sample of 71 educators (mainly high school headmasters) and businessmen, the majority of whom were males and of middle age or above. Yoshino concluded that *Nihonjinron* stimulated, if not created, the active consciousness of Japanese identity of some of the respondents as well as their perceptions and expressions of it. Another contribution to the study of *Nihonjinron* consumers is Loveday's (1990, 1997) research on Japanese attitudes toward contacts with foreign language and their relation to cultural ethnocentrism. Loveday's findings suggest that respondents with higher educational background and higher occupations, and those aged 18-29, are somewhat more tolerant to foreign culture and language contact with English.

Overview

In the present study, we have sought to identify which segments of the Japanese society are susceptible to the tenets of *Nihonjinron*. More specifically, we were interested to find the social characteristics which play a substantial role in determining nationalistic and ethnocentric attitudes as underpinned by *Nihonjinron* tenets. In addition, we sought to reassess the role of *Nihonjinron* in contemporary Japanese society in light of our findings. This is because *Nihonjinron* consumers, we believe, have at least as an important role as its producers in determining the content of production. As such, this study is the first large-scale attempt to specifically examine the prevalence of *Nihonjinron* tenets among the mainstream Japanese population.

Method

Participants and procedure

This preliminary stage of this study began in 1987. The questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of 2,400 adults in Nishinomiya, a city with a population of close to half million, located midway between Osaka and Kobe. In order to approximate random selection of the local inhabitants, the survey used the so-called next-birthday-method (Salmon & Nichols 1983). As a first step, a random sample of households was selected using the telephone directory. Next, the adult in the household whose birthday was nearest to the day of the survey was asked to participate in "National Character Survey," and the questionnaire was sent to this person. Among those who were selected as respondents, 944 returned the questionnaire (39.3% of the initial sample), of whom seven were deleted due to incomplete response. The final sample consisted of 585 men and 314 women (and 38 who did not answer) from a wide range of age, occupation, educational level, and social economic status (SES). For further details on the method, demographic structure of the sample, as well as certain descriptive results, see Manabe and Befu (1992).

Testing material

The questionnaire contained demographic questions and numerous measures, many of which were designed specifically to assess exposure, interest and belief in *Nihonjinron* as defined in the review above. In the present study, we did not make use of all the measures the questionnaire contains (about 250 items) because not all were relevant to this topic (for a complete English and Japanese versions of the questionnaire, see Befu & Manabe 1987; Manabe & Befu 1989, respectively). As dependent variables, we used 11 measures, which were arranged in the following five sub-themes.

1. Exposure to *Nihonjinron*. To assess respondents' level of exposure to *Nihonjinron*, we used two measures:
 - A. Exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature. This measure

consists of a list of titles and authors of 21 prominent books on various *Nihonjinron*-related themes. Respondents were asked to mark titles and authors they were familiar with, and their response could range from 0 (low exposure) to 21 titles and 21 authors (high exposure).

B. Exposure to central tenets of *Nihonjinron*. This measure consists of three statements (Japanese people are homogeneous, Japanese society is homogeneous, Japanese culture is unique). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they encountered these items, and their response could range from 0 (low exposure) to 3 (high exposure).

2. Interest in *Nihonjinron*. To assess respondents' level of interest in *Nihonjinron*, we used two measures.

C. Interest in *Nihonjinron* in the media. This measure consisted of five media sources (newspapers, television, radio, magazines, books). Respondents were asked to indicate their interest in *Nihonjinron* for each of these sources, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very interested (1) to not at all interested (5). Aggregated response could range from 5 (high interest) to 25 (low interest)

D. Interest in *Nihonjinron* literature. This measure consists of a list of titles of 21 prominent books on *Nihonjinron* (identical to the list in Measure A). Respondents were asked to mark books they read, and their response could range from 0 (low interest) to 21 items (high interest).

3. Belief in Tenets of *Nihonjinron*. To assess respondents' belief in tenets of *Nihonjinron*, we used three measures:

E. Belief in the central tenets of *Nihonjinron*. This measure consists of three statements (identical to those in Measure B). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of these statements, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from totally agree (1) to totally disagree (5), and their aggregated response could range from 3 (strong belief) to 15 (weak beliefs)

F. Belief in the blood concept. This measure consists of

- 5 statements regarding the role of Japanese blood in Japanese identity. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of these statements, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from totally agree (1) to totally disagree (5), and their aggregated response could range from 5 (strong belief) to 25 (weak belief).
- G. Belief in variation within the Japanese society. This measure consists of 10 aspects of Japanese life (e.g., dialect, religion, and income). Respondents were asked to indicate the level of variation they believed to exist in each item, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from a great deal of variation (1) to very small variation (5), and their aggregated response could range from 10 (weak belief in variation) to 50 (strong belief in variation).
4. Attitude toward Japan and Japanese Identity. To assess our respondents' attitude toward the Japan and Japanese identity we used two measures:
- H. Japan's position. This measure consists of five items (scientific, artistic, and economic achievement, standard of living, extent of internationalization). Respondents were asked to evaluate Japan's standard with respect to each of these items, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very high (1) to very low (5), and their aggregated response could range from 5 (high evaluation) to 25 (low evaluation).
- I. Criteria for being Japanese. This measure consists of 10 criteria (e.g., Japanese citizenship, both parents being Japanese, and Japanese physical appearance). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent each of these items is necessary as a criterion for being Japanese, using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from absolutely necessary (1) to makes no difference (4), and their aggregated response could range from 10 (strict criteria) to 40 (lax criteria).
5. Attitude toward Foreigners in Japan. To assess our

respondents' attitude toward foreigners in Japan we used three measures:

- J. Belief in foreigners' incapability to handle Japanese culture. This measure consists of five statements regarding foreigner's inability to handle various aspects of Japanese culture (e.g., Foreigners cannot understand Japanese culture thoroughly). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of these statements, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from totally agree (1) to totally disagree (5), and their aggregated response could range from 5 (weak belief) to 25 (strong belief).
- K. Support for foreigners' assimilation. This measure consists of 10 hypothetical situations in which foreigners are involved in the Japanese society (e.g., a Japanese marrying a foreigner, or a foreigner employed by a Japanese company). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of approval to each of these situations, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very much in favor (1) to very much opposed (5), and their aggregated response could range from 10 (strong support) to 50 (weak support).
- L. Feelings about foreigners' assimilation. This measure consists of five hypothetical situations in which foreigners are in direct contact with the respondent (e.g., your own child marrying a foreigner, or having a foreigner as a neighbor). Respondents were asked to indicate their personal feeling about each of these situations, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very much welcome it (1) to totally distasteful (5), and their aggregated response could range from 5 (positive feelings) to 25 (negative feelings).

The independent variables in this study included gender, educational level (middle school, high school, college and above), SES (high, middle, low; as defined subjectively by the respondents), experience abroad (yes/no), having one or more foreign friends (yes/no), and age. The age variable was divided into three age-groups. The first group, "The War Generation," was born before 1927, experienced the war as

adults (most males as soldiers), and was 60 years old and above at the time of the survey. The second group, "The Recovery Generation," experienced the war as children or adolescents, entered adulthood during the period of rapid economic growth, and was between 40-59 years old at the time of the survey. The third group, "The affluence Generation," was born during the period of rapid economic growth, entered adulthood in a period of affluence, and was under 40 years old at the time of the survey. In addition, we used several of the dependent variables as independent variables, splitting the sample at its median score into two groups (in case of gender difference, each gender was split separately).

Results

1. *Exposure to Nihonjinron.*

To examine differences in exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature, we conducted one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) on the total number of titles and authors respondents were familiar with (Measure A) for each independent variable (we could not simultaneously analyze all the independent variables because there were too few subjects in each cell). The analyses indicated significant difference for gender (men more exposed), educational level (respondents of higher education more exposed), travel abroad (those who traveled more exposed), and having a foreign friend (those who have a friend more exposed). We conducted similar ANOVAs on the total number of central tenets of *Nihonjinron* respondents encountered (Measure B), which indicated only one difference: having a foreign friend implied greater encounter (Table 1).

These findings suggest that exposure to *Nihonjinron* is determined primarily by level of education, but also by contact with foreign culture (e.g., travel abroad and having a foreign friend), and to a lesser extent gender (only among those who have high education). Using these four factors, we conducted a 4-way ANOVA on Measure A, which did not reveal any interactions between them. Findings show that those highly exposed to *Nihonjinron* literature are highly educated males, who travel abroad and have foreign friends. Thus, on one extreme we had a cell with 84 respondents who matched this profile, and had an average familiarity score of 13.9 items. On the other extreme, there was a cell with 30

uneducated males, who did not travel abroad and had no foreign friends. These respondents had an average score of only 5.9 items, a difference of about 1.5 SD from the former group.

Range	A. Familiarity with NJR literature				B. Encounter with the central tenets of NJR			
	0 (low) - 42 (high)				0 (low) - 3 (high)			
Category/ Group	N1	M	SD	F	M	SD	F	
Sex								
Male	585	9.5	7.1	10.9†	1.76	1.0	< 1	
Females	314	7.8	5.8		1.70	1.1		
Age								
Young	276	8.6	6.5	< 1	1.69	1.1	< 1	
Middle age	403	9.1	6.6		1.74	1.1		
Old	228	8.9	7.2		1.81	1.1		
Education								
Low	95	5.5	4.5	34.8‡	1.57	1.1	2.4	
Middle	384	7.2	5.8		1.70	1.1		
High	405	10.9	7.2		1.81	1.1		
SES								
Low	253	8.8	6.6	< 1	1.69	1.1	2.0	
Middle	450	8.6	6.6		1.71	1.1		
High	203	9.4	7.1		1.87	1.1		
Travel abroad								
Yes	411	10.5	7.3	42.7‡	1.81	1.0	3.6	
No	477	7.3	5.3		1.67	1.1		
Foreign friend								
Yes	230	11.2	7.6	35.1‡	1.93	1.0	10.0**	
No	674	8.0	6.1		1.67	1.1		

TABLE 1
Exposure to
Nihonjinron
(NJR)

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ † $p < .001$ ‡ $p < .0001$

1 The number of subjects slightly differs in each measure and category due to missing data.

2. Interest in Nihonjinron.

To examine differences in interest in *Nihonjinron* as appeared in the media, we conducted one-way ANOVAs on the aggregated ratings for all media sources (Measure C). The analyses indicated significant differences for all the

independent variables. Analyses on the total number of *Nihonjinron* books the respondents read (Measure D) showed similar results (Table 2). We conducted several four-way ANOVAs on these two measures using a number of combination of variables. These analyses indicated that those interested in *Nihonjinron*: are older, well-off, educated males, who have a contact with foreign culture and greater exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature. Interestingly, we did not find gender differences within the senior group.

TABLE 2
Interest in
Nihonjinron.

Range	C. Interest in NJR in the mediA			D. Reading NJR literature		
	5 (high) - 25 (low)			0 (low) - 21 (high)		
Category/ Group	M	SD	F	M	SD	F
Sex						
Male	14.3	4.5	22.4‡	2.16	2.8	19.2‡
Females	15.7	3.8		1.27	2.2	
Age						
Young	15.8	3.8	17.5‡	1.39	2.1	6.3**
Middle age	14.7	4.3		1.91	2.8	
Old	13.6	4.4		2.30	3.0	
Education						
Low	15.3	4.3	6.2**	0.68	1.4	21.2‡
Middle	15.2	4.2		1.39	2.1	
High	14.2	4.4		2.42	3.0	
SES						
Low	15.2	4.5	9.5†	1.49	2.5	6.9**
Middle	15.0	4.1		1.74	2.5	
High	13.6	4.2		2.43	2.9	
Travel abroad						
Yes	14.0	4.3	23.8‡	2.54	3.0	56.1‡
No	15.5	4.2		1.14	2.0	
Foreign friend						
Yes	13.5	4.3	26.1‡	2.99	3.4	54.4‡
No	15.2	4.2		1.45	2.2	
Exposure to NJR literature						
High	13.2	4.4	50.3‡	3.04	3.0	138.3‡
Low	15.4	4.0		0.88	1.7	

* p < .05 ** p < .01 † p < .001 ‡ p < .0001

3. *Belief in tenets of Nihonjinron.*

To examine differences in belief in the central tenets of *Nihonjinron*, we conducted one-way ANOVAs on the aggregated level of agreement with the tenets respondents expressed (Measure E). The analyses indicated only age difference: Older respondents expressed greater agreement with the tenets. Similar ANOVAs on the aggregated level of agreement with the five statements regarding the blood concept (Measure F) indicated that men, older respondents, respondents with lower education and without foreign friend, and those who were less exposed to *Nihonjinron* literature, expressed greater belief in the blood concept. Similar ANOVAs on the aggregated score of belief in variation in 10 aspects of Japanese life (Measure G) indicated that women, respondents with lower education, respondents who have not traveled abroad and without foreign friend, and those who were less exposed to and less interested in *Nihonjinron* literature, believed in lesser variation within Japanese society (Table 3). The relation between belief in *Nihonjinron* tenets and personal characteristics depended on the measure. On one hand, there were almost no personal differences in the belief in the central tenets of *Nihonjinron*. On the other hand, personal characteristics had greater effect on more specific measures such as belief in the blood concept and the belief in variation within Japanese society. Additional four-way ANOVAs on these two measures indicated that the typical believer in tenets of *Nihonjinron* is an old male (depend on the age group) with low education, who has lesser contact with foreign culture, and interestingly, less exposed to *Nihonjinron* literature. Thus, on one extreme we had a cell with 21 old males, of low education and with no foreign contacts, who expressed the strongest belief in the blood concept ($M=9.8$). On the other extreme, 21 young, highly educated females with foreign contacts, and 64 young, highly educated males without foreign contact, expressed much weaker belief ($M=17.4, 18.8$, respectively), a difference of about 2 SD.

TABLE 3: Belief in Tenets of Nihonjinron.

Category	Range Group	E. Belief in central tenets of NJR			F. Belief in the concept of 'blood'			G. Belief in variation in Japanese society		
		3 (strong) - 15 (weak)			5 (strong) - 25 (weak)			10 (weak) - 50 (strong)		
		M	SD	F	M	SD	F	M	SD	F
Sex	Male	7.7	2.2	< 1	14.9	4.5	6.8**	23.7	6.7	4.5*
	Females	7.8	2.2		15.8	4.1		22.8	6.4	
Age	Young	8.1	2.1	4.9**	17.6	4.1	91.9‡	23.6	6.5	< 1
	Middle age	7.7	2.2		15.0	4.1		23.2	6.7	
	Old	7.4	2.3		12.7	3.9		23.5	6.5	
Education	Low	7.8	2.0	< 1	13.7	4.5	20.1‡	22.2	5.7	8.3†
	Middle	7.7	2.2		14.4	4.2		22.7	6.9	
	High	7.8	2.3		16.1	4.4		24.4	6.4	
SES	Low	7.7	2.2	1.7	15.7	4.9	2.3	23.4	7.4	1.7
	Middle	7.9	2.2		15.0	4.2		23.0	6.4	
	High	7.5	2.2		15.0	4.2		24.1	5.9	
Travel abroad	Yes	7.7	2.2	< 1	15.5	4.4	2.0	24.4	6.4	21.7‡
	No	7.7	2.3		15.0	4.5		22.4	6.6	
Foreign friend	Yes	7.7	2.3	< 1	15.7	4.1	4.8*	24.4	6.7	8.6**
	No	7.8	2.2		15.0	4.5		22.9	6.6	
Exposure to NJR literature	High	7.6	2.3	3.3	16.0	4.3	12.8†	24.5	7.0	13.9†
	Low	7.9	2.1		14.8	4.6		22.7	6.2	
Interest in NJR in media	High	7.7	2.2	< 1	14.9	4.6	2.9	23.6	6.9	1.2
	Low	7.8	2.2		15.4	4.3		23.1	6.3	

* p < .05 ** p < .01 † p < .001 ‡ p < .0001

4. *Attitude toward Japan and Japanese identity.*

To examine differences in evaluation of Japan's standard, we conducted one-way ANOVAs on the aggregated level of evaluation of the five criteria (Measure H). The analysis indicated that older respondents, respondents with high SES, respondents who had low exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature, and those who expressed stronger belief in the blood concept, also evaluated Japan's standard higher. Similarly, we conducted one-way ANOVAs on the aggregated score of the 10 criteria for being Japanese (Measure I). The analyses indicated that men, older respondents, respondents with lower education, respondents who did not travel abroad and did not have foreign friends, and those who had little exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature and expressed stronger belief in the blood concept, also held stricter criteria for being Japanese. (Table 4).

Category	Group	H. Japanese Standard			I. Criteria for being Japanese			
		Range	5 (high) - 25 (low)	F	10 (strict) - 40 (lax)	F		
Sex	Male		11.9	3.2	< 1	25.6	8.6	4.8*
	Females		12.0	3.2		26.9	8.3	
Age	Young		12.5	3.3	13.2‡	28.6	8.1	26.3‡
	Middle age		12.0	3.2		25.9	8.4	
	Old		11.1	2.9		23.2	8.0	
Education	Low		11.9	3.5	< 1	22.1	8.6	14.2‡
	Middle		11.8	3.2		25.5	8.9	
	High		12.1	3.0		27.2	7.6	
SES	Low		13.1	3.3	27.7‡	27.0	8.8	2.3
	Middle		11.7	2.9		25.8	8.5	
	High		11.0	3.1		25.3	7.6	
Travel abroad	Yes		11.9	3.1	< 1	26.8	8.1	4.1*
	No		12.0	3.2		25.6	8.6	
Foreign friend	Yes		12.2	3.3	2.2	27.1	8.2	4.4*
	No		11.8	3.2		25.7	8.4	
Exposure to NJR literature	High		12.2	3.2	6.1*	28.1	7.7	21.1‡
	Low		11.6	3.3		25.3	8.3	
Interest in NJR in media	Strong		11.8	3.2	< 1	26.1	8.6	< 1
	Weak		12.0	3.2		25.3	8.0	
Belief in 'blood'	High		11.2	3.1	37.9‡	23.5	8.2	80.2‡
	Low		12.5	3.1		28.3	7.9	

TABLE 4
Attitude toward Japan and Japanese Identity.

* p < .05 ** p < .01 † p < .001 ‡ p < .0001

Attitudes toward Japan had a similar pattern to beliefs. Old respondents with low SES had higher evaluation regarding Japan's standard, and older respondents, males, those with low education and with no foreign contacts had stricter criteria for being Japanese. To illustrate this difference, we had on one extreme a cell with 21 old males, with low education and no foreign contacts, who manifested the strictest criteria for becoming Japanese ($M=20.0$). On the other extreme, there was a cell with 20 young, highly educated females with foreign contacts, who manifested the least strict criteria ($M=29.1$). Nationalistic attitudes on these two measures were associated with stronger belief in the blood concept but lower exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature.

5. *Attitude toward foreigners.*

To examine differences in belief regarding foreigners' ability to handle aspects of Japanese culture, we conducted one-way ANOVAs on the aggregated score of five statements (Measure J). The analyses indicated that older respondents, respondents of no foreign friends, respondents with low exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature, and those who expressed stronger belief in the blood concept and held stricter criteria of Japaneseness, also expressed greater disbelief in foreigners' ability to handle Japanese culture. To examine respondents' support for foreigners' assimilation in Japanese society, we conducted ANOVAs on the aggregated score of 10 hypothetical situations where foreigners were involved (Measure K). The analyses indicated that younger and more educated respondents, respondents who traveled abroad and have foreign friends, respondents with greater exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature and greater interest in *Nihonjinron* in the media, and those who expressed weaker belief in the blood concept and held more lax criteria of Japaneseness, also supported foreigners' assimilation in Japanese society. Finally, to measure respondents' own feelings regarding foreigners' assimilation, we conducted ANOVAs on the aggregated score of five hypothetical situations where foreigners were involved (Measure L). Similar to the previous measures, these analyses indicated that younger and more educated respondents, respondents who traveled abroad and have foreign friends, respondents with greater exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature and greater interest in *Nihonjinron* in the media, and those who

expressed weaker belief in the blood concept and held more lax criteria of Japaneseness, also harbored more positive feelings toward foreigners' assimilation in Japanese society (Table 5).

Category	Group	J. Belief in foreigners' foreigners' assimilation			K. Support for foreigners' assimilation			L. Feelings about ability to assimilate		
		Range	5 (weak) - 25 (strong)		10 (strong) - 50 (weak)		5 (pro) - 25 (con)			
		M	SD	F	M	SD	F	M	SD	F
Sex	Male	13.9	4.8	< 1	24.5	7.1	< 1	13.0	3.4	2.8
	Females	14.1	4.5		25.0	6.8		12.5	3.6	
Age	Young	15.0	4.8	11.2†	23.2	7.0	9.6†	12.1	3.5	8.6†
	Middle age	13.9	4.7		25.0	6.9		13.0	3.5	
	Old	13.0	4.4		25.8	7.0		13.4	3.3	
Education	Low	14.0	4.1	1.3	28.5	7.0	23.3‡	14.5	3.6	13.7‡
	Middle	13.7	4.7		25.4	7.1		12.9	3.6	
	High	14.3	4.8		23.3	6.7		12.4	3.3	
SES	Low	14.2	4.9	< 1	24.8	6.9	< 1	13.0	3.6	< 1
	Middle	14.0	4.5		24.7	7.2		12.8	3.5	
	High	13.7	4.9		24.4	6.7		12.7	3.4	
Travel abroad	Yes	14.3	4.8	3.4	23.4	6.7	26.3‡	12.2	3.3	27.0‡
	No	13.7	4.6		25.9	7.1		13.4	3.6	
Foreign friend	Yes	14.6	5.0	4.7*	22.5	6.5	31.8‡	11.4	3.3	53.4‡
	No	13.8	4.6		25.4	7.1		13.3	3.4	
Exposure to NJR literature	High	14.4	4.9	4.6*	22.9	6.7	19.5‡	12.2	3.2	9.5**
	Low	13.7	4.5		25.2	7.0		12.9	3.4	
Interest in NJR in media	High	13.7	4.9	2.7	23.8	6.9	10.7**	12.4	3.4	7.5**
	Low	14.2	4.6		25.3	6.9		13.31	3.5	
Belief in 'blood'	Strong	13.1	4.5	29.5‡	25.9	6.9	25.1‡	13.4	3.4	23.0‡
	Weak	14.8	4.8		23.6	7.0		12.3	3.5	
Criteria of Japaneseness	Strict	12.9	4.4	38.0‡	26.7	6.7	61.4‡	13.5	3.5	39.4‡
	Lax	14.9	4.7		23.2	6.7		12.1	3.2	

* p < .05 ** p < .01 † p < .001 ‡ p < .0001

Discussion and Conclusions

The present study identified two distinct features of Japanese public attitude toward *Nihonjinron*: interest and belief, which appear, in contrast to what one may expect from nationalistic attitudes, to be correlated negatively. In other words, those

who show high interest in *Nihonjinron* tenets do not believe in its tenets as much as those with lesser interest, and vice versa. This distinction is of great importance because interest in *Nihonjinron*, especially the widespread availability of books on this topic, has been often taken as an indicator of strength of Japanese nationalism.

TABLE 2
Attitudes
toward
foreigners in
Japan

The typical person we found to be highly exposed to *Nihonjinron* tenets and to manifest a greater interest in this topic tend to be an older and more educated male, who has been abroad and has foreign acquaintances. By contrast, the person we found to believe in *Nihonjinron* tenets and support them tends to be an older and less educated person (of either sex) who has not been abroad and does not have foreign acquaintances. This unmistakable fragmentation in attitudes toward *Nihonjinron* found between various section of the Japanese society provides some indication not only to the functions of *Nihonjinron* at present but also on the direction it may go in the near decades.

Contemporary Functions of *Nihonjinron*

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

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

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

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

Finally, the fact that much of the *Nihonjinron* writings has been generated out of authors' own experience in foreign countries or their encounter with foreigners in Japan, prompted Davis (1983) to suggest that *Nihonjinron* is aimed primarily at a reading public with some international experience. This may be an overstatement, yet indeed over the last

few decades *Nihonjinron* has increasingly dealt with the domain of international relations and Japan's 'internationalization', chiefly because of Japan's ever-growing involvement in the international arena (Befu, 1983; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1983). *Nihonjinron* writings furnish Japanese who lives overseas or merely maintain foreign contacts, and to lesser extent also foreigners who deal with Japan, with cultural explanation regarding their difficulties in intercultural communication with each other, as well as justification for Japanese 'national' behavior (cf. Inamura, 1980; Morita & Ishihara, 1989).

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

Present Attitudes and Future Trends

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

Our findings provide a few clues regarding certain trends among *Nihonjinron* consumers. The fact that both exposure and interest to *Nihonjinron* are greater among older people suggest perhaps that adherence to *Nihonjinron* may decline in the future. This is not as simple as it appears to be. First, because age is only one out of many determinants of adherence, and second because adherence may change with time. Gano (1987) demonstrated that there is a slight tendency for generation to converge with the attitudes of the old ('maturation effect'), and

more importantly, an attitude change in all age groups with the lapse of time ('period effect'). For this effects, Gano concluded that "the "core" values of traditional Japanese nationalism are alive and strong and growing stronger among all generations of postwar Japanese." (1987:443).

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

These trends notwithstanding, inevitably, the future of *Nihonjinron* will be affected predominantly by the domestic and international situation of Japan. Continuous affluence, stability, and successful involvement of Japan in global affairs may decrease consumers' need for *Nihonjinron*. In contrast, increasing international competition or economical depression, among other things, may intensify adherence to its tenets.

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