

Further examination of some issues would have added even more layers to an already rich work. For example, Kelsky notes that whether or not Japanese men actually reject the West is less important for the purposes of her argument than the fact that Japanese women find it useful to portray Japanese men as rejecting the foreign (p. 128). While the accuracy of women's constructions of the Japanese male is not at issue here, it is interesting to note the relative paucity of sources from Japanese men in the book. While books by male authors and accounts by women on men are used, there are no discernable interviews with Japanese males (other than her husband) on any subject. Detailed discussions of the interactions between American and Japanese women in their "competition" for access to the alpha white male would have made the discussion of racial and class hierarchies even more nuanced, as would observations on the distinctions made by some Japanese women between "African" and "American" black males.

Kelsky notes that several people were offended by her choice of research topic (and husband) (pp. 237-241). The potentially offensive has delivered the results that the resolutely humdrum could only dream of. A bold, thoughtful and thought-provoking work, this book should be required reading for all researchers of gender, race, power, sex and desire.

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**HEGEMONY OF HOMOGENEITY: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron.** By *Harumi Befu*. Melbourne (Australia): Trans Pacific Press. 2001. xiii, 181 pp. US\$29.95, paper. ISBN 1-8768-4305-5.

Through much of the twentieth century, the Japanese engaged in an enthusiastic national conversation about the nature of Japan and Japaneseness. These "Nihonjinron" (who-are-we-Japanese) speculations have been poured into an endless stream of books, magazines and television shows, produced by serious academics, freelance journalists, government agencies and pulp publishers, and avidly consumed (if sales and audience figures can be trusted) by a large portion of the national population.

Although "ron" usually connotes a field of debate, Nihonjinron is really just a cacophony of competing models of Japanese uniqueness, each balanced precariously on some alleged feature (of ecology, social structure, management type, psychology, aesthetics, language, ethnic origins, etc.) by which Japan may be understood as singular. What they share are assertions of internal homogeneity, specious essentialism, and auto-Oriental comparisons with everyone else in the world.

However zany, Nihonjinron have been politically potent and commercially profitable for over a century. Harumi Befu, one of our respected senior Japan anthropologists, has done much in his writings over the years

to bring *Nihonjinron* under scholarly scrutiny, and this volume usefully draws together many of the points he has advanced in disparate publications. In chapters 2 and 4, Befu enumerates key *Nihonjinron* premises, tenets and claims and offers a useful inventory of the major contributors and their models, which indeed run the gamut from the well-formed through the half-baked to the crackpot. Chapter 3 deals with the media of *Nihonjinron*, the features of publishing and readership that have made this packaged discourse more of a hit commercial product than specialized academic talk or purely official state rhetoric.

The Japanese are hardly unique in obsessing about their distinctiveness, but Japan's twentieth-century history has given a distinctive cast to such collective navel-gazing. In chapter 5, Befu elaborates on the hypothesis that he and others have offered previously, that this discourse of Japaneseness can be attributed in part to the "symbolic vacuum" created by the collapse of legitimacy suffered by other symbols of the nation-state and nationalist sentiment after the defeat in World War II—the emperor as deity, the national flag and national anthem, state rituals and monuments like Yasukuni Shrine. All of these nationalist expressions have remained in legal limbo and political controversy, while the flamboyant culture-and-character talk enriches writers and critics and entertains a national audience. As Befu asserts plausibly in chapter 6, *Nihonjinron* has come to function as modern Japan's civil religion, a notion introduced by both Robert Bellah and Winston Davis.

Befu himself admits that filling a symbolic vacuum cannot sufficiently explain the popularity and potency of postwar *Nihonjinron*; after all, strident claims of Japanese uniqueness functioned before World War II to support these very symbols of an aggressive imperialist state. Indeed, in the final chapter (7), Befu surveys the historical vicissitudes of this cultural-nationalist discourse, from early nineteenth-century nascent nativism to the swaggering ethnic nationalism of the 1980s.

The real question is why *Nihonjinron* could revive itself by the 1960s with a more palatable apolitical tone when other expressions of national identity remained so discredited. In part, I suspect, it is because Japan culture-talk played well to the Orientalizing sensibilities of the West (though as a return volley with back spin) and in part because *Nihonjinron* was packaged by and through the expanding commercial media. It was feel-good sermonizing delivered by credentialed commentators in easily-digestible nostrums. *Nihonjinron* "ritualized optimism" for the population, to borrow a phrase that Winston Davis coined in another context.

Readers now have several valuable studies of *Nihonjinron* to choose from, in English and in Japanese. At least some of these were inspired by Befu's own earlier writings, and this volume is a welcome summary of his thoughts and arguments.

