

# Japanese Migration Then and Now: The Increased Visibility of Foreigners through Diversification and International Marriage

Paul CAPOBIANCO\*

For the past several decades, the number of foreigners in Japan has steadily increased. Whereas in the past, the foreign presence in Japan has been easily relegated to abstract conceptual and physical margins within Japanese society, this article explains why this abstracting of foreign Otherness is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve. To make these points, this work refers to the fact that Japan is receiving more immigrants from increasingly diverse backgrounds, as well as the increasing prevalence of international marriages and biracial people.

## KeyWords

Immigration  
Japan  
diversity  
international marriage

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# I Introduction

Anyone familiar with Japan knows that the nation is in a dramatic state of change. The demographic problems of earlier decades are showing their effects in more areas of everyday life and the Japanese government has yet to provide a clear direction as to how the nation will cope with these changes. Thus far, foreign workers have provided one of the most viable solutions to deal with the ongoing labor shortages brought on by these demographic troubles. Although official rhetoric suggests Japan is not a country of migration, and that it does not accept low-skilled labor, statistics and personal experiences tell a different story. Quantitatively, the number of foreigners living in Japan has risen steadily for the past several decades and shows no signs of slowing. Qualitatively, it is virtually impossible to spend time in a major Japanese city before encountering foreigners working at convenience stores, serving food, or checking guests into hotels. The wheels of change are turning and while the outcome is unclear, we can postulate some tangible directions as to how Japanese society will deal with this fundamentally different diversification.

John Lie questions how, despite Tokyo's diversity, the city was able to remain "devoid of visible racial or religious contention" for a long time (Lie 2008a, 162). One answer Lie offers is that foreigners are framed as ethnic and cultural Others, and that their class differences essentially remain "invisible," which allows for ideas to persist that Japan is homogenous and absent of diversity. Elsewhere, researchers have noted that Japan, despite being more structurally racist than most western societies, is nonetheless absent of ethnic and racial tensions that have been observed elsewhere (Shipper 2008; Weiner 1998). The problems that often accompany diversity have been downplayed in favor of ideas about a more egalitarian Japan. This is especially true in the case of foreigners,

who exist at Japan's far margins. By remaining in an "invisible" space, foreigners and the issues regarding their presence are easily overlooked and ignored. Unquestioned social and identity discourses continue uninterrupted and life goes on.

This invisibility is both conceptual and material. Conceptually, foreigners have been abstracted into particular sectors of Japanese life. It was easily reasoned that foreigners were not a nationwide concern, but rather one that only existed in factories of Aichi, the red-light districts of Tokyo, in schools as assistant language teachers, or in similarly marginal places. This "out of sight, out of mind" mentality was easily buttressed by the fact that for a considerable amount of time, there was very limited contact between Japanese and foreigners, and the contacts that did occur were similarly constrained. Now, however, both forms of invisibility—the material and the conceptual—are changing. The outcomes will have important sociocultural implications, which have yet to be fully considered or explored.

This article examines the implications of this increased visibility of foreigners and considers how Japan's relationship with migration differs today compared with the past. This article explains two ways that the conditions surrounding foreigners in Japan differ today: (1) increasing diversity and (2) increasing prevalence of international marriages and biracial people. It suggests that there are fundamental differences between the nature of diversity today compared with the onset of this migration several decades prior, which are compelling changes to the relationships that develop between Japanese and foreigners in Japanese society, as well as the way Japan engages with and conceptualizes cultural difference. These particularities make foreigners less invisible within Japan and thus are forcing more Japanese to reconcile their existence.

## II History of Migration into Japan

To understand the differences in migration, then and now, it is helpful to explain how migration into Japan has changed over time. While there has been a foreign presence in Japan for centuries, this paper is concerned with migrations from the 1980s. This is because the 1980s brought the most dramatic and most diverse influx of foreigners in modern times. During Japan's colonial empire, there were large movements of people between Japan and its colonies, which at its heyday consisted of Korea, Taiwan, mainland China, and parts of Micronesia (Morris-Suzuki 1998). Some of these colonized peoples were brought forcibly, while others migrated voluntarily seeking economic opportunities. The result was that large communities of Chinese and Koreans formed within the Japanese archipelago. After World War II, these populations lost their status as members of the Japanese empire (albeit marginalized members) and thousands remained stateless in Japan until normalization treaties were enacted decades later (Lie 2008b; Ryang 2000). These communities are today referred to as *zainichi* communities and, while still subject to systematic discrimination, have largely assimilated linguistically and culturally into Japanese society.

More recent migration occurred in the 1970s and 1980s when Japan's labor shortages began to intensify as the nation's domestic supply of labor diminished (Douglas and Roberts 2000). After the arrival of several thousand refugees fleeing conflicts in Southeast Asia in the 1970s (Kawakami 2003), greater numbers of foreigners began arriving in Japan from more diverse origins in the 1980s, mostly from other parts of Asia. Incentivized by the availability of work and the strength of the Japanese Yen, these migrants found work in diverse sectors of Japan's labor

market. Most found work in jobs that were socially stigmatized and that were being neglected by an increasingly educated Japanese population, such as in construction work and factory jobs.

This migration resulted in the emergence of conspicuous foreign communities that hailed from diverse backgrounds and attracted the attention of wider society. Whereas issues concerning *zainichi* communities decades earlier were easily overlooked, due in part to many ethnic Chinese and Koreans "passing" as Japanese, this recent migration was harder to neglect. This created an increased awareness of foreigners in general because this migration occurred so quickly and in such large numbers. Some foreign populations were noticeable because of the ways they established networks and socialized. For example, Iranians used Tokyo parks as places to socialize and network with each other. The presence of hundreds of Iranians gathering in public spaces, seemingly overnight, coupled with a growing presence of migration elsewhere generated concerns about the threats these foreigners would pose to public safety and cultural institutions (Friman 2001; Morita 2003; Sakurai 2003). Public commentators and government officials started to link the presence of foreigners to crime and debates ensued surrounding how Japan should best cope with the growing presence of these ethnically and culturally different foreigners (Friman 2001; Shipper 2008).

In 1990, "a backlash against the growing number of racially distinct, and therefore highlight visible, illegal foreign workers prompted a national debate over immigration" (Friman 2001, 323). Resultingly, Japan revised its immigration policy to privilege the entry of ethnic Japanese persons living overseas (*nikkeijin*). This resulted in a decrease in the number of foreigners from Asia and an increase in *nikkeijin*, who largely came from Brazil and Peru. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, thousands of Japanese migrated to the Americas seeking economic opportunity, and these revised migration policies aimed to bring these people back to Japan as workers. This led to a drop in the number of

foreigners arriving from other parts of Asia and a rapid increase in arrivals from Latin America, mostly from Brazil and Peru (where most Japanese migrated to earlier in the century).

This is a classic example of how ideas about identity are superimposed upon ethnic and racial categories in Japan. It was believed that because the *nikkeijin* were culturally Japanese, they would smoothly integrate into Japanese society, although that proved not to be the case (Roth 2002; Tsuda 2003). Despite the presumption of shared cultural and ethnic congruity, it was soon realized that the *nikkeijin* would not smoothly and unproblematically integrate into Japan's society and labor force as hoped. Many *nikkeijin* were unfamiliar with contemporary Japanese cultural norms and work habits, many did not speak Japanese competently, and many non-*nikkeijin* migrated to Japan as well, undermining the premise of these policies. In total, over 200,000 *nikkeijin* migrated to Japan during the 1990s and early 2000s (Yamanaka 1996). Due to the failure of the *nikkeijin* to integrate, the visa program that facilitated their entry into Japan was discontinued in the early 2000s, which once again led to a rebalancing of the foreign population, through which the number of South Americans decreased, and the number of Asian migrants increased. This is largely the situation in which Japan finds itself today.

While the number of Brazilian and Peruvians in Japan peaked in the early 2000s, foreigners continued entering Japan from other countries. Not only did migration persist, the Japanese government even adopted policies to incentivize migrants to Japan. Furthermore, many of the foreigners who migrated during the 1980s have established themselves in Japan by starting businesses, families, and integrating into society as best as they possibly could. These decades of migration have fostered the situation today, which consists of well-established and growing foreign communities from diverse backgrounds. The growth and further diversification of these communities will likely persist, as Japan has become reliant upon foreign workers as a source of low-wage labor. The

effects of this migration are further intensified by the fact that, as the foreign population in Japan increases, the Japanese population is concomitantly decreasing. While foreigners currently comprise around 2% of Japan's population, demographic trends suggest that this figure will rise to 8-27% by 2050 (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu 2008). Such a drastic increase, even in its most conservative form, would carry significant implications for Japanese society and Japan's sociocultural institutions.

Taking this ongoing diversification as a starting point, this paper explains two ways that these contemporary migration patterns differ from the past and explains what implications they carry for Japanese society. While the following section discusses two important ways this migration is different, there are, in fact, many forces at work that contribute to the novel context within which foreigners and Japanese engage one another. What effects these new encounters remains to be seen, but these conditions warrant serious attention, as the changes they might induce are substantial and will greatly impact Japanese-foreign relations and the ways that Japanese society engages with foreign difference.

### III Contemporary Migration

This section discusses two ways immigration today differs from the past: (1) the increased volume and general diversification of foreigners and (2) the persistence of international marriages and the increasing number of biracial children in Japan. Each difference brings a unique dimension to the ways that Japanese-foreigner relations are developing and together these differences raise novel questions about how these changes will affect Japan's future.

#### 1. Volume and Diversity

The first way contemporary immigration to Japan differs compared to decades earlier is that the foreign community in Japan is now considerably larger and more diverse. This increasing prevalence and diversity means that Japanese people are coming into contact with foreigners in more multifaceted and dynamic ways. According to the most recent data, there are 2,829,416 registered foreigners in Japan (Japanese Cabinet Office 2019). A few exceptional years notwithstanding, Japan has experienced a persistent increase in the number of foreigners residing in Japan since the 1990s.

Japan's foreign population has also become considerably more diverse. In 1980, there were 782,910 "registered aliens" in Japan, of which 85% were Korean. Most of these were actually *zainichi* Koreans who never naturalized and retained Korean nationality, though were by and large assimilated into Japanese society. This means that *zainichi* Koreans included, foreigners comprised slightly less than 0.6% of Japan's population (Migration Policy Institute, 2017). Five years later, in 1985, there were seven countries from which there were 5,000 registered residents in Japan. Today, there are more than thirty-three countries with 5,000 or more registered residents (Japanese Cabinet Office 2019). This data does not include people who have obtained Japanese citizenship or who are working in Japan undocumented. This suggests that a significant diversification has occurred and that foreigners have been coming to Japan from more places and in greater numbers than previously recorded.

These foreigners have formed communities with co-nationals and have played an important role in shaping the sociocultural landscape in various places throughout Japan. There is now a vast array of restaurants serving foreign food and stores catering specifically to different foreign populations. Such establishments are often run by foreigners themselves. Tokyo especially offers a diverse assortment of international dining options by native chefs, which is a testament to this diversification.

Table 1. Foreigners in Japan (2019)

Total Foreigners	2,829,416
China	786,241
Korea	451,542
Vietnam	371,755
Philippines	277,409
Brazil	206,886
Nepal	92,804
Taiwan	61,960
Indonesia	61,051
United States	58,484
Thailand	53,713

(Japanese Cabinet Office 2019)

This ethnic and cultural diversification has also been induced in part by the diversification of Japanese higher education. Japanese universities have expanded the number of degree programs offered in English at both undergraduate and graduate levels, which has resulted in an increasing number of foreign students studying in Japanese universities. Furthermore, the Japanese government has implemented policies to attract foreign students to study at Japanese universities, including the Global 30 initiative and the "300,000 International Students Plan" (Bushnell 2013; Milly 2018). Many universities offer degree programs in English, as well as scholarships to students hoping to enroll in these programs. Ultimately, these initiatives, coupled with a growing interest in university students looking to Japan as an attractive destination, have resulted in an increasing number of foreign students obtaining undergraduate and graduate degrees in Japan. This situation is noticeably different from the 1980s when foreigners were coming to Japan from more limited backgrounds to engage in a limited number of jobs.

This diversification has led to novel interactions taking place between foreigners and Japanese people, which are important for the ways perceptions of foreigners develop. New patterns of communication and direct interpersonal interaction facilitate new forms of sociality that affect wider patterns of Japanese-foreign relations. Several recent studies show how foreigners and their Japanese counterparts reformulate relationships in juxtaposition to one another in this environment. Leiba Faier (2009)

explains how Filipina women married to Japanese men in rural Nagano came to be reconceptualized by Japanese locals as *ii oyomesan* (good wives). This is because they took up local gender norms that Japanese women—who had since moved to urban areas—were expected to adopt. Beata Świtek (2016) notes the ways that Japanese patients and coworkers reconfigure their perceptions of Indonesian care workers as a result of their direct encounters with them in care settings. Paul Capobianco (2017) shows how Japanese families reformulated their relationships with Africans of various backgrounds through their personal contact via home stays, host families, and marriage. Further evidence of the changing attitudes Japanese hold towards foreigners is articulated by David Green and Yoshiko Kadoya (2015), who describe that many factors lead Japanese actors to conceptualize foreigners differently, among the most important of which are language skills and direct contact.

Christopher Burgess (2008) provides an example of how Korean wives married to Japanese men in rural Yamagata led local residents to change their perception of foreigners. His ethnography has shown how direct encounters between Korean wives and Japanese locals fostered conditions through which the two parties established better relationships. Rather than resisting negative sentiments, the Korean women tried to educate locals about their experiences in Japan and develop positive relationships based on a sense of mutual understanding. Burgess notes that this can succeed, and more positive relations ultimately might ensue.

The author of this paper has conducted interviews with several foreigners living and working in areas with small foreign populations. One African man who owns a shop in a small city in northern Japan explains that he actively sought a location where he could escape the pressures and negative influences of Tokyo. Although he still travels to the Kanto area regularly, he said that he wanted to relocate his family for lifestyle reasons and to escape the bustle and influences that surround city life. He also notes

that he thinks his venture to this area led many of the locals to “see a black man for the first time.” He stated that the “[locals] were shocked at first, but after a while, they got used to having me here. Young people like my shop and I am an active member of the community. I speak Japanese and go to events and stuff. So, I think we’re all good.” In another case, a Filipina woman living in Shikoku explains that she moved to the island to follow her boyfriend who was transferred and never left because they enjoy the lifestyle. She notes that many other Filipina women had come to the same area for lifestyle reasons.

As for the diversification of higher education, the increasingly diverse backgrounds of foreign students allow Japanese students to mingle with and befriend foreigners from ethnic and national backgrounds that they otherwise would not engage with. While the effects of these interactions need to be further examined, it is not farfetched to surmise that these cross-cultural friendships will spark the interest of some young Japanese people, which allows them to develop more amicable attitudes towards diversity and a sincerer interest in foreign cultures.

Previous research and these larger trends suggest that there are qualitatively novel engagements happening between foreigners and Japanese people (Capobianco 2017; Faier 2009; Świtek 2016). These encounters are having variegated outcomes and have the potential to cause Japanese people to reconceptualize foreign difference in a multitude of ways. No longer are simplistic associations of cultural Others as being staunchly and unambiguously negative accurate for comprehending what is occurring in Japanese society today. Instead, more careful and more dynamic consideration of the different ways foreigners and Japanese engage one another, as well as who is engaging one another, are necessary for furthering our understandings of the impacts that immigration is having on Japan.

This diversification is also causing the Japanese government to react and respond to the needs of these foreigners, albeit nominally. For example, this has caused the Japanese government to create

services to better accommodate foreigners from diverse backgrounds, though the reach of these services remains limited. An increasing number of signs and official documents are offered now in English, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other languages. However, since such resources are limited, foreigners are also subject to numerous other difficulties. Workers are often unaware of their rights and many have been brought to Japan by employers under false pretenses, which pay do not pay them the legal minimum wage or offer other benefits employers should otherwise provide (Douglas and Roberts 2000; Shipper 2008). The government's trainee program has been a prime example of this, where low-wage workers are imported under the guise that they are undergoing professional "training," but are in fact engaging in low-wage work. This program has been riddled with problems and has come under significant scrutiny from activists, though there seems to have been little serious effort to alleviate these problems (Bélanger, et al. 2011).

Such conditions are notably different than in previous decades, where the number of foreign residents in Japan was smaller (both in sum and as a percentage of the total population) and where engagements with foreigners were limited to particular workplaces and geographic contexts. Such novel conditions are already facilitating new forms of sociality and personal relationships to develop, through which more dynamic understandings of foreign and cultural difference are developing in the minds of Japanese actors. How this will ultimately unfold long-term remains to be seen. However, it is not unlikely that more dynamic views will develop as more Japanese cross paths with foreigners in heretofore never experienced ways, and as Japanese and foreigners renegotiate their relationships to one another in this volatile and uncertain climate. Understanding these views can help us to better understand the ways that Japan is changing as a result of immigration and what the trajectory of Japan may entail henceforth.

## 2. International Families and Their Influence on Society

Another area in which migration and diversity conditions differ today compared with the past is in terms of mixed families. International marriages (*kokusai kekkon*) continue to occur and biracial people are becoming increasingly visible within Japanese society. The perseverance of international marriages over the past three decades has created a landscape that continues to expose increasing numbers of Japanese people to foreigners and their experiences. Relatedly, these marriages are producing offspring that are of mixed background (*konketsuji*), thus effectively raising the number of biracial people in Japan. While this is significant in itself, these changes have been compounded by the fact that a number of biracial celebrities have generated public attention and controversy over the past several years. The novel phenomenon here is the increased number of biracial people and the increasing attention they are receiving. The scale of these phenomena plus the attention generated towards and about differ considerably in historic context.

Although the number of international marriages in Japan peaked in 2006, there are still over 20,000 international marriages in Japan each year, meaning that roughly one in every twenty-nine marriages is an "international marriage" (Amano 2017; Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare 2017). The commonality of international marriages carries important implications for the ways Japanese and foreigners engage one another and how these parties establish new forms of sociality in this context.

These international marriages, and the family and personal connections they carry with them, are accompanied by an increased awareness of issues related to foreigners, what problems foreigners face, and how foreigners interact with Japanese institutions. While this is true of Japanese who marry foreigners, themselves, more importantly, this is also true of the families and extended families of Japanese

who marry foreigners. The in-laws of the Japanese people that marry foreigners are coming into contact with a form of foreign difference on a much greater and more conspicuous scale than ever before. This is happening in ways that are destabilizing stereotypes about foreign difference and are leading to new ways that foreigners and Japanese are positioned within society relative to each other (Burgess 2008; Capobianco 2017).

As more Japanese families are exposed to foreigners via the spouses of their children, siblings, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, cousins, etc., there is a greater chance that more earnest connections will be established between foreigners and Japanese personally and emotionally. Considering the intimate nature of family life, these relationships can help establish a foundation upon which more amicable relations and conceptualizations can develop. In other words, more Japanese marrying foreigners will likely raise the overall consciousness of the existence of foreigners in Japan, as well as help develop a more nuanced understanding of what their lives in Japan entail. Foreigners will no longer be conceptual anomalies simply existing in Japan in the abstract but will become a reality as more Japanese learn about foreigners through their close relatives.

Furthermore, the biracial offspring resulting from these *kokusai kekkon* are being raised in Japan and are culturally and linguistically Japanese. Depending on the ancestry of the non-Japanese parent, they may or may not be able to “pass” as Japanese phenotypically, though they can culturally.

This fact is also significant in that Japanese pupils are being taught at school alongside pupils who have non-Japanese parents. This leads to an increased degree of consciousness of mixed people in Japan, which can engender both positive and negative outcomes contingent on the context and content of such interactions. Positively, if people form relationships with mixed and foreign students, the consciousness of issues related to foreigners and diversity will correspondingly increase. Mixed students have the best chance at achieving this

but so do non-mixed foreign pupils, who are also increasingly common. However, it is not implausible to assume that mixed students with a Japanese parent will fare better at this.

Negative sentiments can also develop, which can strain relations between Japanese and mixed persons. Consider, for example, data from Yoko Yamamoto, who discusses the case of a biracial half-American, half-Japanese girl who experienced bullying by her classmates. Prior to this experience, this student was unaware that she was “a foreigner”: “...Suddenly, a boy bumped into me on purpose and said ‘*gaijin*’ (foreigner)! I was confused because I thought that I was Japanese” (Yamamoto 2013, 55). Thus, not all encounters end positively.

A Japanese interlocutor from the Kanto region confided to me that he also had mixed and foreign classmates while attending school. However, he also explained that he found it easier to get along with western students rather than Southeast Asian students. He notes:

It was always easier to get along with someone if the father was like from America or France. Even those kids who were white but raised in Japan were easy to become friendly with. But the students whose parents were from the Philippines or Nepal or something, they were always more difficult. One of my best friends even had a fight with a Vietnamese student in high school. I was so shocked!

These anecdotes, in addition to Yamamoto’s findings, show that Japanese people are becoming increasingly conscious of the diversity extant in Japan and are developing critical opinions of it.

Unsurprisingly, the increased commonality of biracial offspring has produced a number of athletes and celebrities of mixed background and this is happening at a considerably greater scale than ever



before experienced. Over the past decade, there has been a significant proliferation of the number of biracial people that have come into the national spotlight. The impacts of these people and their increased visibility within Japan has generated discussions concerning what it means to “be Japanese,” as well as how biracial people fit into ideas and discourses about national belonging.

The most public and most controversial of these has been Ariana Miyamoto. Miyamoto was born to an African-American father and Japanese mother and gained national attention when she was named Miss Universe Japan in 2015. She was the first biracial person to win the award, which caused controversy and generated debates about whether or not she was “Japanese enough” to win. Some voices, mostly from the conservative right, questioned to what extent someone with mixed ancestry should have won the award. Miyamoto later responded that throughout her life, non-mixed Japanese have, despite her cultural and linguistic fluency, told her there was no way that she could be Japanese because she did not look Japanese (Wingfield-Hayes 2015).

Miyamoto explains that, rather than considering herself to be “Japanese,” the term *ha-fu* more accurately depicts her identity and how she identifies herself. *Ha-fu* is a term that denotes a person of mixed-Japanese ancestry and carries with it sociocultural connotations. Interestingly, Priyanka Yoshikawa, another *ha-fu*, born to a Bengali Indian father and a Japanese mother, won the contest the following year. Yoshikawa was granted the award despite the fallout from Miyamoto’s victory, thus leading one to critically question the efficacy of the discriminatory discourses that surfaced after Miyamoto’s victory.

Miyamoto’s victory generated critical discussions about whom may or may not be considered Japanese. While this discussion has been ongoing for some time, Miyamoto’s case is unique in several ways. First, her mixed background is prominently featured in her appearance; whereas in the past, many mixed Japanese could phenotypically “pass” as Japanese,

this is not the case with Miyamoto. This would suggest she is an outsider and not Japanese, despite her native cultural competency and linguistic fluency, which throws into flux ideas that have historically associated Japanese identity with a particular physical appearance (Lie 2001; Yoshino 1992). Second, her rise to fame as a model and the winner of Miss Universe Japan, which allowed her to represent Japan in the Miss Universe competition, adds a layer of complexity that thrusts national identity into the picture. The fact that she was awarded a prize that would allow her to represent Japan means that people need to consider her positionality as a mixed-Japanese person, for better or for worse. While some have said that she should rightfully be considered as Japanese and be eligible to represent Japan, others remain adamant that she is not Japanese and a “pure” (i.e. non-mixed) Japanese person should have been chosen. There is, thus, little agreement at the level of national discourse to determine who is and who is not Japanese. How this debate ultimately unfolds will have serious implications for the future of Japan as it relates to the incorporation of foreign and mixed people.

Another celebrity that has gained notoriety is Asuka Cambridge, who was born to a Japanese mother and Jamaican father. In 2016, he represented Japan as part of the track and field team at the Summer Olympics Games in Rio de Janeiro. Cambridge and the Japanese team placed second in the 4x100 meter Relay, in which they were beaten only by a Usain Bolt-led Jamaica team. The team’s success in the Olympics gained them national acclaim within Japan. Later in 2016, Cambridge appeared on Japan’s annual twenty-four-hour telethon for charity holding two track cleats, one portraying the Jamaican flag and the other portraying the Japanese flag. Cambridge explained that these cleats represent his dual heritage. The fact that Cambridge could appear on national television with both cleats and adamantly profess his dual identity shows that, like Miyamoto, he is more willing to assert a dual identity publicly.

Most recently, a half-Ghanaian and half-Japanese

track star, Abdul Hakim Sani Brown, joined Cambridge on the Japanese national track team at the 2019 World Athletics Championships held in Doha. Brown was part of a Japanese team that won a bronze medal in the 4x100 meter relay. He was supposed to join Cambridge on the 2016 team but was held back due to a hamstring injury (Nagatsuka 2016). Both Cambridge and Brown have received public attention for their positive representation of the Japanese national team.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the even more curious case of Naomi Osaka, who is presented much more ambiguously than the others. Osaka, born to a Japanese mother and Haitian father, was raised in the United States and eschews questions relating to her identity as Japanese. When she defeated tennis star Serena Williams at the U.S. Open in 2018, mixed discourses surrounded her victory. While sentiments similar to those directed towards Miyamoto abounded, some of these actually made sense, since she was not culturally Japanese and her linguistic fluency in Japanese seems non-existent. However, other discourses emerged suggesting that she was Japanese because of her behavior. While Williams behaved in a rowdy fashion throughout the match, Osaka remained calm and composed, as she always appears to be. Calmness and composure were deemed by some observers as “truly Japanese” traits, which led to some people acknowledging and appreciating her Japanese behavior and identifying her as Japanese because of this. Especially curious is the fact that unlike Cambridge, Miyamoto, or Brown, Osaka seldom is seen speaking Japanese and her knowledge of the language remains ambiguous. While support for Cambridge might be understood, given his obvious fluency in the Japanese language and cultural norms, the same cannot be said of Osaka.

The presence of these biracial celebrities is having diverse impacts on Japanese discourses about foreign difference at an unprecedented scale. How they develop and to what extent they actually affect attitudes about foreigners in Japan remains to be seen. However, the presence of people like

those mentioned above—as well as other celebrities and athletes, such as Becky, Rora, Yu Darvish, Rui Hachimura, and Aaron Wolf—will undoubtedly affect attitudes towards foreigners in diverse ways, which researchers must attend to moving forward.

Historically, there has been little room for articulations of dual identities within Japan. However, this may change if more people like Cambridge and Miyamoto assert a dual identity and use words like *ha-fu* to describe themselves while also remaining grounded in a contemporary Japanese milieu. Unlike in the past, when the children of foreigners and minority groups were unlikely to adamantly assert a strong second or mixed identity, these examples show that at least some second-generation mixed people today are more willing to do so. Rather than making efforts to “pass” as Japanese, these second-generation mixed-Japanese are now making claims to a different identity, which has had limited success in destabilizing social ideologies in previous cases (Chapman 2007). This may be due in part to the fact that it is harder to “pass” as Japanese based on any appearance of many mixed people. While terms such as Italian American or British Pakistani are common ways people identify themselves with multiple cultures, the phenomenon of having an ethnic identity different from a national identity has been the topic of much consideration in Japan. Therefore, whether or not people like Cambridge and Miyamoto will be accepted into the mainstream remains uncertain. The fact that such matters are being raised marks a turning point in which Japan will be forced to reconcile these tensions. How this will happen remains uncertain and could result in either further acceptance of mixed people or further marginalization. Nonetheless, as Japan diversifies, there will be a greater likelihood that more critical discussions about these topics will develop.

These novel conditions are putting Japanese into contact with foreigners in new ways, which are fundamentally different from those of the past. Previously, it was easy to relegate foreigners to the conceptual and physical margins of society, but

this is no longer true as an increasing number of Japanese engage with foreigners on a regular basis and are coming to know them more intimately. As these encounters unfold, there is a greater likelihood that different types of relationships will emerge in ways that lead Japanese to reconceptualize the role of foreigners in Japan, the results of which may be both positive and negative (Burgess 2008; Capobianco 2017; Faier 2009; Green and Kadoya 2015). While the outcomes of these interactions have yet to be seen, there is little doubt that they affect Japan and how the majority understands the experience and positionality of foreigners. It is important to recognize that these encounters engender both positive and negative sentiments, as not all encounters with, and exposure to, foreigners lead to positive outcomes that improve cross-cultural understanding. Nonetheless, the forces of change are in motion, which demands further consideration as to how the newfound effects of migration to Japan create new contexts, experiences, and ideas from within Japan.

## IV Discussion

The underlying premise of this article is that the conditions surrounding migration and diversity in Japan today are making foreigners and mixed people more visible in Japanese society. This is happening through a variety of channels, each of which has its own particularities. While there are many reasons why foreigners have remained invisible for so long, arguably the most important factor enabling this invisibility is lack of knowledge. A lack of firsthand experience, ignorance, and failure by media outlets to capture this breadth lay at the core of the ability to downplay the presence of foreigners for so long. Lie also notes, that “In spite of concerted efforts by some scholars and activists to challenge the belief in Japanese ethnic homogeneity, the view that only Japanese live in Japan is deeply rooted and widely shared” (Lie 2000, 80) and that “when asked about Japan’s existing minorities, many people seemed

puzzled and confused” (Lie 2000, 80). Thus, ignorance and misinformation converge with existing identity ideologies to create conditions that have facilitated this invisibility.

Although slow, processes of change are unfolding and are carrying important ramifications for the trajectory of Japan and the ways that Japanese conceptualize the foreign presence in Japan. If more amicable relations continue to develop, there will likely be more serious calls to recognize the presence of foreigners in Japan, thus engendering further critical discussions. This will compel a multitude of effects, both positive and negative. It is hard not to imagine such discussions compelling more critical inquiries into how foreigners are positioned in Japan, what role they have to play in Japan’s future, and the ways Japan should change to accommodate foreigners and biracial people. It is also not hard to imagine these changes compelling a new wave of racism and xenophobia and leading some to develop more hostile attitudes towards foreigners. While it is too early to say how these changes will develop, we can recognize that changes happening and how they progress will have serious implications for life in Japan.

Another effect of these changes is that they will likely make people more accustomed to the cultural impacts of Japan’s diversification. As Japanese come in contact with foreigners and biracial people in new contexts, such interactions will become normalized, as will the general presence of foreigners within Japan. Minimally, this will suggest that people will not stare at foreigners or be caught off guard when they need to interact with a foreigner. However, more seriously, this also means that people who are raised in an environment in which diversity is the norm will likely possess a heightened cross-cultural sensitivity to issues related to foreigners. Such people are likely to be more sympathetic to the problems foreigners and mixed people face, as well as be more willing to accept them as members of Japanese society. Since ignorance of foreigners and Others has been a key factor contributing to their marginalization and

corresponding invisibility, it is plausible to assume that as more people become aware of the presence of foreigners, this too will change. This creates a heightened awareness of diversity and cultural difference, which will likely manifest in the ways Japanese and foreigners interact with each other.

Although it is unlikely that negative attitudes towards foreigners will vanish completely, as the aforementioned encounters persist attitudes towards diversity and cultural differences will likely improve (much like in the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere). The generational differences between people raised in a time when there was little diversity, compared with those who grew up with much higher levels of diversity, will likely hold very different—likely more neutral views of diversity. While new issues will arise, it is hard to seriously envision a future in which attitudes towards diversity, and foreigners in general, mirror those of previous generations.

Lastly, the presence of foreigners and biracial people have already led to more critical discussions about Japanese identity and foreignness. Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu notes that “multiethnic individuals cannot easily be dismissed as foreigners” and thus have the potential to lead to conceptual identity reconfigurations (2000, 212). This has been a major issue surrounding mixed celebrities like Miyamoto and Cambridge, whose presence destabilizes existing paradigms about who is and who is not perceived to be Japanese. Mixed people challenge the status quo in ways that foreigners themselves cannot. Namely, biracial people born and raised in Japan possess the linguistic and cultural capital to pass themselves as Japanese. They also share Japanese ancestry (or “blood”), which has been historically important in constructing Japanese identity (Robertson 2008; Yoshino 1992). The consciousness of such people has led more Japanese to reconsider their role in Japanese society and Japan’s future more generally.

People such as the celebrities mentioned above currently still exist as cultural anomalies.

Japanese discourses have not yet figured out how to logically reconcile their existence and Japanese discourses often position such people conceptually in idiosyncratic ways. Despite enhanced media attention, serious discussion remains limited and will only expand in the future. As this occurs, we can expect discourses about who is and who is not perceptibly Japanese to take on new directions. We cannot yet predict exactly how this will proceed, but the points raised in this paper offer some potential directions.

There are two extremes as to how this may occur. The first of these is radical acceptance in which activists, Japanese citizens, and politicians make headway in the ongoing fight for foreign and minority rights and recognition. This would lead to a greater accommodation of foreigners, serious efforts to develop Japan as a truly multicultural society, and one in which diversity is encouraged rather than made invisible. At the other extreme is radical rejection in which far-right groups with xenophobic and nationalistic motives strengthen and in which support services available to foreigners do not develop as needed. Extreme rejection would produce stronger anti-foreigner sentiments and may lead to some form of conflict—making foreigners more visible in a different way.

The most likely path, however, is somewhere in the middle. While foreigners may not be entirely accepted, it is also unlikely that intense racism will prevail. There will be too many positive encounters taking place and too intimate relationships developing to allow for the xenophobic attitudes to win out. Nonetheless, the struggle to recognize foreign difference and make the foreign presence in Japan more tangible faces an uphill battle with much progress to be made. How this unfolds remains a serious question that will impact the trajectory of Japan for future decades. We can merely draw upon the data, anecdotes, and inferences we have to speculate possible outcomes.

# V Conclusion

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This paper has provided two examples of how migration in Japan today is different than in the past. The two ways that have been discussed—the increasing and diversifying presence of foreign communities and the growth of mixed families and children—are just two of many different ways that migration into Japan today is qualitatively and quantitatively different than previously experienced. These particularities make the foreign presence in Japan more visible, which carries important implications for how Japan understands and engages with foreign difference. The novel context in which these interactions are happening is creating new types of encounters and relationships between Japanese and foreigners, which facilitate new forms of sociality and more critical discussions about the construction and trajectory of Japanese identity. Considering these particularities, further investigation is warranted to obtain a more nuanced understanding of their true effects on Japanese society.

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