

JAPANESE IDENTITY STATISTICALLY PROFILED*

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1. Consumer's point of view

The study of *Nihonjinron* has so far been almost exclusively limited to the analysis of *Nihonjinron* writings produced by intellectuals. This has left out an examination of how “consumers” of *Nihonjinron* react to all these writings. Whether or not and how much impact the literature of *Nihonjinron* may have on readers, e.g., to what extent Japanese people espouse tenets of *Nihonjinron*, and what social characteristics believers and non-believers of the tenets manifest are almost a totally uninvestigated and therefore unknown area.

What we are advocating is that we need to study *Nihonjinron* from the point of view of the consumer. Are consumers satisfied with the products in the market? If they buy them, are they using them as intended? What use are they putting them to? What about consumer satisfaction? Which consumers, are buying, using, and are satisfied with the products? What social attributes do they have? These questions have never been asked in investigating *Nihonjinron*. Such *Nihonjinron* critics as Dale,¹ Mouer and Sugimoto,² Miller,³ and others all examine producers (authors) and products (books) but none bother to probe much into *Nihonjinron* as a consumer issue. Occasionally sales figures of some of the best seller *Nihonjinron* books are mentioned as an indicator of consumer behavior. Beyond it, nothing much has been said. Fortunately, we finally have, in our Nishinomiya survey, data on consumer behavior regarding *Nihonjinron*. In this paper we take a close look at the survey data in order to learn what *Nihonjinron* consumers are like.

2. Methodology⁴

It is important to keep in mind that how people respond to a question in a questionnaire is not necessarily the same as how they react in a “real-life” situation involving the same question. To illustrate, a person may respond, “totally agree” to a statement, “foreigners cannot master Japanese completely” in this questionnaire, and yet may take a more tempered position in discussion this matter with a foreign friend. A response, in either situation—whether to a questionnaire or to a foreign friend—while basically governed by the respondent's internal disposition toward the issue at hand, is also conditioned by external stimuli to which response is requested. When stimuli are different, responses are expected to be different. Thus one should not immediately conclude that a Japanese “on the street” will necessarily behave according to the way they respond in this survey. At the same time, if they behave differently, this fact does not invalidate survey results.

A word should be said about the survey we conducted. We devised the questionnaire in 1986–87 specifically to examine what ordinary Japanese think about *Nihonjinron*. The questionnaire was mailed in the summer of 1987 to a random sample of 2,400 adult persons (above 20 years of age) in the city of Nishinomiya, a medium-size community of roughly 300,000 adult population, located between Osaka and Kobe. Of these, 944 persons, or 39.3% returned the questionnaire.

First, Nishinomiya as a community represents on the average a population with somewhat higher

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educational and income level than Japan as a whole. This fact may skew our interpretations of the data to the extent that these factors are significant variable. Second, we have no idea about the social characteristics of the 60.7% of the sample who did not return the questionnaire. We should not rule out the possibility, for instance, that those who did not bother to respond were less interested in *Nihonjinron* than those who did respond. Third, Among those who did respond, males outnumbered females by a ratio of two to one, while the sex ratio in Nishinomiya is quite normal. Fortunately sex was not an important factor.⁵ Fourth, in correlational analysis, what we have is just that: correlation. Although correlation may indicate covariant relationship, we have no way of knowing this strictly from the data. If we find, as we did, that those who read *Nihonjinron* literature tend to be more tolerant of foreigners participation in Japanese society (e.g., becoming teaches in schools and marrying Japanese) than those who do not, we do not know whether reading this literature induces the readers to be tolerant or tolerance in this area induces the Japanese to read more *Nihonjinron* books, or perhaps both these are results of some third factor, although common sense may help guide us in interpreting the data in certain cases. Finally, like in most survey questionnaires, responses to questions were scaled in degrees, such as “strongly agree,” “somewhat agree,” “can’t say,” “somewhat disagree,” and “strongly disagree.” In this report for the sake of simplicity, we are often collapsing different degrees of agreement or disagreement into one category

3. Not all Japanese are *Nihonjinron* enthusiasts

There seems to be a tacit assumption on the part of *Nihonjinron* writers and *Nihonjinron* critics alike, both Japanese and foreign, that all Japanese think and behave in the way *Nihonjinron* authors write about Japan and the Japanese. After all, if *Nihonjinron* books are not about Japanese on the street, they would not be worth much. If a *Nihonjinron* writer says that the Japanese are a homogeneous people, for example, a common and reasonable assumption would be that most if not all Japanese share the same idea. *Nihonjinron* is worth discussing presumably because ideas in it are supposed to represent live people. *Nihonjinron* critics’ criticisms, too, ultimately rest on the assumption that *Nihonjinron* are supposed be about real people, and not just a figment of *Nihonjinron* writers’ imagination. Perhaps one of the greatest and immediate revelations is that though this may come as a surprise, many Japanese are even interested in *Nihonjinron*.

Here one need to be aware of the difference between intellectual interest in *Nihonjinron* and its subjective espousal. Although in abstract we, of course, understand the difference between the two, in discussing *Nihonjinron*, too often the two are not separated. Instead, one is assumed to be the same as the other. In mentioning sales figures of *Nihonjinron* books, for example, whether the figures represent merely interest and curiosity, as our findings show, or whether they indicate enthusiastic espousal and belief in *Nihonjinron*, as most students of *Nihonjinron* seem to assume, is never questioned.

Let us take a couple of instances for illustration. For example, 82% of the sample expressed “interest in” *Nihonjinron* as discussed in the newspaper ; but when asked whether they believed in certain tenets of *Nihonjinron*, percentages were much lower in most cases—around 50%, variation depending on the specific tenet in question. Similarly, only 49% of those who responded believe in the uniqueness of Japanese culture, far lower than the 82% expressing “interest in” *Nihonjinron*. Another tenet of *Nihonjinron* has to do with the supposed innate inability of foreigners to master Japanese language. Roy Andrew Miller has written *ad nauseam* on this subject, ridiculing Japanese linguists for making such a preposterous claims. In fact it turns out that only 36% of the sample agreed that foreigners are unable to master Japanese completely.

Though a large number expressed interest in newspaper discussion of *Nihonjinron*, such interest through other media was lower, 79% for television, 41% for radio, 59% for magazines, and 50% for books. The low interest rate for radio is understandable since radio listening as such in Japan, as in other industrialized countries with wide spread distribution of television, is on the decline. Radio listening nowadays in Japan is mostly for music or sports, especially baseball game. Lower rates for magazines and books are most likely due to the fact that they are less accessible than newspapers and television. Newspaper is delivered to the door everyday and television inescapably dominates the sitting parlor of the 99% of Japanese homes. Books and

magazines, on the other hand, for most people, one must make an effort to go to a bookstore to purchase. Though many do subscribe to magazines and have them delivered, many of them, such as women's and children's magazines or sports magazines, which are popular subscription titles, do not generally carry articles on *Nihonjinron*. That extra effort needed to go to a bookstore is probably seen in the differential percentages between interest in *Nihonjinron* through newspaper, on one hand, and books and magazines, on the other.

We created a composite variable out of five variables all having to do with interest in *Nihonjinron* in the media of various kinds—newspaper, television, radio, magazine, and book. This new composite variable was correlated with other variables in order to reveal a “profile” of those interested in *Nihonjinron* and those not.⁶ People who are interested in *Nihonjinron* indeed, manifest certain characteristics. For example, they tend to have traveled abroad, have foreign friends, welcome discourse on *Nihonjinron* in the media, have read *Nihonjinron* books, and are well aware of the claims of Japanese culture being homogeneous and unique. Yet, and this is the important point, they do not necessarily *believe* that the Japanese are homogeneous, that Japan is unique, that “blood” is important for a variety of social and cultural competencies, that criteria of being Japanese should exclude foreigners, or that foreigners should be excluded from social participation in Japanese society. A clear message is that “interest in” *Nihonjinron*, such as seen in the sale of *Nihonjinron* books, should not be interpreted to mean that ideas in *Nihonjinron* are upheld by the large number of Japanese who are interested in the topic. Interest in *Nihonjinron* is just that: interest in *Nihonjinron*. It makes Japanese become aware of a variety of issues in *Nihonjinron*, such as uniqueness and homogeneity of Japan without committing them to the espousal of these ideas.

4. Familiarity is not belief

As one would reasonably expect, those who are interested in *Nihonjinron* not only know of many *Nihonjinron* writers and *Nihonjinron* books, but also have definitely read many *Nihonjinron* books. Then what about those who have read many *Nihonjinron* books as against those who have not? What characterizes each of them? What impact reading *Nihonjinron* books has on those who read them? We supplied a list of popular *Nihonjinron* writers and their representative books and asked respondents to tell us which authors and books, they are familiar with and which books they have read.

Concentrating on the variable of “having read *Nihonjinron* books,” if we may state the conclusion first, we found that reading *Nihonjinron* by and large does not lead one to believing in *Nihonjinron* proposition; on the contrary, it tends to loosen one's belief in them. Or, depending on which way one wants to read the correlation, belief in *Nihonjinron* propositions does not prompt believers to read *Nihonjinron* literature. This may sound counter-intuitive. Common sense might lead one to believe that it is those who are interested in and at the same time believe in and feel good about *Nihonjinron* propositions who are the avid readers of the literature and that reading *Nihonjinron* would enhance one's belief in it. After all, the Bible is read, is it not, mostly by Christians, believers, and reading the Scripture, supposedly, strengthens the reader's faith. In the case of *Nihonjinron* this turns out not necessarily to be the case.

Avid readers of *Nihonjinron* tend to be better educated and have more foreign exposure in the sense of having travelled abroad and having more foreign friends than those who read less on the subject. They tend to be interested in *Nihonjinron* and welcome increasing amount of publication on the subject, according to our data.

The more familiar with *Nihonjinron* literature these respondents are, the more relaxed are their criteria of being Japanese, though the correlation is not overwhelming. The criteria of being Japanese we used are: Japanese citizenship, having Japanese parents, being born in Japan, spending the formative period of life in Japan, living in Japan for some period of life, being able to speak Japanese, having a Japanese surname, and having Japanese physical appearance. In other words, those familiar with *Nihonjinron* literature tend to think these criteria are not important for being Japanese. We also found that those familiar with the literature are more willing than those unfamiliar with the literature to allow foreigners to participate in Japanese social institutions: they do not mind foreigners marrying a Japanese, sharing a workplace with Japanese, teaching

inschools, living in Japan or taking out Japanese citizenship.

The importance of these findings should be obvious. In *Nihonjinron* literature much is made of the purity of the Japanese “blood,” something almost implying genetic inheritance of linguistic and cultural competencies. It is also expressed in the supposed reluctance to allow foreigners full participation in Japanese society and in keeping foreigners (*gaijin*) forever foreigners; in the relative difficulty of foreigners to become naturalized citizens; and in legal, institutional, and social barriers preventing foreigners from obtaining permanent appointment, until recently, at national universities and private corporations, and also to keep foreigners in the “fringe institutions” of the society, such as entertainment and spectator sports.⁷

Those who are “familiar with” *Nihonjinron* also tend to believe, more than those who are not, that *Nihonjinron* serve the cognitive function of enabling them to learn about themselves and about who Japanese are. But they are mum as to whether *Nihonjinron* is a useful basis for building a good society.

A tentative conclusion one arrives at on the basis of our data is that if one believes that belief in *Nihonjinron* is undesirable, if we want Japanese to be “liberated” from the yoke of *Nihonjinron*—and there are many foreigners and Japanese alike who think so—we should encourage more people to read *Nihonjinron* literature. This is counter-intuitive, as we said above, since the received view is that *Nihonjinron* literature exhorts espousal of a certain, conservative view of the world contained in *Nihonjinron* and that readers of *Nihonjinron* literature are believers of this definition of who the Japanese are. But the finding here, tentative though it might be, is that exposure to *Nihonjinron* literature has the opposite, salutary impact on the reader: the more they read this literature, the less they believe in them.

5. Tenets of *Nihonjinron* (1): homogeneity (*tan'itsu, dooshitsu*)

While in English we use one word—homogeneity—generally, Japanese use at least two separate words having roughly the same meaning. One is *tan'itsu*, *itsu*, the other is *dooshitsu* or *tooshitsu*. The former tends to emphasize the external appearance of being one and the same, while the latter points more to the sameness of the substance. But in reality, in common parlance, the two are not clearly distinguished, both referring to homogeneity as in English.

The idea of homogeneity is central to *Nihonjinron*. It is constantly invoked to refer to the oneness of the Japanese. It is supposed to be the hall mark of the difference between Japan and other cultures, especially the West. It is supposed to be the wellspring of Japanese economic strength in that the managerial efficiency manifested in the global economic power of the Japanese is said to reside in the racial and ethnic homogeneity of the Japanese.⁸ Much has been made of a one-time Prime Minister Nakasone's remark contrasting the supposed superiority in Japan's homogeneity with the ethnic heterogeneity of the United States.

In our survey, we first asked whether the respondent is familiar with the term (*tan'itsu minsoku*), and then asked whether they believed in it. 72% of the respondents said they were familiar with the term. 25% said they were not familiar with it, with 3% giving no answer.

When we asked whether they espoused this proposition of homogeneity, only 38% of the respondents said “yes.” Interestingly, an equal number of people (39%) could not answer “yes” or “no,” and only 23% gave a “no” answer. Thus, although much is made of the homogeneity notion in *Nihonjinron*, it does not seem to affect too much more than a third of the population. The rest of the population either know about it but do not believe in it, or do not even know about it. This makes one wonder whether the impact of this homogeneity notion and consequently of *Nihonjinron* as such is as great in the thinking of the Japanese in general as some *Nihonjinron* writers or critics make it out to be.

One question which immediately comes to mind is whether those who espouse this notion are not aware of the internal variation within Japan. If they are well aware of internal variations in geography, customs, social characteristics, etc., one might surmise, they are not likely to think that the Japanese are a homogeneous group. Accordingly we asked in our survey to what extent they believed Japan to manifest variations in dialect, climate, rural-urban differences, income, religion, politics between the (then) ruling party and oppositions, generation, occupation, gender, and education. Although belief in the homogeneity of the Japanese

people (*tan'itsu minzoku*) is not very high, being only 38%, do those who believe it perceive internal variations to be minimal, compared with those who do not uphold the idea of homogeneity? Do those who think Japan is homogeneous (*tan'itsu*) not know its internal variations? Interestingly, our data shows that belief in homogeneity in this sense has nothing to do with awareness of internal variations. No correlation, positive or negative, was found between the two variables. Thus one can be keenly aware of linguistic, political, religious, generational, gender, rural-urban and other differences within Japan, and yet totally believe that the Japanese are homogeneous (*tan'itsu*). The two have nothing to do with each other.

Why is it that those believing in homogeneity (*tan'itsu*) of Japan do not vehemently deny internal variation of Japan? Here we run out of data from our survey to offer an answer. But we might speculate. The question of cultural identity orients the Japanese to seek an answer which would apply to all Japanese. There is an underlying belief that the Japanese are one in some sense. Thus homogeneity, for some Japanese, is probably taken for granted, rather than being a demonstrated fact. It is not easy to prove, though perhaps not impossible to do so, that in spite of religious, income, and other differences in the population, there is something that holds all Japanese together.

Belief. Now, when we turn to correlates of *espousal* of the idea of homogeneity, we have a very different story. A highly interesting finding is that there is absolutely no correlation of this variable with whether or not respondents are familiar with *Nihonjinron* authors or books. In other words, who believe in homogeneity is not a function of whether or not or how many *Nihonjinron* authors they know of or how many *Nihonjinron* books they have read. It is not correlated with education, either. Those with much education and without much education equally tend to, and tend not to believe in homogeneity.

Is it correlated with exposure to foreign country through travel, or how many foreign friends one has? One might imagine that persons who have been abroad or have foreign friends might be so impressed with the contrast between Japan and foreign country that they would think, that in comparison with a country like the United States, relatively speaking, Japan is in fact quite homogeneous. But no correlation was found here, either.⁹

Then, what is belief in homogeneity correlated with? Although weakly, that is, at 0.1 level, it is correlated with a number of factors which seem to make sense. It is correlated with age. The older the respondent, the more likely the respondent is to believe in homogeneity.

Also, those who believe in homogeneity tend to believe that foreigners lack cultural competencies for being Japanese, such as comprehension of Japanese culture, ability to speak Japanese, assimilation into Japanese society, and mutual understanding with Japanese. Quite understandably, they also tend to believe in the efficacy of the "Japanese blood" to enable the Japanese to understand each other, to speak the language, to comprehend the culture, to assimilate into the society, and to look like Japanese. Again, logically deriving from the above, more than those who do not espouse the homogeneity thesis, these people tend to believe that such conditions must be fulfilled in order to be a Japanese as having Japanese citizenship, having Japanese parentage, being born in Japan, being socialized in Japan, being able to speak the language, having a Japanese name, and looking like a Japanese. Finally, they believe that *Nihonjinron* helps in creating a better society.

One variable with which belief in homogeneity is in fact correlated is that of how well respondents think of Japan in terms of its technological, scientific, economic, artistic, and other achievements. Those who think highly of Japan in these areas also tend to think Japan is homogeneous. Having said this, we should remind ourselves that in speaking of the behavior of those who believe in the homogeneity of the Japanese people, we are referring to only 38% of the population.

Thus it is established that "being aware of" and "belief in" are two different phenomena as far as the idea of Japanese as being homogeneous is concerned. That is, cognition does not immediately translate into belief. Some people are merely curious and aware of the idea, other are aware of it *and* believe in it. In short, the curious are one kind of people and believers are another. This difference is seen clearly in the profiles of these two kinds of people—profiles obtained by examining their respective statistical correlates. That is, the set of variables which are correlated with those who are curious about the homogeneity notion is very different from that correlated with those who believe in homogeneity of the Japanese. Let us see the differences.

First, let us take up the characteristics of those who are “aware of” the homogeneity (*tan'itsu*) notion without necessarily believing in it. These respondents tend to be more educated, have more experience of foreign travel and have more foreigners as friends. Perhaps one's direct contact with foreign culture through travel or foreign friends makes one think about the issue of homogeneity. Those who are aware of the idea of homogeneity also tend to be interested in *Nihonjinron*. They are aware of *Nihonjinron* authors and their works, and have read them. They are aware of the idea of Japanese culture as being unique. But do they believe in various tenets of *Nihonjinron*? The answer is “no.” Either their attitude is neutral toward them or against them. For example, with respect to the assimilability of foreigners, the respondents who are aware of the homogeneity notion tend to be more tolerant, rather than less so, of foreigners performing various roles in Japanese society. Also, they are disinclined to believe in the efficacy of “blood.” In short, those who have cognitive interest in the homogeneity notion also have cognitive interest in other aspects of *Nihonjinron*, but in general they do not espouse tenets of *Nihonjinron*, with one understandable exception. Namely, those aware of this tenet also tend to espouse it with a fairly high (0.3) level of correlation.

Now, those who believe in the homogeneity of the Japanese people have very different characteristics, even though correlation between those who believe in homogeneity and those who are aware of the notion is very high. Belief in homogeneity is not correlated with foreign travel or with having foreign friends, or with lack thereof; nor do believers in homogeneity tend to be familiar with *Nihonjinron* writers or their books. That is, belief in homogeneity is not correlated with any of these variables, positively or negatively. Instead, “believers” tend to believe in the uniqueness of the Japanese. They also tend to believe, understandably, that foreigners tend not to have requisite cultural competencies to qualify them as Japanese, such as ability to speak the language, understand Japanese culture, etc. Also understandably, they tend to believe in the efficacy of “the blood” of the Japanese for enabling them to acquire or have Japanese cultural characteristics. They also tend to believe that to be Japanese means to have a Japanese name, to be born in Japan, to speak Japanese, etc. In short, those espousing the homogeneity idea of the Japanese also espouse a number of other tenets of *Nihonjinron*. Those who are merely intellectually curious, as we noted, however, do not share any of these beliefs.

Another difference between “the curious” and the believers is that the believers tend to have high regards for achievements of Japanese in technology, science, arts, etc., whereas the curious do not have the same regard. Also, whereas believers think that *Nihonjinron* is a useful concept for building a better society, the curious are interested in *Nihonjinron* merely as a means of knowing oneself and knowing who the Japanese are, but not for taking action.

Seen thus, we realize that those who are intellectually interested in the notion of homogeneity have quite a different profile than those who believe in the tenet. They are indeed intellectually curious about many other aspects of *Nihonjinron*; but they are not by and large believers of *Nihonjinron* tenets. On the other hand, those who believe in the homogeneity tenet also believe in many other tenets of *Nihonjinron*.

To sum up our discussion so far, then, first we must realize that *Nihonjinron* is not a concern of all Japanese: only 80% of respondents showed interest in *Nihonjinron* as such. As for the homogeneity notion, only about 72% had heard of it, and a far smaller percentage (38%) agreed that the Japanese are a homogeneous people. Thus the intellectuals who write on *Nihonjinron* and claim homogeneity of the Japanese actually have only a small following among Japanese. Moreover, since belief in homogeneity is not correlated with knowing *Nihonjinron* writers or their books, those who believe in the homogeneity tenet seem to have acquired the idea from sources other than *Nihonjinron* books. In short, *Nihonjinron* writers and writings can not be credited for the belief these respondents have in the homogeneity of the Japanese. On the contrary, most Japanese who read about *Nihonjinron* and read about the homogeneity of Japanese merely are interested in the idea intellectually, and do not seem to be persuaded by the very idea of homogeneity that they avidly read about.

Taking the homogeneity (*tan'itsu minzoku* and *dooshitsu shakai*) and uniqueness propositions, which are at the heart of *Nihonjinron*, are those who espouse them also interested in *Nihonjinron* in the media? No, not necessarily. There is no correlation.

Are these people favorably disposed toward discussion on *Nihonjinron* in the media? Offhand, the guess

would be that they would welcome *Nihonjinron* discussion, but correlation is only mild. Those who believe in homogeneity (*tan'itsu*) and uniqueness do not seem to care much about *Nihonjinron* writers, or their books. Thus their belief seems to be independent of reading on the subject. They do not have any definite position with regards foreigners' Japanese cultural competency, while one would think that those believing in the homogeneity of the Japanese would reject the notion that foreigners would have any cultural competencies, such as complete understanding of Japanese culture, total mastery of the language, etc. The fact turns out that there is only a weak correlation with the *tan'itsu* notion of homogeneity. And for the "blood" notion, too, one would think that those who believe in homogeneity also believe in the efficacy of the "blood" of the Japanese, but these two variables are only weakly correlated. Do believers in homogeneity, as one might expect, have stricter criteria of Japaneseness and have a more restrictive view of foreigners' social participation? The answer is by and large "no;" there is only minimal correlation here.

6. Tenets of *Nihonjinron* (2): Uniqueness

The idea of uniqueness of Japanese culture, like the homogeneity idea, is central to *Nihonjinron*. While all cultures are intrinsically unique by definition, the Japanese seem to make more of it than many other peoples. After all, the whole enterprise of *Nihonjinron* is to demonstrate once and for all the uniqueness of Japan, its people, its culture, and its history. In trade talks with the United States, Japan has often invoked this idea to claim its inability, nay unnecessary, to go along with what the United States considers to be "universal" *modus operandi*. Assumption of uniqueness presumably excuses the Japanese from explaining their position, their economic structure, their distribution system in a way "rationally" understandable to Westerners.¹⁰ It has served as a weapon of mystification. How is this idea thought of by ordinary Japanese?

Immediately one notes that the idea of uniqueness seems to stand alone, without being highly correlated with other variables. Among the *Nihonjinron* propositions listed above, belief in the uniqueness of Japanese culture is correlated with none, even at the 0.1 level. Thus believers in the uniqueness of Japanese culture do not necessarily believe foreigners lack Japanese cultural competencies like understanding Japanese culture or speaking Japanese. Nor do they tend to think "the Japanese blood" has much to do with making Japanese Japanese. They do not think that the criteria of being Japanese listed above are of any importance. Nor are they concerned with foreigners participating in Japanese society.

The only thing one could say is that those who believe in the uniqueness proposition also tend to believe in the homogeneity notion (both *tan'itsu* and *dooshitsu*), but the level of correlation (0.1) is low. They tend to think *Nihonjinron* is useful in thinking about Japan's role in the international scene and in creating a better society (at least at 0.1 level). But again the level of correlation is not very high.

Understandably, belief in Japan's uniqueness is relatively highly correlated (0.3 level) with being aware of Japan's uniqueness. But those who are aware of the idea of Japan's uniqueness manifest a vastly different profile than believers.

Men tend to be more *aware* of this idea than women, the aged more than the young, the more educated more than the less educated, and those with more foreign exposure (through travel abroad and foreign friends) more than those with less foreign exposure. Those who are aware of the uniqueness idea tend to be well read in *Nihonjinron* and are aware of the homogeneity notion, as well. They believe *Nihonjinron* satisfies the need to know one's own identity. However, those who are aware of the uniqueness idea also tend to be more tolerant of foreigners assimilating into Japanese society, though the level of correlation is admittedly low (0.1).

7. Tenets of *Nihonjinron* (3): Blood

The importance of blood in *Nihonjinron* needs no elaboration. It is presumed that it is the blood tie of the Japanese which keeps the Japanese pure, and the Japanese race homogeneous. The term *minzoku*, or ethnic group, as in *Nihon minzoku*, connotes both cultural and racial contents. There is conflation of biology and culture, confusion of the two, reading from one to the other. Blood thus is an integral part of cultural

transmission. Purity of culture is derived from the purity of blood and vice versa.

More specifically in our survey, we asked whether, or to what extent respondents believed that “blood” influenced physical appearance, mutual understanding (between those who “shared” blood), whether “blood” helped speak Japanese, understand Japanese culture, and become members of the society.

Like most other *Nihonjinron* tenets, belief in the efficacy of the blood received a relatively low mark. Even its expected genetic impact on physical appearance is appreciated only by 52% of the sample. When it comes to cultural impact of “blood” it ranges from 20% for “enables one to speak Japanese” to 39% for “allows mutual understanding among those who share the blood.”¹¹

These findings may be a big surprise for those who have thought that the blood element was an important component of the Japanese ethos. However, one should note that between those who are affirmative about the role of the “blood” and those who are negative, there is a large percentage of those who could not make up their mind. For its role in promoting “mutual understanding” among those who share “blood,” as many as 43% were uncertain as to whether “blood” can or cannot impact this particular cultural competency. From the “scientific” vantage point, one might claim that there is no need for uncertainty, that obviously there is no impact. The fact that so many Japanese are not sure whether genetics does not play a cultural role is something to note.

Because of the large number of respondents not being able to answer “yes” or “no,” correlation with other variables is necessarily low. Nonetheless, tendencies are discernible, and corroborate other findings. Of all the variables associated with age, this one, “blood,” is most strongly correlated (0.3 level). Age is the only variable correlated with “blood” at this level. The idea about the purity of Japanese blood and its importance for the “Japanese spirit” was pounded into Japanese youths during and before the second world war. Thus those who were of school age then, which means those who were born around 1935 or earlier are likely to have been socialized with this notion, and the high correlation of this variable with the “blood” variable may be in strong part due to this factor. After 1945, of course, official indoctrination of the “blood” idea ceased, but to the extent that this idea is part of folk belief, and not simply an official doctrine, it has been informally transmitted to and accepted by younger people as well, though to a much less extent by older generations.

Those who believe in the efficacy of “blood” for Japanese identity are likely to believe also in high achievements of Japan in scientific, technological, artistic, economic and other fields (0.2 level). For these people, these accomplishments no doubt are due to the “blood” of the Japanese. They also believe that *Nihonjinron* helps to give pride as Japanese, have self-esteem, and be respected by others.

At a weaker level of correlation (0.1), the “blood” factor is reasonably, or expectably associated with a number of other variables. For example, those believing in the efficacy of “blood” tend to believe that foreigners lack Japanese cultural competencies, such as complete understanding of Japanese culture, and mastery of the language. They also tend to exclude foreigners from participating in Japanese society, for example, being a school teacher, marrying a Japanese, or taking on Japanese citizenship.

Also, these respondents tend to exercise stricter definition of who Japanese are, e.g., in terms of possession of Japanese citizenship, Japanese parentage, and birth in Japan (0.2 level). They tend to believe *Nihonjinron* is useful in building a better society, and in knowing about oneself. Also as one would expect, believers in “blood” welcome discussion on *Nihonjinron* in the media, though the correlation is weak. This does not mean that these people know of *Nihonjinron* writers or are familiar with their books any more than those who do not hold beliefs about “blood.” On the contrary, the stronger the belief in “blood,” though the correlation is weak (0.1), the less they know of *Nihonjinron* writers and their books. As to whether these believers read *Nihonjinron* books, there is no correlation.

While correlation of many of these variables is not overwhelmingly high (13 variables at 0.1 level, 3 at 0.2 level, and only one at 0.3 level), still in all, what is important is that so many variables are in fact correlated with this variable and that correlations are all in a consistent direction, namely they all are in the direction of supporting *Nihonjinron*.

8. Tenets of *Nihonjinron* (4): Criteria of being Japanese

How about the criteria of being Japanese? Among various possible criteria of being Japanese, we selected: possession of Japanese citizenship, having one or both Japanese parents, being born in Japan, being reared in Japan in the formative period of life, being able to speak Japanese, having a Japanese name, and having a “Japanese face.”

In asking what is of importance in defining who the Japanese are, we distinguished between what one might call “self norm” and “societal norm.” This distinction is important, and needs explanation. In the first, we asked, “To what extent do you think the following are necessary as criteria for being Japanese?”

For the second, we asked, “Setting aside your own views, how in general are the following thought to be necessary in Japan?” The assumption behind the first question is that each person has some notion about criteria of Japaneseness, wherever they may be derived. The second question assumes that in addition to personal views, each person also has internalized what he or she thinks to be the societal norm about criteria of Japaneseness. In some cases the personal view may be a direct reflection of his or her societal view, with no difference between them. In other cases one may expect discrepancy between them—that one may think the societal norm to be one way, and yet personally one may disagree.

Looking at each individual criterion for Japaneseness, whether of self-norm or societal norm, it is clear that none receives 100% endorsement. In fact, except for the societal norm for “Japanese citizenship,” none has a majority support. This fact underscores the point made earlier that *Nihonjinron* is not supported by the majority of Japanese. Moreover, many of the criteria, especially in self-norm, received less than 25% of the vote. For example, in self-norm, parentage, birthplace, locale of socialization, and looks are important only for less than a quarter of respondents.

Implicit in distinguishing between self norm and societal norm and asking respondents about societal norm is the assumption that there is no such thing as one over-arching societal norm or set of norms which every member of the society shares. Instead, as each member has had different, albeit slightly, experiences of socialization, what one has internalized as societal norm is each different from that of others.

In aggregate, we found that respondents' own norm is more lenient in the sense of diverging more from the strict, ideal *Nihonjinron* position than their societal norms. When we take the percentages of those who answered the criteria of Japaneseness to be “absolutely necessary,” the “personal norm” is consistently lower than the “societal norm.” That is, for all criteria, more respondents believe these criteria to be demanded by the society than those who think they personally hold them as necessary. In many of these criteria, the “societal norm” has about 50% more votes than the “personal norm.” What this means is that for many Japanese, even though they themselves may not think a certain criterion to be absolutely necessary, they believe that the society demands it to be a norm. If we take these criteria to be part of the tenet of *Nihonjinron*, we may say that many Japanese, while not accepting the tenet (at least this part of it), acknowledge the existence of the tenet.

In other words, personally, Japanese hold a more liberal position with regards who Japanese are than how they think the society defines Japaneseness. It is important to note and keep this discrepancy in mind. Societal norm as a norm influences how societal members think. It tends to pull self-norms toward societal standards in so far as members look up to the societal norm as a guide to forming their own judgment.

Of special note is the fact that a great many respondents answered “indifferent” to the criteria of Japaneseness, apart from answering “don't know.” For all ten criteria, the percentage of “indifferent” responses in personal sense (as a self-norm) is higher than that in societal sense. For example, while ten percent of the respondents are indifferent about citizenship as a criterion for being Japanese, only one percent believe that the “society” is indifferent to this criterion. In short, for any criterion, there are more Japanese in our sample who believe these criteria are unimportant as a personal opinion than those who believe they are unimportant as a norm of the society. That is, while many of them do not care themselves whether a given criterion is important for being Japanese, they acknowledge that the society still think they are important.

We may now recall the observation made above that while *Nihonjinron* literature is extremely popular in

Japan, many books in it being best sellers, the percentages of respondents who espouse *Nihonjinron* tenets are about 50%. This discrepancy may well be related to the difference between personal and societal norm. The fact that personal acceptance of *Nihonjinron* tenets, as far as criteria of being Japanese are concerned, is lower in percentages than societal norm may be a reflection of the fact that while only about one half of the respondents are willing to accept *Nihonjinron* tenets, *Nihonjinron* literature reigns the field of Japanese identity question. A great many Japanese probably assume *Nihonjinron* literature as representing the societal norm, while they themselves are skeptical of accepting it personally.

9. Impact of Foreign Exposure

What would be the impact of foreign exposures—in terms of having foreign friends or going abroad? Would foreign exposure make the Japanese become more self-conscious about their own identity, and lead them to espouse *Nihonjinron* as a ready answer to their question of identity? Or would it have the effect of making them less inclined to believe in *Nihonjinron*?

Having foreign friends and traveling abroad indeed are correlated with having “interest in” *Nihonjinron* to some extent. And the high degree of foreign exposure in terms of travel abroad and foreign friendship is also correlated with a high degree of “awareness of” *Nihonjinron* writers and *Nihonjinron* books and exposure to *Nihonjinron* books. Those with foreign experience and foreign friends tend to be aware of the “homogeneity” and “uniqueness” propositions of *Nihonjinron*. Thus having foreign friends and going abroad seem to heighten one’s awareness of *Nihonjinron* issues and motivates one to read *Nihonjinron* books. These factors also seem to expose the Japanese to the *Nihonjinron* tenets of homogeneity and uniqueness. The causal direction, of course, could very well be reversed, or go in both directions: awareness of the notion of the Japanese people, society and culture being homogeneous and unique may motivate Japanese to seek out foreign friends and send them abroad.

10. Believers of *Nihonjinron*

Who then are the believers of *Nihonjinron*? What kind of Japanese tend to espouse *Nihonjinron*? What kind of profile do they have? One might wonder whether intellectuals tend to believe in *Nihonjinron* tenets more than the less educated, or men more than women? As already remarked, interest in *Nihonjinron* or familiarity with *Nihonjinron* literature is no guarantee of promoting belief in *Nihonjinron*. Nor exposure to foreign cultures or friends helps.

Then what factors help account for belief in *Nihonjinron*? Among the various variables, we found that age is the best predictor, not that it is consistently and always highly correlated with all *Nihonjinron* tenets. But it is a better predictor than sex, education, subjectively perceived standard of living, or any other measure we used. That is, the older the age, the more likely they believe in the homogeneity (*tan'itsu*) of the Japanese people, the homogeneity (*dooshitsu*) of the Japanese society, foreigners’ lack of cultural competency, the role of “blood” in determining cultural competency, and strict criteria of Japaneseness as personal norm.¹² Also, older respondents tend to be less tolerant of foreigners participating in Japanese society than younger respondents in so far as foreigners directly impinge on the respondent’s life. If foreigners’ social participation is an academic issue, not involving the respondent’s own life, however, the respondent’s attitude is neutral. For example, when they were asked if they would approve “their own child” marrying a foreigner, a foreigner living next door, working along side a foreigner, older respondents were more negative than younger ones. On the other hand, if the question was about a foreigner marrying a Japanese or a foreigner working for a Japanese company, older respondents did not show any different reaction from younger ones. The two tenets not correlated with age, then, are “uniqueness” of Japanese culture and foreigners’ social participation as a societal norm.

Sex difference has almost no impact: men’s belief pattern is no different from women’s. As for education, since younger Japanese are better educated than older Japanese in the sense of having had more years of

schooling, and since older Japanese tend to believe in *Nihonjinron* more than younger Japanese, one would expect better educated Japanese to be less inclined to believe in *Nihonjinron*. This hypothesis is born out by the data, but only mildly.

Even with age, however, we cannot say that correlation is overwhelming. Of the nine tenets, age is correlated with seven of the nine tenets tested in this questionnaire, not all nine, as shown above. One of the two not correlated with age is, interestingly, the uniqueness idea, which is not correlated with much of anything, in spite of much that has been made of in media and by *Nihonjinron* writers and critics, alike. Also, among the seven variable which are positively correlated with age, most of the them (six) are correlated only at 0.1 level, and only one ("blood") at 0.3 level.

11. The Future of *Nihonjinron*

Nihonjinron is the world view of older Japanese more than of younger Japanese, keeping in mind, however, that believers in *Nihonjinron* may represent less than a majority in numerical sense, for a specific tenet. A question arises as to the future of *Nihonjinron* in this regard. One scenario might be that *Nihonjinron* is a thing of the passing generation, and as younger generations who are less credulous of *Nihonjinron* grow older, *Nihonjinron*'s support will diminish. Or, alternatively, one might argue that belief in *Nihonjinron* is a function of age as such, and that as younger ones grow older, more and more, they will begin to espouse *Nihonjinron*.

There are data in our survey, besides age correlates, to predict weakening of *Nihonjinron* in Japan. Belief in *Nihonjinron* is negatively correlated with education, travel abroad and having foreign friends. All these three factors are likely to increase in the future. Given the concern of the Japanese with education, the general level of education in Japan cannot help but rise, with larger and larger proportions of high school graduates entering college and college graduates entering graduate programs. Also, Given the relatively strong global economic position of Japan, more and more Japanese, with increased income, are likely to travel abroad as tourists or in connection with academic or employment assignments. As this happens, Japanese will gain more and more foreign friends. Our data shows that all these developments will have the tendency to weaken the hold of *Nihonjinron* on the general populace of Japan.

On the other hand, there are countervailing tendencies which need to be observed. One is that as a person becomes older, he or she tends to become more conservative, so that the younger generation in years to come would tend to behave more like the older generations than they do now. The reason for this conservative tendency is that the conservative values of the society are not just accidentally associated with the establishment; rather, they are there because they buttress the existing economic and political institutions. These institutions are slow to change. As they persist, the value system supporting them also is likely to persist. As younger Japanese join established economic and political institutions, then, they are likely to become more conservative in outlook and espouse more conservative values, in short, tenets of *Nihonjinron*.

Recent changes in employment pattern¹³ away from the so-called permanent employment system, however, is likely to weaken the hold of *Nihonjinron* on the Japanese, since this employment system is tightly undergirded by a whole host of *Nihonjinron* tenets and propositions, such as group orientation, social hierarchy, nonverbal communication, and harmony.

Which of these two sets of opposing forces will have the upper hand in the future, no one can say. One scenario would see gradual liberalization of those in political and economic power, working out some compromise, or loosening in the meaning of Japaneseness. Japan would become more internationalized and less oriented toward *Nihonjinron*. Another scenario would forecast a more conservative Japan, increasingly favorably oriented toward *Nihonjinron*. Still a third scenario will see both trends continuing, with increasingly divergent and polarized public opinion, where conservatives in the establishment will continue to uphold *Nihonjinron*, while liberals, disenchanted with *Nihonjinron*, gaining in numerical force without being able to capture political power.

12. CONCLUSION

What does one make of the situation where in reality *Nihonjinron* is espoused only by one half of the Japanese population, if we may extrapolate from our sample? It is instructive to look afar sometimes to understand situation at hand. Maryon McDonald has written a fascinating ethnography of the Breton in "*We are not French!*"—*language, culture and identity in Brittany*.¹⁴ According to McDonald, "militant" Bretons, living in urban centers, advocate return to the traditional Breton culture, full use of Breton language, etc., spouting out a *Breton-jinron*, as it were. After studying militants, McDonald moved to a rural area, where militants claim that the traditional culture still remains. It turned out that Breton peasants living there were quite ambivalent about their traditional culture, preferring French culture on certain occasions, switching, in fact, linguistic codes back and forth as they pleased. Thus the world view which militants created was not of reality, but an invented one. But the outside world does not know this because militants, who are the educated elites and spokespersons of the community, are the only people who communicate with the outside world and represent their culture to outside, while peasants go about their life un-ideologically and without much attention to militants' calls and demands.

Japanese intellectuals who write *Nihonjinron* resemble Breton militants. Intellectuals have their own agenda—of promoting themselves, of representing Japan in the way they wish, of being spokespeople of Japan. They perhaps even forget that there are people out there whose needs they are supposed to cater to. They become intoxicated with their own words, their own views, their own arguments. They begin to assume the world view they create in their imagination to represent the reality. In the meantime, most of ordinary people go about their own life irrespective of intellectuals' pontification.

Footnotes

1. Peter Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986)
2. Ross Mouer and Yoshio Sugimoto, *Images of Japanese Society* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1986)
3. Roy Andrew Miller, *Japan's Modern Myth: The Language and Beyond* (New York: Weatherhill, 1982)
4. For technical details of the methodology of this survey and further documentation of results of this survey, see the following sources. Harumi Befu and Kazufumi Manabe, "An Empirical Study of *Nihonjinron*: How Real is the Myth?" *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies*, Vol. XXXVI (1987), pp. 97–111. Harumi Befu and Kazufumi Manabe, "*Nihonjinron*: The Discursive Manifestation of Cultural Nationalism," *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies*, Vol. XXXIX (1991), pp. 101–115. David McConnell, Sug-In Kweon, Harumi Befu and Kazufumi Manabe, "Nihonjinron: Whose Cup of Tea?" *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies*, Vol. XXXVII (1988), pp. 129–133. Kazufumi Manabe, Harumi Befu, and David McConnell, "An Empirical Investigation of Nihonjinron: The Degree of Exposure of Japanese to *Nihonjinron* Propositions and the Functions These Propositions Serve," (Part 1) (Part 2) *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies*, Vol. XXXIII (1989), Vol. XXXIX (1990), pp. 35–62, pp. 139–167. Harumi Befu and Kazufumi Manabe, "Japanese Cultural Identity: An Empirical Investigation of *Nihonjinron*," *Japanstudien: Jahrbuch des Deutschen Instituts für Jaoanstudien der Philipp-Franz-von-Siebold-Stiftung*, Band 4 (1992), pp. 89–102.
5. We cannot rule out the possibility, however, that had women responded at the same rate as men, some discernible differences may have been obtained.
6. In order to maintain a degree of readability, cumbersome citations of coefficients of correlation and other statistical indices are avoided in the text. Of course, correlations come in different degrees. Here for simplicity's sake, we shall take 0.1 and 0.2 levels in Pearson's coefficient of correlation, though admittedly weak, as convenient, minimal correlation to be noted. That it is a weak correlation will be noted as much as readability will allow. Similarly for the 0.2 and 0.3 levels, which indicate progressively somewhat stronger correlation.
7. Harumi Befu and Kazufumi Manabe, "An Empirical Study of Nihonjinron: How Real is the Myth?" *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies*, Vol. XXXVI (1987), pp. 97–111.
8. Nakane uses the term *tan'itsu* to mean something other than "homogeneous" in her famed *Tate Shakai no Ningen Kankei: Tan'itsu Shakai no Riron* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1967). For her it means that the Japanese belong to one and only one group. In this sense of singularity of affiliation and hence loyalty to the one group (company), too, this concept is supposed to have aided Japanese companies in achieving high productivity.
9. Cf. Patrick Haydock-Wilson, *Japanese Residents in London and their Attitudes toward Internationalisation: An Empirical Critique of Harumi Befu's Paper of 1983*, University of London school of Oriental and African Studies. MA Thesis in Area

- Studies (Japan) (1993) in this regard. Haydock-Wilson found the Japanese residing in London area not to be particularly nationalistic. Lack of methodological rigor in this study, to be sure, makes his conclusion rather tentative.
10. This is not to excuse the American side from its own imperialistic and Orientalizing biases in their accusations.
 11. Cf. Figure 6, p.53, in Kazufumi Nanabe, Harumi Befu and David McConnell, "An Empirical Investigation of *Nihonjinron*: The Degree of Exposure of Japanese to *Nihonjinron* Propositions and the Functions These Propositions Serve (Part 1)," *Kwansei Gakuin University Annual Studies*, Vol.XXXVIII (1989), pp.35-62.
 12. Curiously, as a societal norm, we find the opposite tendency, namely that younger generations tend slightly to accept a more strict definition of Japaneseness as a societal norm than older generations.
 13. Harumi Befu and Christine Cernosia, "Demise of 'Permanent Employment' in Japan," *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 29 (3) (1990), pp.231-250. John C. Beck and Martha Nibley Beck, *The Challenge of a Lifetime: Individuals, Organizations, and Environment in Japan's Elite Employment System* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993)
 14. Maryon McDonald, "We are not Frech!" —*Language, Culture and Identity in Brittany* (London, New York: Routledge, 1989)

ABSTRACT

Nihonjinron, also known as Nihon bunkaron, Nihon shakairon, Nihonron, etc, is a body of discourse which attempts to demonstrate Japan's cultural differences from other cultures and Japan's cultural uniqueness in the world. It thus tries to establish Japan's cultural identity, and may well be considered an expression of Japan's cultural nationalism.

While some Nihonjinron is serious academic discourse, the great bulk of Nihonjinron discourse occurs in the popular media: in newspapers, television, radio, magazines, and popular books. It is this popular version of Nihonjinron that we wish to examine in this paper.

Popularity of this subject is reflected in the large number of books being published in this genre. Nomura Research Institute's compilation of books in this genre, published between 1945 and 1978 lists some 700 titles. By now one can easily count 1,000 titles in this category. A great many of these books have gone through multiple printings.

One of the problems of *Nihonjinron* is that except for a very few studies, such as the so-called "national character surveys" (*Kokuminsei Choosa*), *Nihonjinron* arguments lack quantitative demonstration. That is, *Nihonjinron* arguments have been offered without telling us whether all Japanese espouse the tenets of *Nihonjinron* or whether only some of them do; and if only some of them espouse the tenets of *Nihonjinron*, what kind of people are they and what percentage of the total population do they represent?

To rectify this near absence of empirical studies, we conducted a question-naire survey in the summer of 1987 to determine the extent to which *Nihonjinron* tenets are espoused by Japanese and to identify the characteristics of those who do and those who do not uphold these tenets.

A preliminary report of this survey has been published. In this paper we take a closer look at the survey data.