

# The Chrysanthemum No Longer Blooms: The End of *Nihonjinron* and Theology of Japan<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) This article is based on chapter 6 of the author’s doctoral thesis. Yumi Murayama-Cain, *The Bible in Imperial Japan 1850-1950* (Ph.D thesis, University of St Andrews, 2010).

“I like Americans, but they are somewhat unicellular.” Ozawa Ichiro,<sup>(2)</sup> the former leader of the Democratic Party of Japan, spoke in front of the media, and he continued: “I don’t think Americans are smart,” though he valued highly democracy in the United States.<sup>(3)</sup> It is rather surprising that Ozawa could still seek election as party leader and prime minister after publicly condemning the entire populace of an allied nation as “unicellular”, which is not only untrue in a figurative sense, but politically incorrect and simply an expression of crude prejudice.

Since Ozawa was a politician, his inappropriate comments were reported on television and newspapers both inside and outside of Japan, but this type of blanketing of a group of people with one or two oversimplified features is, unfortunately, not uncommon in daily conversation. “Americans are friendly,” “Japanese are devious,” “Portuguese are lazy,” and suchlike. Moreover, I have often heard Japanese people make generalisations about themselves, as well as some visitors to Japan who seem to have become instant anthropologists. There even exists a genre of popular literature called *Nihon Bunkaron*, more commonly referred to in English texts as *Nihonjinron*, which discusses and purports to give tangible answers to the question “Who are the Japanese?” Works of this kind are read widely and many books became best sellers. Theologians in Japan also began to take up this theme to make theology relevant to Japan, or to critique Japan theologically. For instance, Kitamori Kazo, in his *The Japanese and the Bible*,<sup>(4)</sup> his last book published during his lifetime, attempts an “intercultural (that is, between Japanese culture and the culture of the Bible) reading,” one earlier example of which was the concept of *Tsurasa* he introduced in the *Theology of the Pain of God*.<sup>(5)</sup> Another attempt was

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(2) In the main text, Japanese names are given in Japanese style: surname followed by given name. Names in citations are always in western style.

(3) “Americans ‘simpleminded’” *The Japan Times* (Thursday, Aug. 26, 2010).

(4) Kazo Kitamori, *Nihonjin to Seisho* [The Japanese and the Bible] (Tokyo: Kyo bun kan, 1995).

(5) Kitamori, *Kami no Itami no Shingaku* [Theology of the Pain of God] (Tokyo: Shin Kyo Shuppan, 1946).

made by Furuya Yasuo (1926-) and Ohki Hideo (1928-) in *Theology of Japan*, which first appeared in Japanese in 1989.<sup>(6)</sup> This is a noteworthy work which takes “Japan” as a subject of theological analysis and reflection. Ohki describes their project:

What is a “theology of Japan”? It is, in essence, “to theologize [*theologieren*]” ‘Japan.’ It is to critique Japan as an object of theology. It does not mean “theological studies in Japan” that are rarely done in the obscure corner of the Japanese intellectual world as the caricature of western theological studies; it is also not an attempt to produce Japanese theology by going through the trouble of “Japanising” western theology. The “of” in the “theology of Japan” is not genitive but objective. Therefore, it is not the theology that Japan owns, but the theology whose object is Japan.<sup>(7)</sup>

However, the *Nihonjinron* project was based on false presuppositions, which have led to erroneous conclusions about Japanese society. If attempts at theological analysis of Japan or the Japanese draw on the arguments or indeed the fruits of *Nihonjinron*, they may unknowingly participate and promote a discourse, which both is a product of and produces “power” as described by Foucault.<sup>(8)</sup> This article shall critique *Nihonjinron* in order to understand the challenges that theology in Japan faces today.

## 1 “Who are the Japanese?”

“Who are the Japanese?” “What distinguishes the Japanese?” These questions are not new but have been posed throughout the history of Japan in

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(6) Yasuo Furuya and Hideo Ohki, *Nihon no Shingaku* [Theology of Japan] (Tokyo: Yorudan sha, 1989).

(7) Ohki, “A Theology of Japan: Independence of the Intellect in Japan” in Hideo Ohki *et al*, *A Theology of Japan: Origins and Task in the Age of Globalization* (Seigakuin University Press, 2005), 19.

(8) Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) ; translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

the context of its international relations. During the Edo period, scholars of National Learning (*Kokugaku*) pursued what is distinctly Japanese in contrast to pervasive influences from China and Korea. When Japan encountered the modern Western nations, there was another tide of literature which addressed the identity of the Japanese. Nitobe Inazo (1862-1933), who was a Christian and a classmate of Uchimura Kanzo (1861-1930) in Sapporo Agricultural School (founded by William S. Clark in Hokkaido), wrote a book entitled *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*. It was written originally in English and published in 1900. Because of the attention given to Japan in the world after Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese War, the book became a bestseller. Nitobe explains Bushido as "the code of moral principle which the knights were required or instructed to observe." The fighting knights (*Bushi*) were a privileged class in feudal Japan. With privilege, they soon realised, came great responsibilities. This sense of being one of the elite led the warriors to hold to a common standard to carry out their responsibilities and to act honourably towards each other. The sources of Bushido, according to Nitobe, are Buddhism, Shintoism, and the teachings of Confucius and Mencius.<sup>(9)</sup> At about the same time, Okakura Tenshin (1863-1913) also published a book in English, *The Book of Tea*, which discussed subjects including Taoism, Zen, and Japanese arts in relation to the influence of tea in everyday life in Japan.<sup>(10)</sup> The difference between the works of Nitobe and Okakura and *Nihonjinron*, which were largely produced from the 1960s onwards, is that the former was mainly addressed to the world outside of Japan, whereas *Nihonjinron*'s main audience is the Japanese themselves, as if to reassure the Japanese people by providing them with identity markers in the age of globalisation.

## 2 "Japan" as a Category of Social Anthropology

In postcolonial studies, anthropology and its products, ethnographies, are

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(9) Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (The Leeds and Bible Company, 1900).

(10) Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea* (New York: Putnam's, 1906).

criticized because the origin of anthropology as a field of study is undeniably rooted in, and coincides with, the emergence of the colonial powers. It was employed to describe the colonial subject to the colonizer, and to reinforce colonial discourse to and interpellate the observed subjects, who were constructed as “the Other” to the observer from the metropolis. Since the two activities to produce ethnography, fieldwork and writing, are bound by the observer-writer’s value system, it is not only misleading to draw a conclusion on any society, but could play down to the colonial discourse.<sup>(11)</sup> Another problem is the issue of cultural essentialism, which presupposes that individuals in a certain group or society inevitably share several describable characteristics in their personalities, thoughts, or actions. In postcolonial theory, the fallacious nature of essentialism has already been pointed out.<sup>(12)</sup> Mario Aguilar warns us against using the concept of “culture” for simplistic pigeon-holing in spite of the diversity and complexity of each society: “In saying that somebody belongs to a British or American culture we are basically impeding the exploration of the possibility of complex social realities operated by complex individuals.”<sup>(13)</sup> The essentialism would be more prominent especially when the ethnography claims to cover a large group such as an entire people in one nation-state. It is undeniable that there are many different customs and great linguistic differences within Japan. Those diversities depend on region, gender, class, occupation, and other elements, which intertwine to create a complex identity for each person in the society.

Today, sociology and anthropology operate on a similar basis, and many sociologists and anthropologists are aware of the issues around the history of anthropology. The goal of ethnography is understood not merely to be to demonstrate a society’s uniqueness but to find principles that are observable

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(11) See “Ethnography” in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 79-83. Cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 77-92.

(12) Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 73.

(13) Mario I. Aguilar & Louise J. Lawrence, *Anthropology and Biblical Studies : Avenues of Approach* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2004), 307.

in other human societies and to relate them to one another.<sup>(14)</sup> It is also an accepted norm that an anthropologist studies a society to which he or she is, in one way or another, “foreign.”<sup>(15)</sup> However, Japanese intellectuals, social anthropologists or otherwise, have written works describing their own ‘culture’ and emphasising its uniqueness. These works formed the genre of *Nihonjinron* or *Nihon Bunkaron*, which literally means “propositions about Japanese people”.<sup>(16)</sup> *Nihonjinron* articles have been published in popular as well as academic journals, and numerous books have been written in the genre.<sup>(17)</sup> Since the *Nihonjinron* genre is widely read in Japan, one can conclude that the ideas that are presented in the *Nihonjinron* literature reflect a popular cultural identity, a cultural-nationalistic view of Japanese society.

One of the characteristics of *Nihonjinron* literature is its assertion that Japanese society is homogeneous. Marcus Banks presents two perspectives on ethnicity: primordialist and instrumentalist. The former sees ethnicity as

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(14) Joy Hendry, ‘Introduction: The Contribution of Social Anthropology to Japanese Studies’ in *Interpreting Japanese Society*, Joy Hendry ed. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998), 8.

(15) *Ibid.*, 4. Hendry comments on this issue: “It might be commented that a native Japanese is in a better position to elucidate concepts such as time and space in their own language, but this leads to a second characteristic feature of social anthropology. We tend to look at societies other than our own, even in the countries where we have been brought up. This is the crux of the matter, for the values and categories we are taught as children become natural to us, unquestioned unless we move away. In looking at our own societies, we run the risk of taking for granted things which are in fact culturally relative.”

(16) *Nihon* means “Japan,” *jin*, “people,” and *ron*, “proposition” or “theory.” As Harumi Befu points out, while the term *Nihon Bunkaron* (Propositions about Japanese Culture) is the more accepted term among the Japanese, *Nihonjinron* is the most frequently used among anthropologists who write in English. Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity* (Melbourne: Trans-Pacific Press, 2001), 2.

(17) *Ibid.*, 7. Befu cites a partially annotated bibliography compiled in 1978 on *Nihonjinron* literature. According to the bibliography, which covers the period 1946 to 1978, 698 titles were published. Befu says, “If a similar compilation since 1978 were added to the list, the total would no doubt far exceed a thousand. If articles from periodicals were added, the number would easily multiply by a factor of two or three.” See *Nihonjinron*, NRI Reference No. 2 (Kamakura: Nomura Sg Kenkyo, 1978).

an intrinsic element of human identity; the latter views it as an artefact for common purposes. Goodman, who quotes Banks, suggests that the *Nihonjinron* literature, especially after World War II, tends towards primordialism rather than instrumentalism.<sup>(18)</sup> The authors of *Nihonjinron* presupposed that there is a continuity between Japanese society today and the “traditional Japanese” society. Many books employed a broad approach and attempted to reduce “Japaneseness” to one or two concepts. They pay attention neither to the insider minority groups in Japan, such as *Burakumin*, Ainu, those who have been discriminated against — such as people with disabilities or atomic bomb victims — nor to the immigrant ethnic minorities living in Japan.

Another noteworthy characteristic of *Nihonjinron* is that the writings in this genre compare Japanese society with the monolithic “West,” and by doing so, the authors assert how different Japan is from the West.<sup>(19)</sup> This dichotomy existed as early as the nineteenth century. The idea of “Japan versus the West” developed as a consequence of national consciousness ever since Japan encountered the modern technology and ideology of the Western countries. To summarize, *Nihonjinron* literature, which describes Japanese society as a monolithic culture, is an artefact emerging from the primordialist view of society, and it also functions to reinforce this unified view of Japaneseness.

### 3 The Roots of *Nihonjinron*

Around the time when Japan’s first constitution was promulgated in 1889, and the construction of a new social order for “modern Japan” under the Meiji government was under way, a reactionary movement for a revival of Japanese mores arose. It eventually led the country to ultra-nationalism, and militarism. Japan rapidly equipped itself for the colonisation of East Asia, which eventually led the nation into the Asia-Pacific War. In the defeat of 1945, Japan had an

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(18) Marcus Banks, *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions* (London: Routledge, 1996), 36.

Quoted by Roger Goodman, ‘Making Major Culture’ in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*, Jennifer Robertson ed. (Blackwell Publishing Inc., 2005), 59.

(19) Goodman, ‘Making Major Culture’, 69.

experience similar to its encounter with the West in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Following Japan's unconditional surrender and subsequent occupation, the Allies drafted a new democratic pacifist constitution for Japan. Japan again became a nation that followed the example of "the West," especially to emulate the former enemy and most powerful member of the Allies, the United States.

Once again Japan faced the issue of identity in the aftermath of a radical change brought about by the West. In this time of national crisis, an American anthropologist wrote what became one of the most famous ethnographical studies of the Japanese. Ruth Benedict's book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), set an example for the works that became known collectively as *Nihonjinron*.

*The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* was published in Japan during the time of national self-examination after the defeat in the Asia-Pacific War. Benedict was assigned to the study of Japan in June 1944, when the victory of the Allies was becoming plausible. Benedict wrote, "I was asked to use all the techniques I could as a cultural anthropologist to spell out what the Japanese were like."<sup>(20)</sup> After its original publication in 1946, the book was translated into Japanese in 1948 and became a bestseller in Japan.

Benedict began her book saying, "The Japanese were the most alien enemy the United States had ever fought in an all-out struggle," because Japan was outside of the Western cultural tradition and thus did not have the same conventions about the conduct of war as the United States.<sup>(21)</sup> In the dawn of victory, the United States and the Allies "had to know what their government could count on from the people. [They] had to try to understand Japanese habits of thought and emotion and the patterns into which these habits fell. [They] had to know the sanctions behind these actions and opinions."<sup>(22)</sup> She said her project "is about what makes Japan a nation of Japanese."<sup>(23)</sup> In

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(20) Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1947), 3.

(21) Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 1.

(22) *Ibid.*, 4.

(23) *Ibid.*, 13.



other words, Ruth Benedict's ethnography of Japan was a typical example of anthropology functioning as a servant, or brother, of colonial power: the study equips the colonizer with the knowledge of occupants or colonized using an essentialist view of the society of object.

Because the war was not over when she was assigned for this study, Benedict could not come to Japan for fieldwork. She was not proficient in the Japanese language either. Thus, Benedict resorted to gather as many sources as she could: films, novels, radio programs, and interviews with Japanese prisoners of war. From those sources, Benedict tried to explain how the Japanese themselves understood certain behaviour, putting aside what she calls "Occidental assumptions." After warning against American cultural nationalism,<sup>(24)</sup> she explained the Japanese system, which makes people behave differently from Americans.

Benedict observed that the emperor functions as the symbol of the Japanese people, and so is inseparable from Japan. "A Japan without the Emperor is not Japan."<sup>(25)</sup> The emperor occupied the top of the hierarchy, yet was spared the criticisms that people directed against their government. While for many Americans freedom was the foremost value, Benedict argued, for Japanese people, taking "one's proper hierarchical station" was the basis of moral conduct. This was the most important idea in understanding how Japanese people behave in their society as well as understanding Japan's actions internationally. Japan did not see its place as being within the spheres of influence of foreign nations. Rather, Japan determined that its "proper station" was above the countries of Asia and elsewhere in the world.

Therefore, according to Benedict, morality for the Japanese is relational. Righteousness should be accompanied with the recognition of one's place in the great network of mutual indebtedness. In this context, the notions of *On* [indebtedness], *Chu* [loyalty to the superior], and *Ko* [filial piety] are

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(24) Ibid., 15-6. Benedict commented: "The study of comparative cultures too cannot flourish when men are so defensive about their own way of life that it appears to them to be by definition the sole solution in the world."

(25) Ibid., 32.

interconnected. The emperor is beyond any reach of mundane controversies, yet is the supreme object of *Chu*, to which the repayment of *On* is limitless. One's highest duty is not the love of one's country. It is the "repayment of the emperor in person," and obedience to the law becomes repayment of one's highest indebtedness.<sup>(26)</sup> Because moral conduct does not depend on the categorical imperative, desirable behaviour changes according to what one's *Chu* demands in a particular situation. While the nation was at war in the name of the emperor, the people fought. Once the emperor announced the surrender, the people accepted the defeat without making any further argument. "In [Japan's] own eyes this enormous payment nevertheless bought something she supremely valued: the right to say that it was the emperor who had given the order even if that order was capitulation. Even in defeat the highest law was still *Chu*."<sup>(27)</sup>

In spite of her disclaiming of Occidentalism, Benedict's "us and them" language is clearly a sign of Occidental superiority. However, she tried to persuade her readers to recognise that the "strangeness of the Japanese" could be "normal" in its own right, while American understanding of what is natural could become relative and potentially strange from other societies' perspectives.<sup>(28)</sup> For example, she compares State Shinto in Japan with American expression of nationalism. "Since it was concerned with proper respect to national symbols, as saluting the flag is in the United States, State Shinto was, they said, 'no religion.' Japan therefore could require it of all citizens without violating the Occidental dogma of religious freedom any more than the United States violates it in requiring a salute to the Stars and Stripes."<sup>(29)</sup> In any case, her study was clearly much valued by the Allied authorities during the occupation of Japan, especially in their policy regarding the emperor.

Many anthropologists today criticise *The Chrysanthemum* as homogenizing

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(26) *Ibid.*, 129.

(27) *Ibid.*, 132.

(28) Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologists as Author* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

(29) Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 87.

and ahistorical. It is compared with John Embree's *Suye Mura, A Japanese Village* (1939), as the latter is an ethnography of a Japanese village based on the author's fieldwork.<sup>(30)</sup> However, as a study commissioned by the Allies at the end of the Second World War, Benedict's ethnography of Japan accomplished its purpose: her study gave enough knowledge and justification for the occupation army's policies during the eight years of occupation. Benedict does make a comment to suggest that the system she observed "was singular. It was not Buddhism and it was not Confucianism. It was Japanese — the strength and the weakness of Japan."<sup>(31)</sup> With such a conclusion, she managed to make "Japan", which consisted of many different personalities and layers of society, into a tangible whole, understandable in the context of the occupation.

After its publication, the book became an unexpected best-seller in Japan. Sixty years after it was written, in Japan the book is still widely read and considered a classic. It was the Japanese people who appreciated the ethnography that was written at the request of the United States government. The two concepts of "shame culture" and "hierarchical groupism" were emphasised by Japanese readers as distinctively Japanese notions in contrast with the "Western" guilt culture and individualism, much more so than the author herself, who never used the term "groupism". In the ten years following the book's publication, these two "Japanese characteristics" were interpreted as reasons for the Japanese failure to modernize.<sup>(32)</sup> Ironically, *The Chrysanthemum's* depiction of "Japan" and "Japaneseness" provided the Japanese identity for the growing ethnic nationalism of the Japanese people.<sup>(33)</sup> Benedict's work, at least as understood in Japan, became a prototype for the

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(30) Ibid., 3-16. Robertson commends Embree's work for a "more historicized description of Japan instead of pursuing the timeless Japaneseness" of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Cf. Tamotsu Aoki, *Nihon Bunkaron no Henyo* [The Transformation of Propositions on Japanese Culture] (Tokyo: Chuko bunko, 1999), 34-36.

(31) Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 19.

(32) Aoki, *Nihon Bunkaron no Henyo*, 62.

(33) Jennifer Robertson, 'Introduction: Putting and Keeping Japan in Anthropology' in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*, Jennifer Robertson ed. (Blackwell Publishing Inc., 2005), 7.

*Nihonjinron* literature.

#### 4 *Nihonjinron*

From 1960s until the late 1980s,<sup>(34)</sup> Japan achieved remarkable economic growth, which wiped out the image of a “defeated nation.” Goodman calls attention to an interesting fact:

As the Japanese economy expanded and looked set to become the largest in the world by the end of the century, the government, under the direction of then prime minister, Nakasone Yasuhiro, established and generously funded the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (known as *Nichibunken*) in Kyoto to look at the origins and development of what constituted Japanese culture. The publication of works about what constituted the key characteristics of Japanese society and culture flourished and, rather than being categorized by disciplinary background, were increasingly shelved in bookshops under the generic heading of *Nihonjinron*.<sup>(35)</sup>

Following in Benedict’s footsteps, most of the *Nihonjinron* literature from this period also tried to describe “Japaneseness” in contrast with “the West”. The authors also attempted to summarise Japanese society with a few key concepts. A difference is that while distinctively Japanese characteristics identified in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* or in the *Nihonjinron* of the 1940s and 1950s are understood by the Japanese readers to be negative and reasons for failure, *Nihonjinron* from 1960s through 1980s presented what is uniquely “Japanese” as the basis of Japan’s economic success. The “Japanese system” was re-evaluated in a positive light, and “Japan’s role in the world” was asserted. This type of *Nihonjinron* became “a mass consumer product.”<sup>(36)</sup>

Two major works that are categorised as *Nihonjinron* and became bestsellers,

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(34) Numerous works were produced on this topic before 1960 as well, but the two books by Nakane and Doi will be dealt with in this article as examples.

(35) Goodman, ‘Making Major Culture’, 59.

(36) Aoki, *Nihon Bunkaron no Henyo*, 87-88.

being reprinted many times, are Nakane Chie's (1926-) *Tateshakai no Ningen Kankei* "Relationships in a Vertical Society", which was later translated into English and published as *Japanese Society*<sup>(37)</sup> in 1967 and Doi Takeo's (1920-2009) *Amae no Kouzou* (translated into English as *Anatomy of Dependence*) in 1971. These two books are particularly well known in Japan, and succeeded in popularising certain ideas about Japanese society. In the early 1970s, the Foreign Ministry had Japanese embassies and consulates give away free copies of Nakane's Japanese Society to foreigners interested in Japan.<sup>(38)</sup>

## 5 Nakane Chie, *Japanese Society*, and Doi Takeo, *The Anatomy of Dependence*

Nakane's *Japanese Society* is based on her thesis, submitted in 1964, in which she compared the groupism of Japanese society with that of Indian society. Nakane concluded that Japanese groupism is based on *ba* — "place," or "frame" — while that of Indian society is based on "attributes" or qualification. Examples of attributes are class, educational background, status, gender, or age, whereas *ba* includes one's hometown, organisation or company. According to Nakane, for a Japanese person, where one belongs and where one stands in the group is more important for one's identity. It is more important for them to know that one belongs to company A or school B, than to say that one is an engineer or a professor.<sup>(39)</sup> Inside the group (*Uchi*) is distinguished from the outside (*Soto*),<sup>(40)</sup> and the group operates much like a family or household, "*Ie*".<sup>(41)</sup>

She argues that this principle of the household structure is a characteristic also seen among Japanese social groups. In Japan, a company functions like

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(37) Hata and Smith point out that the English version is different in significant details from the Japanese original. See Hiromi Hata & Wendy Smith, 'Nakane's "Japanese Society" as Utopian Thought', in *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 13.3 (1983): 361-88.

(38) Goodman, 'Making Major Culture', 61.

(39) Chie Nakane, *Tateshakai no Ningen Kankei* [Relationships in a Vertical Society] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1967), 30; Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society* (Penguin Books Ltd, 1973), 3.

a household, where the relationship between an employer and employees is like that of a father and sons. The group also includes an employee's family, thus "it 'engages' him 'totally'." (42) She contrasts this group structure with "the Western" company which is based on contract and one's qualifications. Nakane concludes her book with the idea that Japanese interpersonal relationships tend to be tangible and local, and that this creates a society that is different from Western society, which is based on contracts. People's identities depend on their relationships instead of their beliefs or convictions, which resonates with Ruth Benedict's observation.

Nakane argues that Japanese society is "a homogeneous society built on a vertical organizational principle," and points out that the one factor dominating Japanese way of thinking is "relativism." (43) Japanese readers of Nakane understood her thesis as explaining the uniqueness of Japanese society and thus its industrial and economic success. (44)

Five years after *Tateshakai*, Doi Takeo's *Amae no Kouzou* was published and also immediately became a bestseller. Roger Goodman describes this book as "psychological glue, which holds together Nakane's sociological model." (45) During his year of study in the United States, the author, a psychologist and

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(40) *Uchi* and *Soto* are categories that explain the Japanese people's attitude toward inside and outside. While inside is clean and safe, outside is unclean and dangerous. A Japanese child first learns this distinction by associating inside and outside of the house with being clean and dirty, respectively. However, these categories also apply to explain attitudes toward insiders and outsiders. See Joy Hendry, *Understanding Japanese Society*. 3rd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 47-49.

(41) Nakane, *Japanese Society*, 4. *Ie* is a technical term to describe the Japanese household, which was a legal unit before the Second World War. Nakane defines *Ie*: "[T]he *ie* is a corporate residential group and, in the case of agriculture or other similar enterprises, *ie* is a managing body. The *ie* comprises household members, who thus make up the units of a distinguishable social group. In other words, the *ie* is a social group constructed on the basis of an established frame of residence and often management organisation".

(42) *Ibid.*, 8.

(43) *Ibid.*, 154-155.

(44) Aoki, *Nihon Bunkaron no Henyo*, 95-96.

(45) Goodman, 'Making Major Culture', 62.

doctor, thought that there were certain differences between the Japanese and Western mindsets (technically, the Japanese and American mindsets). He then concluded that the Japanese have a unique psychological element that cannot be explained by Western psychology. Doi calls this element “*Amae*,” which is translated as “dependency.”

According to Doi, *Amae* is originally a child’s dependence on its mother, which the Japanese still maintain even when they become adults. This childlike dependence expects that the others will be accepting, protective, and will read one’s thoughts. One can find *Amae* in the Western culture as well, but not so prominently as in Japan.<sup>(46)</sup> Doi believes that the distinctive concepts of the Japanese that Benedict described such as *Giri* (indebtedness), *Gimu* (duty), *Haji* (shame) can be explained by this one psychological concept of dependence. He also suggests that Nakane’s notion of vertical relationships is also based on *Amae*: the members of an organisation seek indulgence from their superiors.<sup>(47)</sup> In a society in which *Amae* is dominant, an individual is in a web of dependent relationships, which excludes the idea of autonomy that prevails in the West. Therefore, for the Japanese, to lose one’s community or group to which one belongs is to lose one’s identity whereas a Westerner would consider that one’s intrinsic identity remains even when one is cut off from one’s community.<sup>(48)</sup> Doi is not always uncritical of Japanese society, yet his attempt to explain the society by using one concept, *Amae*, leads to the conclusion that Japanese society operates in a very different way from other societies, and that this is rooted in the psychological uniqueness of the Japanese people. Doi’s conclusion is only one step behind Tsunoda Tadanobu who proposed that there are differences in the functioning of the brains of native speakers of Japanese and of those who speak Western languages.<sup>(49)</sup>

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(46) Takeo Doi, *Amae no Kouzou* [Structure of Dependence] (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1971), 224; Takeo Doi, *Anatomy of Dependence*, Trans. by John Bester, (Tokyo, New York, San Francisco: Kodansha International, 1973), 142. Doi makes a comment that “*Amae*” is recognisable in the youth of other countries.

(47) Doi, *Amae no Kouzou*, 33 ; Doi, *Anatomy of Dependence*, 28.

(48) Doi, *Amae no Kouzou*, 202-16; Doi, *Anatomy of Dependence*, 132-41.

In the 1980s, when Japan was criticised, particularly by the United States, over economic and political issues such as not opening the Japanese market to foreign investment or not importing foreign-made products, the *Nihonjinron*, the Japanese view of themselves, also began to receive criticisms from outside of Japan. Australian sociologist Peter N. Dale criticised *Nihonjinron* for insisting on the homogeneous racial identity of the Japanese, which leads to “cultural fascism”.<sup>(50)</sup> Dale’s criticism against *Nihonjinron* can be seen as being as ethnocentric as *Nihonjinron* itself as he tears down *Nihonjinron* from his “Western” perspectives.<sup>(51)</sup> However, *Nihonjinron* also received critiques from other sociologists and anthropologists such as Harumi Befu, Sugimoto Yoshio, and Ross Mouer.<sup>(52)</sup> Those critics found *Nihonjinron* problematic for several reasons.

## 6 A Critique of *Nihonjinron*: Essentialist and Ahistorical

Goodman explains essentialist view of society:

Essentialism is the charge that the analyst works on the assumption

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(49) Tadanobu Tsunoda, *The Japanese Brain: Uniqueness and Universality*, trans. by Oiwa Yoshinori (Tokyo: Taishukan Publishing Company, 1985); Tadanobu Tsunoda, *Nihonjin no Nou* [The Japanese Brain] (Tokyo: Taishukan Publishing Company, 1978). Befu comments on Tsunoda’s work: “Tsunoda’s view has received wide publicity, as one would imagine, and for some it has given a stamp of scientific validation for the so far fuzzy, social-science and humanistic — that is, ‘impressionistic’ — *Nihonjinron* arguments. Tsunoda’s view, however, is not entirely accepted by the medical community because of the smallness of the sample and the substandard scientific procedure employed in the study.” See Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*, 36.

(50) Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (London, Sydney, Oxford: Croom Helm and the Nissan Institute, 1986).

(51) Aoki, *Nihon Bunkaron no Henyo*, 173-174. Aoki points out that some of Dale’s criticisms of Japanese society are based on the very point he criticises: namely, the monolithic dichotomy of “the West” and Japan.

(52) Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*; Ross Mouer & Yoshio Sugimoto, *Images of Japanese Society: A Study in the Social Structure of Reality* (London, New York, Sydney, Halesy: Kegan Paul International, 1986).



that certain cultural features have always been present in any society and his or her job is simply to find and record these essentialist features and to document how they have continued virtually unchanged over centuries.<sup>(53)</sup>

A characteristic common to both Nakane and Doi is this essentialist assumption, and they see those cultural features as encouraging or restricting an individual's action and mindset within the society. There is also little consideration for the historical background that brings changes in a society, although any cultural symbols and systems are historically contextual. However, it is also possible to say that the state of a society is a result of conflicts between different groups that assert that their view of the society is the norm. In other words, one could argue, "Culture is only something that different interest groups draw on to legitimise their position."<sup>(54)</sup> Harumi Befu's criticism of *Nihonjinron* is based on the latter presupposition: he suggests that *Nihonjinron* is a replacement for national symbols, such as the flag, anthem, or imperial institutions, that have been tainted by Japan's history in the first half of the twentieth century, and thus it is a "cultural manifestation of nationalism."<sup>(55)</sup> National symbols, Befu argues, are created by the nation-state to remind its citizens of the importance of their nation, which both protects them and asks for sacrifices from them. Since other national symbols in Japan are politically divisive, *Nihonjinron* became a new, untainted, form of patriotic symbol.<sup>(56)</sup>

When the essentialists' view of culture is predominant in a society, it easily becomes a tool for those in power to manipulate the society, since this view could be used to affirm the *status quo*. For example, Goodman suggests that

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(53) Goodman, 'Making Major Culture', 65.

(54) Roger Goodman, 'Thoughts on the relationship between anthropological Theory, Methods and the Study of Japanese Society' in *Dismantling the East-West Dichotomy*, Joy Hendry & Heung Wah Won Eds. (London: Routledge, 2006), 29.

(55) Harumi Befu, 'Symbols of Nationalism and Nihonjinron' in *Ideology and Practice in Modern Japan*, Roger Goodman & Kirsten Refsing eds. (London: Routledge, 1992), 26; Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*, 86-104.

(56) *Ibid.*, 26-7.

there is considerable historical evidence to show that the Japanese company-as-a-family model was deliberately developed for economic reasons.<sup>(57)</sup> He draws attention to the fact that Japan has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, which means that if a publication of ethnography of Japan becomes a bestseller, the idea presented in the ethnography could thus create or reinforce itself in the society.<sup>(58)</sup> In other words, what Said described about Orientalism is relevant here:

A Text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual, and arising out of circumstances similar to the ones I have just described, is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical successes warrant. Most important, such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality or a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.<sup>(59)</sup>

Anthropologists on fieldwork often encounter Japanese informants who give them a brief summary of Nakane's work as the explanation of Japanese society.<sup>(60)</sup> The works of Nakane or of Doi themselves do not seem to promote nationalism or patriotism in a direct sense; however, the notion of the uniqueness and homogeneity of the Japanese is an idea that is central to Shinto myth, which in turn is the foundation of the claim of a unique and unbroken

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(57) Goodman, 'Making Major Culture', 66.

(58) Hata and Smith criticises Nakane's *Japanese Society* for reinforcing and legitimising a certain view of Japan on behalf of the state and for the benefit of large companies. See Hata & Smith, 'Nakane's "Japanese Society" as Utopian Thought', 361-388. Joy Hendry, on the other hand, evaluates Nakane positively. See Hendry, 'Introduction: The Contribution of Social Anthropology to Japanese Studies', 8-9. See also Hendry, *Understanding Japanese Society*, 102-123.

(59) Said, *Orientalism*, 94.

(60) Roger Goodman, 'Introduction', in *Ideology and Practice in Modern Japan*, Roger Goodman & Kirsten Refsing eds. (London: Routledge, 1992), 5.

Imperial line. This view of Japan being drastically different from other nations in East Asia — culturally, historically, and even biologically — is still strongly supported by some Japanese, who believe that the ancestors of the Japanese came to the archipelago in the remote past, instead of the scientifically more probable theory that they came from the Korean peninsula around 400 BCE with knowledge of agriculture and displaced the indigenous hunter-gatherers.<sup>(61)</sup> Perhaps from fear of the unearthing of archaeological evidence supporting the latter view, the excavation of some of Japan’s most important archaeological sites, *Kofun* —large, hill-like tombs constructed between 300 and 686 CE— is forbidden by the Imperial Household Agency. They are thought to contain the remains of the ancestors of the imperial family, and thus it is said to be “desecration” to investigate them.<sup>(62)</sup>

## 7 A Critique of *Nihonjinron*: Japan as a Homogeneous Nation

One of the strongest criticisms of *Nihonjinron* is against the claim that Japan is a homogeneous nation while there actually exists significant ethnic, social, occupational, health, and age diversity. *Nihonjinron* and other generalised views on Japan ignore the groups of people who do not have the same sense of “Japaneseness.” The idea that Japan is uniquely homogeneous provides an excuse for the government’s policy of restricting immigration and services for foreigners. The argument runs as follows: since Japanese culture is so idiosyncratic, a multicultural community is not something Japanese people are ready for: Japanese people are not yet equipped to live with foreigners in a single society.<sup>(63)</sup> Emphasis on homogeneity constructs a “majority culture,” which downplays “minority culture,” and those who do not conform to the norm may experience prejudice, while their very “existence” is downplayed under the idea of homogeneous Japan.<sup>(64)</sup> In the past, groups of people such as

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(61) Jared Diamond, ‘Who are the Japanese?’ in *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 426-47.

(62) *Ibid.*, 428.

(63) Aoki, *Nihon Bunkaron no Henyo*, 154-5.

*Burakumin* became targets of stigmatisation, and were discriminated against. Other groups such as the Ainu (the indigenous inhabitants of Japan), foreigners living in Japan, or other people with hybrid identities could become targets of discrimination even today.

Sonia Ryang, in her article about Koreans in Japan, warns that a study of a minority group could further marginalize it by thoughtless labelling and carelessness about what the study brings to it.<sup>(65)</sup> This is because, in a society such as Japan where homogeneity is loudly proclaimed, being labelled as an outsider and not being categorised as inside the main group can itself provoke further social stigma. Hendry comments that “if people who are discriminated against take political action, and gain benefits, they draw attention to themselves and may spark further discrimination.”<sup>(66)</sup> In other words, the society is controlled in such a way that asserting one’s rights and pointing out injustice are discouraged by means of sanction.

## **8 A Critique of *Nihonjinron*: East and West Dichotomy**

Another strong criticism of *Nihonjinron* is its comparison of Japan with the idea of the monolithic and homogeneous “West.” Comparisons between Japan and the United States are very popular in the literature due to the history of the two countries. It is usually argued in *Nihonjinron* that Japan operates in a way exactly opposite to the West. By doing so, *Nihonjinron* claims that some Japanese ideas are untranslatable to foreigners, and only Japanese people can understand Japanese culture, which can easily promote cultural bigotry. Also, this line of argument ignores other countries in East Asia, with which, culturally speaking, Japan has much in common: instead, the only dialogue partner is the “West,” which implicitly suggests Japan’s prejudice against its Asian neighbours.<sup>(67)</sup> This idea of taking Japan out of Asia, so-called Asianism, is

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(64) Goodman, ‘Making Major Culture’, 69.

(65) Sonia Ryang, ‘Japan’s Ethnic Minority: Koreans’ in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*, Jennifer Robertson ed. (Blackwell Publishing Inc., 2005), 96.

(66) Hendry, *Understanding Japanese Society*, 107.

a colonial mentality from before the Second World War, when Japan decided to become like one of the “West” by colonising its neighbours.<sup>(68)</sup>

This hypothetical “West” can be compared to the one in Samuel Huntington’s book *The Clash of Civilizations*.<sup>(69)</sup> Drawing an East-West dichotomy, using the term “culture,” Huntington argued that the Islamic and Confucian cultures would become a threat to Western values, an idea that undoubtedly influenced the United States’ foreign policy after the September 11th terrorist attacks.<sup>(70)</sup>

## 9 Deconstructing *Nihonjinron*

As mentioned above, *Nihonjinron* is at best mistaken, and is in fact devious. However, the reason why it became so popular in Japan is rather obvious. Ever since its encounter with the Western civilisation, Japan has been pursuing its unique identity, which sets it apart from the West while westernising itself. The idea of a homogeneous Japan has been politically helpful in uniting the country. The homogeneity myth is still strongly supported among Japanese people while the formalism of customs and language keeps the society controlled.

As noted previously, Befu proposes that *Nihonjinron* is a national symbol in post-war Japan. The flag and anthem were not officially national symbols until 1999 when a special law was passed to declare them “national.” Befu

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(67) Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*, 75. Befu believes that there is a racial hierarchy the Japanese perceive: he says that they felt lower than Westerners, and felt superior toward the peoples of Southeast Asia and Africa, whose technological level is below Japan’s and who are not white. The fact that most *Nihonjinron* authors ignore Asian and African countries may support his proposition. However it should be noted that this type of unofficial hierarchy is observable in any society, though the order of hierarchy may differ.

(68) Goodman, ‘Making Major Culture’, 69.

(69) Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1996).

(70) Lynne Y. Nakano, ‘Writing for Common Ground: Rethinking Audience and Purpose in Japan Anthropology’ in *Dismantling the East-West Dichotomy*, Joy Hendry & Heung Wah Won eds. (London: Routledge, 2006), 189-95.

goes on to say that *Nihonjinron* took the place of State Shinto, which was the Japanese civil religion. He says, “If *Nihonjinron* is Japan’s civil religion, it is reasonable to regard it also as a manifestation of Japan’s cultural nationalism. After all, nationalism is religion.”<sup>(71)</sup> He then compares the *Nihonjinron*-as-civil-religion and “Protestant civic piety,” the American civil religion. “Just as there was legitimising of Protestant values in America and integration of Protestant citizens as American, one can find in Japan legitimising of Shinto values and integration of Japanese subjects through Shinto.”<sup>(72)</sup> The stronghold of the civil religion is no longer Shinto, but *Nihonjinron*.

*Nihonjinron* as a “scripture” of Japanese civil religion is an interesting hypothesis, yet Befu is reading too much of the American situation into the Japanese context. Even if there is Japanese cultural nationalism, it differs greatly from the American civil religion and the nationalism it promotes. *Nihonjinron* and its popularity is perhaps a result of the people’s search for their own cultural and national identity, but for most people, Japanese nationalism does not possess the fervour of American nationalism. I would argue instead that *Nihonjinron* is a product of the reaction of Japan to its international political situation and to the impact of globalisation. When “westernisation” was the only way to survive as a nation, the people naturally sought to construct their own identity. In this process of construction, Christianity, especially the Protestantism that came in the 19th century, was of no help to the Japanese people. Unlike the Latin American countries, which were colonised in the 16th century and became quickly Catholic, the Christian religion did not offer reasons for the Japanese people to convert: it remained the religion of the ultimate Other, the West. When the Japanese finally constructed their identity, their religion, and their society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and finally became “like the West” in their imitation of Western colonialism, the country gave itself to totalitarianism, which eventually brought destruction in the Second World War to Japan itself, and with much damage

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(71) Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*, 112.

(72) *Ibid.*

to surrounding Asian countries. One of the major Christian cities, Nagasaki, was destroyed by the atomic bomb, and the emperor was demythologised. Even then, Christianity had no place in the Japanese society, unlike the African nations, which became independent in 1960s, and where Christianity proliferated since. While the political system, social structure, capitalism, even pop-culture, and many other western neo-colonial discourses were employed to make “modern Japan”, through this process of westernisation, Christianity was never used as a tool for appropriation.<sup>(73)</sup> It was rejected because its place had been already filled: it was filled by the emperor system and myth, which survived after 1945 by transforming itself into the discourse of *Nihonjinron*. The claim of Christianity to be a representation of the “universal value” to promote modernisation was, on the whole, flatly rejected in the history of Japan. Japan did not need Christianity to become what it is today.

Today in Japan, very few people are outspoken nationalists, and patriotism is much more subdued than that of the United States or even of European countries. However, *Nihonjinron* as a national symbol has strong influence in the society. The data is rather old, but according to Befu, a survey in 1987 showed that 82 percent of Japanese people said that they were interested in the search for the Japanese identity while 13 percent indicated lack of interest and 5 percent did not answer.<sup>(74)</sup> Another survey in 1998 on the tenets of *Nihonjinron* showed that 38 percent of the sample agreed that the Japanese are a homogeneous people, 23 percent disagreed, and 39 percent were undecided. Also, 49 percent agreed that Japan was a unique culture while 42 percent did not answer. Less than 50 percent agreed about the importance of “Japanese blood” in defining Japanese culture.<sup>(75)</sup> Even though the proportion of people who support the major tenets of *Nihonjinron* is less than 50 percent, the idea of the Japanese being homogeneous is strongly supported by politicians, and

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(73) Ashcroft, Griffins & Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 15.

(74) Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*, 76.

(75) Harumi Befu & Kazufumi Manabe, ‘An Empirical Investigation of Nihonjinron Propositions and the Function These Propositions Serve’ in *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies* XXXVIII (1998): 35-62.

is often used to legitimise a social or international policy. *Nihonjinron* is not a straightforward expression of nationalism, but it is the foundation on which the radical nationalists stand. The idea of the unique and homogeneous Japan is presupposed by the supporters of the emperor system and the political right, as well as by those who are not interested in politics.

Gayatri Spivak, who argued against the discourse of essentialism, later supported the strategic use of an essentialist view of a society to fight against colonial and neo-colonial oppression.<sup>(76)</sup> However, in the case of Japan, this essentialist discourse, which at least partly rejected European colonial discourse, was the basis for Japan's own political and territorial colonialism of neighbouring Asia before 1945. The essentialist discourse later expressed in *Nihonjinron* was a by-product of the western colonial discourse, and yet was used as a mainstay of Japan's own colonialism. Here, the danger and uselessness of the strategic essentialism is obvious.

## 10 Theology and *Nihonjinron*

Taking account of the argument above, Christianity in Japan could be one of two types: that is, Christianity for nationalism and Christianity against it. For the former, there was an attempt by some Japanese theologians to develop a "Japanese Christianity" in the 1930s to 1940s. This was, however, a minor movement even then, and evaporated at the end of the Asia-Pacific War. Today, this type of Christianity is present among the new religions (newly emerged syncretistic religious institutions), or "new" new religions (post-1970s new religion), in which some elements of Christianity are placed alongside Japanese myths or animism.<sup>(77)</sup> The latter type — Christianity against nationalism — is prevalent among the "traditional" denominations of Christianity. Within this group, there are also two sub-types: those who side with the minority groups

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(76) Gayatri Spivak, 'Criticism, Feminism and the Institution'; interview with Elizabeth Gross in *Thesis Eleven* 10/11 (1984-5 November/March): 175-187.

(77) For this, see Mark R. Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998).



in the society, and those who critique the government's policies as Christians and citizens of the country, often in the form of political activism. Examples of the former include a Japanese feminist theologian, Kinukawa Hisako, and a theologian from the *Burakumin*, Kuribayashi Teruo. In their theological endeavour, the Bible is read from their place, the margins of Japanese society, and they present readings that are distinctly different from the conclusions of the mainline churches, as both of them employ the critical view against the Bible itself and the church tradition.<sup>(78)</sup> In his book *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism* (1999), R.S. Sugirtharajah evaluates these two biblical scholars in their use of the historical-critical method.

For instance, recent exegetical examples of minority discourse worked out by Ahn Byung Mu, Kuribayashi Teruo, Hisako Kinukawa and James Massey may appear to be original Korean, Indian, or Japanese products, yet in a subtle manner they are based on and rework historical-critical principles. It is worth noting that most of these authors are transplanted or uprooted professionals who return to their caste, community, or tribe or re-present themselves as articulate members of various subaltern groups after learning their craft and Western theories of oppression at cosmopolitan centres. Since they are denied entry into the local mainstream interpretative arena, they adopt a negative attitude to their local traditions and share an antagonistic relationship to the dominant culture; hence they are attracted to these foreign theories.<sup>(79)</sup>

Sugirtharajah overlooked, however, the fact that in the context of Japan,

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(78) See for example, Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994); Teruo Kuribayashi, *Keikan no Shingaku: Hisabetsu buraku kaiho to Kirisutokyo* [Theology of the Crown of Thorns: Liberation of Discriminated-against-Buraku and Christianity] (Tokyo: Shinkyo Shuppan, 1991); Teruo Kuribayashi, 'Recovering Jesus for Outcasts in Japan: From a Theology of the Crown of Thorns' in *Japan Christian Review* 58 (1992): 19-32. See also Japan Catholic Buraku Mondai Committee, ed. *Seisho to Sabetsu* [The Bible and Discrimination] (Tokyo: San Pauro, 1998).

what Kuribayashi and Kinukawa are fighting against is the colonial discourse, though his point about their use of historical-critical method is accurate. Thus their “antagonistic relationship to the dominant culture” is not necessarily and simply evidence of their eager acceptance of the “foreign theories.” In fact, Kuribayashi published a book entitled, *Nihon Minwa no Shingaku* (The Theology of Japanese Folktales) in 1997, which is an attempt to understand the Bible and Christianity using Japanese historical and cultural resources; not being simply “nativist”, but rather working through the resources available both from Japanese and non-Japanese traditions.<sup>(80)</sup> Drawing on Japanese folktales, such as *Momotaro* (Peach Prince) or *Issunboshi* (The Little One Inch), Kuribayashi unfolds Christian narratives without generalising “Japan” or “Japanese” while maintaining his stance of “theology from below”.

Kitamori Kazo and Furuya & Ohki belong to the latter type of Christianity: that is, Christianity against nationalism. Yet, in the case of Kitamori, in *The Japanese and the Bible*, the problem of essentialism is evident. One commendable aspect, however, is Kitamori’s attempt to unfold what he meant by introducing the ‘Japanese’ concept of *Tsurasa*. In the *Theology of the Pain of God*, Kitamori argues that the pain of God is the result of the fact that God’s love has overcome God’s wrath. Thus, the cross of Jesus Christ as a historical event becomes crucial. The God of the Trinity is not only the God who begets the Son, but also the God who let the Son die, in which God pains. In this, Kitamori insists that his idea is not Patripassianism, which would assert that God suffered on the cross as Christ. “Pain,” according to Kitamori, is not a “nature” of God, but a concept of relationship between the love and wrath of God. The synthesis of love and wrath is God’s pain, and it does not mean God suffers with the suffering; human suffering is an analogy, a symbol of the pain of God who went outside of Godself upon deciding to love sinners. To further explain

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(79) R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 129.

(80) Teruo Kuribayashi, *Nihon Minwa no Shingaku* [The Theology of Japanese Folktales] (Tokyo: Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan Shuppan, 1997).

this pain of God, Kitamori argues that God's pain is expressed with astonishing accuracy in the concept of the Japanese word *Tsurasa*, which means "tragedy" or "agony." The word is often found in Japanese classical plays. At this point, Kitamori sealed his assertion by a proclamation that if a Japanese person does not understand the concept, "the person is not Japanese-like."<sup>(81)</sup> Yet in *The Japanese and the Bible*, he returned to this concept of *Tsurasa* by actually referring to the stories of Japanese classical plays, in much the same way as Kuribayashi's methodology, to explain Christian doctrine. Especially, when he uses the actual text of a play, *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (Sonezaki Shinjyu) from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, it opens the possibility of comparative readings of the Bible and the play, though the essentialist tendency is still present.<sup>(82)</sup>

Furuya & Ohki's *Theology of Japan* is a valuable work, much awaited after the long history of acceptance of Euro-centric theology in Japanese Christian academia. It is a careful study of Japan as an object of theologizing, yet is not entirely free from the over-generalization of Japan and the Japanese. Furuya surveys the history of Christianity in Japan, focusing on its relationship with the Japanese government, and Ohki pursues the methodology of the Theology of Japan, yet both of them presuppose that there is an essence shared, throughout history, by Japanese people. For example, Furuya refers to *Nihonjinron* itself and reinforces its argument, saying that those features were cultivated during the years of National Isolation from 1600s to 1850s.<sup>(83)</sup> Ohki also sees "*a typical Japanese mentality in Wakon Yosai [Japanese soul and Western technology]*".<sup>(84)</sup>

If the Christianity that argues against nationalism is in fact one of the imported goods of neo-colonialism, it is as if you "chase away the bandits in your country with the help of a foreign army," as Tagawa Kenzo put it in the

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(81) Kitamori, *Kami no Itami no Shingaku* (Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujuyutu Bunko, 1966), 230.

(82) Kitamori, *Nihonjin to Seisho*, 62-112.

(83) Furuya and Ohki, *Nihon no Shingaku*, 50.

(84) Furuya and Ohki, *Nihon no Shingaku*, 237-245, quoted in Atsuyoshi Fujiwara, "The Theology of Ohki Hideo and theology of Japan" in *A Theology of Japan: Origins and Task in the Age of Globalization*, Hideo Ohki et al (Seigakuin University Press, 2005), 36. Emphasis added.

essay he wrote during his stay in Africa.<sup>(85)</sup> The colonial nature of Western methodology in Christian study has been pointed out: it is colonial “because they would have us believe that they have universal validity and significance although they emerged as a contextual response to the specific needs of Western academics.”<sup>(86)</sup> In the relationship with the cosmopolitan centre, how theological discussion of non-Western Christianity finds the contact zone, and transforms itself through hybridity, is a common issue among the scholars whose contexts are outside of the centre.

## 11 Conclusion

In this article, I have argued against the discourse of *Nihonjinron*, and cautioned against its use in theology. The *Nihonjinron* literature, which purports to be an anthropological study of Japaneseness, is actually a modern manifestation of nationalism and a by-product of westernisation and a reaction to globalisation in the face of neo-colonialism. I have surveyed the development and some criticisms of *Nihonjinron* and its relationship to Christianity in Japan. To realise this point would give theology in Japan a helpful perspective to understand the emperor system and where the Japanese Church stands. At the moment, it stands between the Western-centred neo-colonial discourse, in which Christianity has often been a useful tool, and nationalism, which is discernible in a discourse such as *Nihonjinron*. It has been about 150 years since Protestant missionaries arrived in Japan. Today, even though Japan’s international situation is different from that of the mid-nineteenth century, these issues, which Christianity in Japan faces, is essentially the same: that is, (neo-)colonialism and nationalism. Christian scholars are expected to conform to the norm of the Western academics, and scholarly success is determined by how a scholar adapts to the Western academic norm, system, and interests.

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(85) Kenzo Tagawa, *Rekishiteki Ruihi no Shiso* [Thoughts from the Historical Analogy] (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 1976), 50.

(86) Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, 128.

Theological education follows the curriculum created in Europe or the United States, according to which, for example, the study of the New Testament includes the quest for the historical Jesus, Old Testament study begins with the documentary hypothesis, and all the courses are dominated by foreign names. I am not arguing that learning about these things is problematic by itself; instead, I am arguing that if one takes the approach set by the West, those who do not belong to the power of influence could never be equal to those in the centre, and would necessarily remain “colonised”. Another issue is nationalism. Japanese nationalism is thriving, taking different forms at different points in history. Behind this discourse, there is power, which demands conformity. If one takes the examples from Christian history in Japan, Uchimura Kanzo was aware of the Western power over Christianity, while Yanaihara Tadao fought against the issue of Japan’s expansionism. In fact, they are two different sources of power, and must be considered in relation to each other.