1 OVERCOMING JAPAN’S NATIONAL BIPOLARITY: TRENDS OF WORSHIPPING THE NATIONAL CULTURE

So at the very same time that men become fully and nervously aware of their culture and its vital relevance to their vital interests, they also lose much of the capacity to revere their society through the mystical symbolism of a religion. So there is both a push and a pull towards revering a shared culture directly, unmediated in its own terms: culture is now clearly visible, and access to it has become man’s most precious asset [...] So – let culture be worshipped directly in its own name. That is nationalism. – Ernest Gellner (1987, p. 16)

Japan entered modernity in the second half of the 19th century, when pressed by internal and external situations the governmental elite took measures to turn Japan into a nation-state. Since that moment, Japanese society has experienced recurrent nationalist movements directed from above and aimed at different objectives – from the establishment of Japan as an imperial power in Asia to the rescue of the national identity. During the last couple of decades, many analysts and journalists have argued that a new wave of nationalism has extended in the political arena of Japan with the potential of a military resurgence. However, besides the debates among politicians and intellectuals on the revision of official historic accounts, on the need to rebuild a strong military, or on the rights over islands disputed with South Korea and China that have been behind that new nationalist trend, a discourse on the Japanese cultural qualities can be increasingly found embedded in popular culture texts since the second half of the 2000s.

These messages hardly ever touch the delicate topics that are easily recognized as part of a ‘nationalist’ trend against the foreign influences; on the contrary, they are mostly directed at the reinforcement of the positive and admirable imagery of the Japanese society in order to help citizens regain the pride in their national culture and, at the same time, attract non-nationals as consumers of the Japanese products and services. Nonetheless, this widespread discourse reflects ideas of a movement of cultural nationalism of previous decades, ideas that seem to have been naturalized by the society and that media is continuously flagging to remind Japanese of the core ideas of their national identity, becoming a form of banal nationalism. Before analyzing this current media discourse, it is necessary to contextualize
the nationalist movements that have marked the modern history of Japan and their impacts on the hegemonic discourses on the Japanese identity.

In the last section, using official statements and interpretative media analysis, I will postulate a scenario of the circumstances concerning the evolution of governmental policies for cultural promotion during the twenty-first century, as I consider that specific economic goals and a natural disaster were the major elements that impacted the proliferation of the discourse analyzed in this dissertation and, only then, this became parallel to the political trend of the new nationalism.

1.1 FROM NATIONALIST REVOLUTION TO ULTRA-NATIONALIST IMPERIALISM
Ernest Gellner (1983, p. 111) noted that “the most violent phase of nationalism is that which accompanies early industrialism,” when the society, in the process of adapting itself to the new system, faces the instability born from the inequalities found in the fields of politics, economics and education. This was the situation of Japan from 1867 to its defeat in the Pacific War in 1945. This period can be considered as one progressive nationalist movement: it began as a nationalist revolution - as Gordon (2003) calls it – when the country’s elites focused their efforts on building a nation-state and modernizing Japan’s governmental, economic and social structure; as the country became a military power, moved by ideas of Japan’s superiority pursued hegemony in Asia, it became an ultra-nationalist imperialism, causing death and devastation in the region and inviting the same tragedies home as Japan involved in the Pacific War. These developments, as expected, were accompanied by powerful ideological movements inside the new state, which were aimed at the building of a Japanese identity.

In order to reconstruct the context and main ideas of this and the following period of nationalism in Japan, I rely heavily on seven titles: the extensive historical revision of Jansen (2002), the study of Japan’s nineteenth and twentieth century history in the context of the modernity trends worldwide of Gordon (2003), the analysis of the conformation of Japanese identity in the twentieth century in the context of intellectual movements in Japan of Iida (2002), the study of the different discourses and theories about the Japanese nation that appeared among government and intelligentsia sectors during the nineteenth and first half of

1.1.1 EMBRACING MODERNITY IN JAPANESE TERMS: THE PROCESS OF BUILDING A POWERFUL NATION-STATE

In the mid-nineteenth century, Japan had been under the Tokugawa regime for about two hundred and fifty years. This was a de facto samurai government that was legitimized by acting as deployed by the Emperor. The geographic characteristics of the country had helped Tokugawa rulers to keep the country in a semi-secluded situation, relatively safe from Western influences. The few contacts and exchanges with foreigners were mostly controlled by the regime and only a limited group of people were allowed to deal with them – mainly those from intellectual, religious, governmental and commercial elites. However, as the modernization processes appeared in Europe and North America, the pressure to either become part of the ‘world system’ and open to international trade or succumb to the Western powers reached Japan and, adding to an internal crisis, made Tokugawa regime collapse. This moment is marked in history by the Meiji restoration movement of 1867-1868 that was led by a group of insurgent samurai who later acted as leaders of the new government.13

Many of the members of the new elite had experienced studying in Europe or visiting the United States and understood that, in order to be able to negotiate in equal terms with Western powers and resist their colonial voracity, they needed to build a nation-state. For such reason, their main project was expressed by the slogans bunmei kaika (join civilization), wakon yōsai (Japanese spirit Western technology), and fukoku kyōhei (rich country, strong army) (Iida, 2002). The aim was to change the structure of the country according to the ideas and institutions that were central in the models that they perceived as the most powerful around the world: from the establishment of a constitution and parliament that reflected a modern governmental system and social order, to the implementation of the capitalist

13 Sometimes referred as Meiji revolution, others as Meiji restoration. There is a lot of debate about how to name this movement without imposing Eurocentric ideas. I decided to refer to it as restoration movement because the declared aim of the insurgents was to restore the power of the imperial institution – at that time represented by Emperor Mutsuhito – posthumously named Meiji. In modern Japanese history, it became customary to distinguish eras according to the reigning emperor. The period revised in this section covers three eras: Meiji, from 1868 until the death of Emperor Meiji in 1912; Taishō, from then to 1926; and the first part of Shōwa (this era lasted until 1989).
economic system and the focus on the military industry, which allowed a rapid industrialization.

This ‘nationalist revolution’ required to have a core, so the government promoted the national polity theory – *kokutai*\(^{14}\) – that presented Japan as an extended family derived from the Imperial one (Oguma, 2002). Through this, the imperial institution became the most powerful unifying force of Japan and the center of social and national identity; “[i]t came to link individuals to immediate communities of family, workplace, and neighborhood – and beyond that to the imagined community of nation and empire” (Gordon, 2003, p. 70).

In order to propagate among people the ideas that allowed the change, the government had to apply many measures in different areas. Structurally, the semi-autonomous domain lands that prevailed during Tokugawa regime were abolished and turned into prefectures, consolidating them as political units dependent on the central government in Tokyo. Then, the bureaucratic system that existed in the previous regime was gradually transformed into a more functional one, through the establishment of ministries, which were staffed by people who passed civil service examinations and responded to the emperor, not to any intermediate governmental body, adding legitimacy to the state.

This regulations were established in the Meiji constitution, which was written following the advice of a German expert and presented *as a gift* from the emperor to people in 1889, an action that allowed Japan to be acknowledged by Western powers as having a constitutional government and, internally, located the emperor as the center of the nation. Through this constitution, Japan was declared a sovereign state, having the figure of the emperor as the highest authority, administrated by ministries of state, and legislated by a Diet which included a House of Representatives elected by people.\(^{15}\) Other important changes that allowed the unification of Japan as a nation-state were more socially relevant and were included as rights and obligations of the subjects in the Meiji constitution: abolition of status system, universal education, and universal conscription.

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\(^{14}\) This ideology was not entirely new; it took ideas from schools of thought of the Tokugawa period and then adapted them to fit the modernization project. See Oguma (2002), Suzuki (2005).

\(^{15}\) At the beginning, the right to vote was given only to male tax-payers, leaving most people without voice on the governmental decisions.
For centuries, Japanese people had been divided in status groups - nobility, samurai, farmers, artisans, merchants and outcasts – which had privileges or limitations accordingly. The Meiji leaders, although samurai themselves, wanted the meritocracy to permeate not only the government, but also the social order, so they eliminated the privileges of the samurai class and abolished the lower distinctive groups to make them all appear as *commoners* in legal terms. Most samurai and higher class farmers, artisans and merchants were helped by this, as they already had more education and resources than the rest of people, who had a difficult time in the newly opened society.

However, the educational gap was not something that leaders wanted. Just as Gellner had argued in his study of nationalisms and nations about the central function of the state-controlled educational system in the modern nation-states, Meiji government recognized that the source of economic and military dominance of Euro-American powers was education. For such reason, in 1872, it was declared compulsory for all boys and girls to receive four years of elementary instruction; at the same time, a system of schools that went from elementary to higher levels was established. At the beginning, the education was somehow liberal and pragmatic, but people began to use what they learned to criticize the government. Noticing this, the leaders of the Ministry of Education – advised by German experts – took actions to change the curriculum into one aimed at building in people the type of moral that for centuries had been taught to samurai – Confucian ideas of obedience, loyalty, filial piety and comradeship among equals. By 1890, an Imperial Rescript on Education established as principles what was already done in practice: a mixed set of Eastern and Western ideas that inculcated selected Confucian principles as part of the social values and raised talented people to serve the state – in the name of the nation. Thus, “[b]inding together these moralistic injunctions to filial piety and patriotism[,] were statements linking such values directly to the emperor and his ancestors” (Gordon, 2003, p. 105).

Even if these general values were taught ‘universally’ in elementary education, there was some differentiation between other ideological elements according to the sex of the student: girls were trained to become ‘good wives and wise mothers’ (*ryōsai kenbo*) and respect the ‘appropriate’ roles for women – meaning those inside the home - while boys were educated to be part of the public sphere and contribute ‘actively’ to the building of the nation.
Nevertheless, gradually, as people could afford access to higher education, the ideological gap decreased because students were given more autonomy in higher levels and, consequently, some women were able to study more; many of them turned to be teachers that later were to promote girls’ learning.

Elementary education was closely related to another key element in the agenda: establishing a new military force. Taking the example of European powers of the time, the government decreed that all adult male – age twenty and older - had to enlist. In both cases – compulsive education and conscription – people tried to find their way out by all means, including the upsurge of many riots, but slowly accepted the changes and some years after the Imperial Rescript on Education, school attendance reached more than ninety percent for boys and girls and, with the help of the Confucian and nationalistic indoctrination promoted by the education system, people also accepted military services as part of their patriotic duties.

At the end of the nineteenth century, “Japan’s military was strong enough to move from the task of keeping order at home to that of imposing its will overseas” (Gordon, 2003, p. 67), evolving from a nationalist revolution to an ultra-nationalist expansionism. However, this expansionism was not possible only through the patriotic sentiment promoted in people. It was the rapid industrialization - led by the textile industry and coal and metal mining - during the three last decades of the nineteenth century the one that supported economic and social circumstances that led to it. Capitalism in Japan developed centered in broad-range monopolies called zaibatsu – economic empires that included financial, production and distribution chains and maintained a close relation with the state. This characteristic allowed an industrial progress that reflected also in the improving of communications networks – railroads, ports – and military resources for the country.

The nationalist ideological movement and the industrial and military developments were parallel to an international context that required Japanese leaders to take an active role outside. Japan had been victim of unfair trade treaties with Euro-American powers, so the government had as main aim their revision, but also noticed the importance of signing similar agreements with neighboring countries for increasing Japanese production to find markets
and people to have access to the agricultural goods that domestically were no longer available in the needed quantities because of the massive migration to cities.

In this sense, Korea was a major strategic interest for Japan; however, Korea was tributary to China and had its own crisis, so Japanese diplomats and industrial and military leaders tried to promote and support Korea’s independence through advice on how to industrialize and build an army. After years of negotiations and conflicts among Korea, China and Japan, a rebellion in Korea against Korean government and foreign presence led to the Sino-Japanese war in 1894. Japan won in 1895, getting Korea to be recognized as an ‘independent’ state by China, and receiving control over Taiwan and other islands, as well as winning rights to build a railroad in Manchuria – against the protests of Russians who had economic interests there. ¹⁶ The victory had made Japan improve its status in front of Western powers, opening the door for the revision of the unfair treaties. Domestically, it caused an outburst of nationalist pride that further unified the sentiments of the population, gave government the public support that had lacked for so long, and left economic gains that allowed the improvement of the industry of ship-building to support a growing military power.

Nonetheless, the intentions of Japan of imposing its ways in Korea and the interests of Russia over Manchuria, gave place to more international conflicts. The Russians moved troops to Korea in the mid of internal conflicts in the peninsula. Japanese intelligentsia was calling the government to move to war in order to maintain the dominance in Asian territories, but military leaders were not convinced; nonetheless, in 1904, Japan declared war on Russia to secure hegemony over Korea and Manchuria. In 1905, a peace treaty was signed and Japan obtained control over railways and some ports in Manchuria and exclusive rights in dealings with Korea that resulted, two years later, in its annexation as colony, but this time the cost – in men and resources – had been very high.

The gained position in other territories inspired Japanese intelligentsia to promote the indigenous traditions of Tokugawa times that had claimed that Japan was to be at the center of the world; these were well received by a high percentage of common people who were

¹⁶ By this time, Japan had also took control over the Ryūkyū Islands – Okinawa (1879).
also pleased by Japan’s improved position. In 1907, the Ministry of Education added two more years to compulsory education and emphasized the nationalist ideas and the figure of the emperor in its contents. Teachers were promoted by government as social and cultural leaders that were at the service of the nation; youth groups led by school principals were sponsored to endorse the national virtues through leisure activities.

The next decades saw the consolidation of Japanese official nationalism. People became more open to the foreign ideas and trends – from Communism, Marxism and feminism to jazz, movies and baseball; however, most of these were amalgamated with Japanese ‘traditions’ just as the previous years. By the 1930s, there were violent internal turbulences for political reasons in the context of an economic crisis, but influential people – military leaders, bureaucrats, intellectuals, activists – who had been promoting a reinforcement of indigenous Japanese culture over the Western practices and ideas, found echo in the then Prime Minister Konoe. This wing advocated a strong central control of the economy, politics and social life in order to resolve the economic depression and social conflicts that Western free market economy had caused. The economy was put completely to the service of national goals through the ratification of a National General Mobilization Law, which allowed bureaucracy to control material and human resources in times of national emergency. Soon, an ultra-nationalist movement appeared in Japan’s elites.

In 1937, an incident between Japanese and Chinese troops near Beijin escalated to the point that Japan occupied many Chinese territories. At the end of that year, Japanese troops entered Nanjing and, for weeks, raped women and killed countless civilians - the Nanjing Massacre remains as one of the conflictive issues between the two states. Japanese army continued its advances along with terrorizing acts. It also sent troops to Indochina and, by 1941, Japan was controlling the peninsula. Back in Japanese territory, the Mobilization Law had been applied and people – including women and children - and resources were put to work for war strategic industries.

As the United States’ interests in Asia were threatened by these developments, the American president Roosevelt decided to cut commercial relations with Japan and applied an embargo of oil supplies until the Asian power accepted to retreat completely from China.
The Japanese diplomatic and military leaders tried to negotiate, but were unable to reach an agreement with the United States and, in a confusing chain of events, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, giving the Americans reasons to begin what was to be known as the Pacific War. Given the scale of the new enemy, Japanese military leaders began to mobilize also people from its colonies – Korea and Taiwan – into different war strategic posts; some women and children were sent to Japan to work in factories; some young women were sent to military bases to act as comfort women, the euphemistic term used to refer to women who were forced to serve the sexual needs of soldiers (Hayashi, 1998; Hicks, 1997).

After several months of fighting throughout Asia, Japanese forces were weakening and resources were lacking. In mid-August, 1945, the emperor surrendered and another period in Japanese history began; one in which nationalism – as a political movement - was regarded almost as a taboo. Nonetheless, the nationalist ideology that was built during the modernization period did not disappear and was to reemerge in different forms at different times.

1.1.2 THE NATIONAL IDENTITY: INVENTING TRADITIONS AND FINDING THE JAPANESE ESSENCE

In his analysis on myths and memories in the formation of nations, Anthony Smith (1999, p. 57) said that “no national movement and no persisting ethnic identity can emerge without a bedrock of shared meanings and ideals, which guide action and determine the direction of social change.” In order to achieve such shared ideology, leaders of nationalist movements rely on a construction from above or on the rescue of elements from below. In Japan, the evolution of nationalism from Meiji restoration to the imperialist years showed a mix of these types.

Before Meiji, for generations, people in the Japanese territory were socially and culturally divided because of the status system and the existence of semi-autonomous provinces; for this reason, the leaders of the new government took measures to unify the society, so this could respond to the needs of the state. Through a centralized education

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17 There is still debate about whether or not Japan notified in time to the United States about the ending of negotiations.
18 For more on the controversial topic of comfort women, see Drea, et al. (2006), Hayashi (2008), Kuki (2013).
system and by giving support to specific religious and cultural practices, the government had a strong influence on the shaping of Japanese identity and the elements that would later be considered by many Japanese and foreigners as traditional and essential features of Japan and its people. Many of those traditions were promoted as such from above, having most people firstly introduced to them during this period. However, the leaders of the government were not the only ones that impacted the mainstream Japanese identity and the elements that would later be considered by many Japanese and foreigners as traditional and essential features of Japan and its people.

As it was said before, the official position to build the Japanese unity endorsed the ideas of the national polity theory – kokutai - through education and edicts that made the imperial institution the core of the nation-state. The main idea behind this theory was that Japan was a pure and homogeneous nation because all Japanese were descendants of the same bloodline; for such reason, they were a family and the emperor was like a father to all people (Suzuki, 2005, p. 71). To support this theory, Shinto was made traditionally and distinctively Japanese during this period. George Sansom (1958), a British diplomat who lived in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century and specialized in Japanese pre-modern history, said that Shinto was a pagan cult that promoted and expressed the “love of their [Japanese] own land and a sense of continuity, expressed in veneration for ancestors and strong family affection, together with a worship of the powers of nature” (p. 232). Thus, he defended that those characteristics that were being promoted as traditional were not necessarily invented, because they were fundamental in the Shinto ideology, which existed since many centuries before. However, even if Shinto had, in fact, been associated with the imperial institution for a long time, it was not until the Meiji period that it acquired a major role within the state.

Between 1870 and 1900, the government’s arrangements to relate the Shinto institution to the national and imperial notions and spread this ideology to people, made it be regarded as the Japanese religion. Other cults were supposed to be allowed to coexist, as far as they were not subversive, but conflicts between Buddhists and Christians, as well as
between them and the official side, were continuous. Nevertheless, the status of Shinto as the national religion allowed the government to demand the obedience of people to the emperor – and the state – over all other religious or moral beliefs. By that time, Shinto’s moral was also combined with the Confucian virtues related to filial piety and the patriotic sentiment that were being greatly promoted as Japanese virtues (Oguma, 2002).

Nonetheless, the advancement of capitalism and the promotion of modernity had caused hybridity in cultural expressions. In this regard, the government was not very supportive of the native Japanese practices; some expressions existent in Japan since centuries before - like Noh or Kabuki theater forms, which had been financially sustained by the Tokugawa government - were relegated in the new administration because they were seen as feudalistic and, thus, obsolete for the current aims towards modernization. On the contrary, painters, musicians, writers and actors were supported so they could learn Western techniques. In time, neither the Western nor the native style remained in a pure form; both types of cultural expressions and practices were reshaped and later assumed as Japanese traditions and, as Gordon (2003) argues, created new concepts of Japaneseness. Nevertheless, during the first decades of the twentieth century, this cultural Westernization became highly criticized. Some intellectuals agreed with the government on the decision about following the Western model regarding technologic and military areas, but they also considered necessary to regain the values of the traditional Japanese culture and society. Most expressed their belief that the period of modernization following the Western pattern had poisoned Japanese essence, being the urban modern women one of the most relevant examples of such effects.

Officially, the place of women continued to be strictly confined to the private realm and directed by the ideals of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ slogan that was the guideline for girls education. In the Civil Code of 1898, women were placed under male authority in most situations, denying them control on assets and decisions on where to live and whom to marry (Uno, 1993). Also, according to the Annual Report of the Minister of Education of the same year, higher education school for women were designed “to give instruction in such higher subjects of general education as [were] necessary for females” (Bacon, 2010, p. 100). Also, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were numerous newspapers and magazines
designed to appeal to women only, but having mostly men and their views dictating the dominant contents, which were mostly dedicated to give advice on how to be a better mother and wife in the new Japan. As can be expected, these measures had a great impact on framing Japanese gender roles in public and private realms.

Nevertheless, the needs and opportunities that were presented by the modern economy to young women to have jobs, as well as the proliferation of mass media – press, radio, cinema – impacted positively their access of information, being able to get images of the world and a glimpse on the ideas and trends of women in the United States and Europe, and acquiring a relative economic power that allowed them to buy some things on their own. On this way, during the 1910s and 1920s, new archetypes of women appeared in Japan, expressing some of the social changes brought by modernity. In the 1910s, it was the *new woman*, the professional working female, the one that expressed her rejection to the dominant idea that dictated that only men were supposed to enjoy independence and freedom in economic, social and political spheres. By the 1920s, it was the *moga* – contraction of *modern girl* – the one that appeared in Japanese urban life and was obsessively represented in the media of the time as an emblem of the consumer and mass culture that was being adopted from the West (Sato, 2003). The professional women had been seen by male-dominated society with certain worry of their acquired freedom of thought becoming dangerous, but most people agreed that the enlightenment of women was an important factor to achieve a most civilized life (Bacon, 2010); however, *moga* were accused to be just plainly shallow, hedonist and immoral, acting out against tradition, being *un-Japanese* and *un-patriotic* (Gordon, 2003; Uno, 1993).

The extensiveness that media had reached in Japan at that time allowed for a dissemination of a discourse on the *moga* that was far more spectacular than the actual presence of these women in society, becoming media themselves the main creators and detractors of the phenomenon. In the dominant discourse about these women, they were said to be overly receptive to everything foreign, they could be identified by their Western attire
and short hair and, influenced by the love scenes in American movies, they had become promiscuous (Sato, 2003).

This cultural context was one more of the reasons for which many intellectuals supported the government in taking measures to ban Western cultural forms, emphasize Japanese identity, regain control of the economy, and fight to release Asia from Western hegemony during the first decades of the twentieth century. As the relation of Japan with the exterior intensified and the state’s involvement in wars led to the annexation of Korea and Taiwan, intellectuals - which by that time had become erudite in Western methods and theories - developed different ideas and positions about Japanese identity discourses not only officially, but also popularly, because the debates on Japanese nation and identity had made their way to the mainstream public discourse through media (Gordon, 2003; Iida, 2002; Oguma, 2002).

One of the leading theories on Japanese origin of this time was promoted by history professors of the Tokyo Imperial University who argued that Japanese and Koreans had a shared heritage. The proponents of this interpretation praised the annexation of Korea in 1910. Soon, the theory became part of the broader discourse on the ‘national spirit’ behind the Great Japanese Empire. Many common people, academics and bureaucrats seemed to agree on the idea that Japan’s destiny was not to remain an island nation, but to become a continental empire. Also, the idea that Japanese were a mixture of different nations - not only Korean – popularized, arguing that Japanese nation was adaptable and ethically superior to ‘racist’ Caucasian nations. Around the same time, on another field, Unno Kōtoku, a pioneer of Japanese eugenics, developed a theory that advocated the protection of Japanese racial purity under the limit marked by the consanguineous marriage that would cause deterioration in the capabilities of the race; to avoid it, the intermarriage with similar races – Asian - was advised (Oguma, 2002).

These views were incorporated to the new official National Polity Theory to support the expansionism. This renewed version promoted that Japan was like an *ie* (household), in

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19 It is worth saying that during the same time, and even decades before, men wearing Western attire was never seen as subversive. On the contrary, those men’s international look was just an expression of their adoption of modernity, but it was not disruptive of them being loyal and patriotic citizens of Japan (Sato, 2003).
which brides and adopted children were assimilated and unified under the ancestors of the family they entered; in the same way, Japan and Japanese people were – and had been throughout history - able to embrace and assimilate outsiders under the strong unity that provided the imperial ancestors. By 1918, the textbooks used in elementary schools had already implicit this ideology, presenting Japan as multiethnic, as diverse, including in this not only the colonies, but also the ethnic group that had lived in Japanese territory for centuries - the Ainu (Oguma, 2002).

However, this trend did not remain popular for long. In the period between the 1920 and the end of the Pacific War, many discourses on the uniqueness of Japanese reappeared and were to be influential later that century. One of those was that of Yanagita Kunio (1942), an advocate of the rescue and promotion of Japanese folklore as a unifying force from below. He argued the need to recover the original Japanese culture, which existed before Confucian, Buddhist and Western influences. He considered that it was to be found in the ‘mountain people’ or natives that had lost battles against the mixed race that had established as the ruling Japanese nation. In order to obtain rice, he argued, those mountain people interacted with people of the plains and were eventually assimilated. In this sense, rice was at the core of Japanese culture and symbolized the assimilation of indigenous nations. Yanagita thought that, in turbulent times, rural cultures were the heart of a common Japanese culture and had to be rescued as an antidote against the Western modernity.20

Contrary to the argument of the existence of native people besides the Japanese, Kiyono Kenji and Hasebe Kotondo, building on anthropological methods, argued that Japanese people had evolved directly from people of the Stone Age, the same as the Ainu, but in a different chain of evolution (Oguma, 2002). Thus, according to this theory, Japanese people were original inhabitants of the country and they were a distinctive nation.

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20 Yanagita’s thought evolved along with the external circumstances. His interest in the folklore and diversity of the rural regions of Japan and the writings about the mountain people were part of his early works during the early twentieth century, when difference and assimilation were being promoted; then, during the 1930s and early 1940s, he turned the focus on finding ‘the national character’, the elements that were particular, characteristic and unifying in Japanese culture. See Befu (2001), Morris-Suzuki (1995), Oguma (2002).
Watsuji Tetsurō (1961), an expert on ethical studies, also developed a theory of a unique nation, but based on culture as dependent on climate. He argued that Japan had a special monsoon climate in which a rich nature with four characteristic seasons and seasonal and sudden typhoons collided; these particular natural features were not found in any other place in the world, reason for which Japanese people had a unique, homogeneous, but complex culture and psychology. According to his interpretation, Japanese people are naturally peaceful, receptive and perseverant, but also present sudden emotional changes.  

Later, around the time of Japan’s advancement in China and the growing conflicts with the United States in the context of the world conflicts, people influenced by the Nazi movement - using some ideas of Kiyono, Hasebe and Unno - formed the Japanese Racial Hygiene Association and rejected the influx of alien nations and the mixing of blood with non-Japanese people. They proposed that, in order to protect Japanese Empire, Koreans had to be sent back to Korea as soon as the war ended and a clear majority of Japanese had to be established in Korean and Taiwanese territories to avoid the need of intermarrying with them. This Association had close ties with the Ministry of Health and Welfare during the late 1930s and 1940s, but agreeing openly would mean to eliminate the ideological excuse to control Asia, so the official position remained declaring that Japan was not a homogenous nation-state and that Japanese were not ‘nationalists’. According to Oguma (2002, p. 288):

The argument that Japan was not a country of nationalism – in other words, was not a country where ethnic identity was emphasized – meant that […] Japan was not a country that followed the Nazi ideology of an exclusive nationalism (minzokushugi), but rather one that believed in an assimilation of nations centred around the Emperor.

In the 1940s, when Japan had become a direct enemy of the United States, the American government supported the appearance of studies focused on the understanding of Japanese history and people, in order to find information on the better ways to proceed during and after the war. In 1944, Ruth Benedict (2006 [1946]), a cultural anthropologist, began to work to find general patterns in Japanese culture that could be used by the American government to make Japan surrender. She was aware of the complex nature of Japanese people – something that Watsuji had attributed to climate; Benedict wrote that they were

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21 See also Wu (2001).
aggressive and unaggressive, insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, loyal and treacherous. According to her findings, Japanese society was hierarchical and had a culture of shame, making people highly aware of the opinions of others about them. This study was to be very influential in the formation of the imagery about Japanese society not only in the Western countries, but also inside Japan during later decades – as it will be discussed later.

At the end of the war, Allied forces occupied Japanese territory for near a decade to direct the reconstruction process in many areas. Following their guidelines, a new Constitution was promulgated in 1946: sovereignty was a right of Japanese people (*kokumin*), not of the emperor and, established in the Article 9, Japan renounced to war and to its right to maintain military forces of any kind. Among the many other changes that this new Constitution involved, in terms of national identity the most relevant were the separation of politics and religion – taking away the national character of Shinto – and the new role of the emperor, whose political power was completely removed, but was allowed to remain as a symbol. This was influenced by the arguments of Japanese intellectuals – including Watsuji and other ideologists of previous decades – who were reluctant to accept the interference of alien people in the cultural life of Japan and concluded that it was important to maintain the imperial house as a symbol of national unity.

The nationalist revolution that had evolved into imperialism was over along with the Pacific War, but many of the ideas that had been shaped then about Japanese society and culture were already recognized and naturalized as part of the modern national identity, which was “only articulable in universal terms, as a sameness-in-difference, as a difference and a distinction vis-à-vis the assumed universality of the West” (Iida, 2002, p. 15). As soon as the circumstances allowed, the discourses on the homogeneity of Japanese nation reappeared even stronger; without the limits that had imposed the previous expansionist aims, reemerging into another form of nationalism that reached a peak between the 1970s and the 1980s.

1.2 CULTURAL NATIONALISM: STRENGTHENING JAPANESE IDENTITY
In 1952, the Occupation forces that had been supervising Japan’s restructuration left. Japan had survived the Pacific War without being absorbed by other state and without being
divided; its autonomy had been mostly respected under the condition of making the structural changes needed to leave all militarism behind and become a democratic nation. Yet, Japanese society had to face all the changes that this process implied not only ideologically, but also practically: the presence of Occupation forces in military bases in Japanese territory had its effect in culture and society; the disintegration of the empire and the structural changes of the economic system impacted the social composition of Japan, bringing back many Japanese from overseas, sending many Koreans and Taiwanese to their homelands, and inducing a substantial migration from rural to urban areas; and, the new Constitution had given new rights and obligations to citizens, impacting the social and political participation.

Between the decades of the 1950s and 1970s, the effects of such policies and measures were reflected in the transformations of the life-style of people, the structure of families, and the gender roles and stereotypes that are best symbolized by the formation of the national middle-class to which the majority of Japanese considered themselves to belong. At the same time, a growing discourse on the Japanese identity - a movement of cultural nationalism that had continued among intellectuals since war times - permeated to the whole society and popularized during the 1970s through media in such way that it has even been described as a civil religion. The national middle-class was something that was proudly mentioned by cultural nationalists to highlight the homogeneity among Japanese society; nonetheless, if such homogeneity existed, one is compelled to wonder why a cultural nationalist movement appeared in the first place and why there was a need to strengthen the national unity.

In this section, I discuss some particular sociocultural circumstances that I consider instigated the development of the cultural nationalism movement of these decades, under the argument that the expansion of the consumer society with the outburst of the cultural industries and the accelerated economic growth lived from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s,

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22 As Ivy (1993) notes, the term to refer to the phenomenon has been disputed: new middle-class society, new middle-mass society, new middle-stratum society, mass society, etc. I chose to use the first because it is the most common term found in the studies of this phenomenon and I do not agree with the connotations that the term ‘mass’ has in some schools of cultural studies; however, I will be using it as middle-class because I also recognize the difficulties that the notion ‘class’ implies.

23 See Befu (2001).
worked to unify the goals and ideals of a majority of Japanese, but social tensions that had been growing for decades, as well as those caused by Japan’s rapid industrialization and full incorporation to the ‘First World’, exploded in the form of civil movements that challenged the supposed harmony of Japanese society and the ideas of homogeneity.

1.2.1 POST-WAR SOCIETY AND ITS CHALLENGES

The democratic order conveyed to Japan had affected society in many ways. Perhaps one of the most relevant changes – because it impacted the daily life relations of people and the family structure – was the egalitarian legal status given to men and women. This, legally freed Japanese women from the control of their fathers or husbands, giving them the right to vote, to own and manage properties, and to have equal opportunities than men in marriage, divorce, employment and education (Buckley, 1993). The almost immediate result had been an increasing number of female workers entering the labor force. However, this increased participation acquired very distinctive characteristics framed by the discourse on femininity that was still deeply rooted in prewar ideas of the ‘good wife, wise mother’.

The tendency in female labor resulted in an M-shaped labor curve: young single women recently graduated from high school entered the labor force in office or service support positions – the so called office ladies or OL – and then retired when marrying; after raising the children, some went back to the labor force, but only in part-time and minor posts (Buckley, 1993; Upham, 1993). This trend was greatly molded by major corporations that applied policies regarding the hiring of female workers; in general, women were expected to have only high school education, so they would not be able to have the salaries or positions of men, and they were required to quit when marrying or when reaching the thirty-year-old mark, whichever came first (Upham, 1993).

The access to work while young and single had progressively made women wait more to marry and decrease the number of children they had, something that made government and industry leaders very concerned. In different platforms debates appeared discussing the impacts that the increasing presence of women in higher education schools, workplaces, politics and social movements were having on family and society. In 1964, the recently elected Prime Minister Sato Eisaku called women to “bear more children” amid worries
triggered by the decreasing nation’s birthrate, something that caused an uproar from feminist groups (Buckley, 1993, p. 351). Some cases of women who had been fired under the gender-differentiating policies of companies were taken to court and won; nonetheless, these were the less and the feminist movement, although successful to influence single-issue or limited-term campaigns, never reached massive mobilizations, and mostly disappeared after the 1970s (Buckley, 1993; Uno, 1993; Upham, 1993).

In general, the tendency of the women’s employment remained M-shaped and the ideology behind the gender roles persisted: women were still marrying mostly in their twenties and, as soon as that happened, they entered the traditional and expected role of housewife and, most importantly, of dedicated and loving mother (Tanaka Y., 1995). The discourses on women’s responsibility for childrearing and household management were pervasive; schools and media promoted practices and images that implicitly dictated that the place of women was in the house (Uno, 1993) and the government and industry, by denying them practical choices, created a role of wife and mother that “was satisfying for most women and highly valued, indeed celebrated, by the rest of society” (Upham, 1993, p. 334).

This was closely related to the fact that men’s roles had also reached a generalized pattern embodied by the iconic salaryman - full-time corporate or bureaucratic male positions that required a high degree of dedication. A father who was a salaryman was mostly absent from home, something that required the wife’s commitment to the house and the children; by having this type of employment, men were able to access, along with their families, to the promised land of Japanese middle-class.24

The access to the financial security of the salaryman status was directly related to the possession of a title from a prestigious school – in general, public universities. So, a successful future became dependent on the access to high level public education, which was given to students according to the results on merit-based entrance exams. From elementary school to university, every change of level implied the competition for a place through those tests, a system that made children and mothers obsessed with preparing for them, spending

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24 For a broad study on the salaryman and the middle-class that represented the reborn of Japan after the defeat in the Pacific War, see Vogel (1971).
time and money in extra classes (Gordon, 2003). This ‘examination hell’ became part of the family environment; education and exams were the same for girls and boys, but the ideals behind trying to get into good schools, however, were influenced in most cases by gender stereotypes. Boys were encouraged or even obligated to study with the expectation that, by getting into a respectable school, they could get a good job and career; girls, on the other hand, were not expected to make a career and with a regular high school title they could access to office lady positions, but the commuting to a prestigious university could mean the catch of a successful husband.  

These changes in family structure and the generalization of gender and family ideals were sponsored and reinforced by the ‘Japanese miracle’ (1955-1973), which signified a high employment rate and an improvement in the real income of families. This was reflected in a lower percentage of familiar expense dedicated to cover basic needs as food, housing, energy, and medical services, and a higher portion used on clothing, hobbies, education and dining out (Mandujano Salazar, 2011).

This economic environment allowed the expansion of the cultural industries and the development of a consumer society that shared a very standardized culture. In 1953, the television was introduced to Japan and changed the patterns of consumption; the television itself became one of the most desirable commodities (Ivy, 1993; Vogel, 1971). This was fueled by the coverage of special events. In 1959, the marriage of the Crown Prince Akihito to a ‘commoner’ was broadcasted; this event also symbolized the change in the marriage customs to the postwar ideal: “marrying for love and forming a new nuclear family, in close contact with a larger family circle” (Gordon, 2003, p. 265). Then, in 1964, the desire to watch the Tokyo Olympics made more people buy a television set; the Olympics were a major cultural event that induced the national pride due to the opportunity to show the world Japan’s peacefulness and impressive economic and technological achievements. By the end of the Olympics, television became the largest and most powerful mass medium in Japan.

25 For an analysis on the expected role of women in Japanese society during the second half of the twentieth century, see Tanaka Y. (1995).
26 The usual practice until then was for marriages to be arranged.
shaping not only the consumption tastes of people, but also cultural expressions and ideals (Ivy, 1993; Lukács, 2010).

During the 1960s, the broadcasting of entertainment became crucial for the advertising of the many commodities that the industrial growth was producing; at the beginning, the American family series formed a kind of utopian goal for Japanese – the American middle class family – but, soon, these were replaced by Japanese family dramas that portrayed women-centered households that followed the roles promoted by the government, schools and industry. The imagery of these family programs was packed with all the appliances that evoked a ‘bright new life’. Besides dramas, the 1960s witnessed the explosion of music, games and comedy shows in television and the advertising campaigns shown between programs, all of which supported the notion of Japanese people sharing a common sociocultural world represented by the products that were being mass-produced by Japanese industries. Japanese people’s life-style became highly standardized according to those images and the possessions portrayed there became the indicators of the middle-class dream, something that fueled a consumer revolution.

Hence, between the 1950s and 1960s, Japan developed a consumer society and a mass-culture driven by the national middle-class ideal that became the goal for most. There was a proliferation of nuclear families with highly standardized life-styles that were not restricted to the cities, but - through media and commercial infrastructure - had also impacted the rural households (Gordon, 2003). The Japanese typical family became one with access to the newest consumer goods, with a husband having a full-time safe job, a wife devoted to the house shores and the supervision of the children, and children who spent most of their time studying to pass the entrance exams for prestigious higher level public schools.

The notion of ‘culturally homogenized’ masses, of course, involved the fragmentation of a postmodern society in which the individual was turned into an anonymity, dominated by externally imposed demands. Thus, it is not surprising that, at the same time that a considerable majority of Japanese people seemed to align to that national ideal, civil movements and protests peaked, contradicting those images of success and happiness.
During the Meiji and Taishō eras, many civil groups had protested either against government actions or asking for them; however, as the national leaders strengthened their control over people to direct all their efforts to the advancements in Asia, the activism nearly vanished. However, after the defeat in the Pacific War, the political and legal reforms to make Japan a democratic nation-state allowed left-wing movements to realign. Intellectuals, journalists, students and women were the sectors that formed the majority of the activist groups that flourished between the 1950s and 1970s, which were mostly pacific; however, the communists and socialists groups – known as ‘New Left’ - were extreme in their demonstrations. The main complaints during this period were against American military presence in Japan and Asia, against the pollution due to the rapid industrial development, and against minority discrimination.

The movements against American military actions began as soon as 1954, when women began to collect signatures to ban nuclear weapons, action that evolved into an international pacific movement. However, the extension of the Japan-USA Security Treaty and the interventions of the United States in Vietnam caused more radical opposition from socialists and communists groups (Kurokawa, 2010). Besides American presence, these decades made Japanese people worry about the environment. The industrialization that had begun during the Meiji era, intensified between the late 1940s and the 1960s; the pollution that this was causing and, consequently, the damage to people became a public concern due to major incidents in the 1950s and 1960s.

Minority groups were another cause of conflict. At the end of the Pacific War, Koreans and Taiwanese who had been taken to the country to work during the war – and had legal status as Japanese citizens for being colonial subjects - were allowed to go back to their

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27 The violent acts of the communist and socialist groups during the 1970s rapidly won the aversion of people, making them vanish from the Japanese political scene.
28 In 1953, people of the southern city of Mimata began to fell ill and many died of something that was called the Mimata disease, which was linked to the mercury contamination caused by a chemical plant in the region. In 1959, the victims organized and negotiated with the leaders of the plant an economic agreement in order to maintain ‘harmony’ in the city. However, in 1964 in Niigata, a similar case appeared and victims took the case to courts. In both situations, it was later known that the government had tried to conceal the links between the illnesses and the chemical pollution, something that was widely debated in media and made public very sensitive to environmental issues. The media attention and the civil mobilization on those and other cases of pollution pressed the government to enact the Public Hazard Law (1967) and to establish the Environment Protection Agency (1971). See Kurokawa (2010), Upham (1993).
homelands, but not all did, and even others arrived fleeing from the conflicts in the Korean Peninsula. The result was that Koreans consolidated as the largest ethnic minority in Japan and, among them, a substantial group had a left-wing tradition. The Japanese government and the Occupation forces discussed the possibility of deporting the ‘subversive Koreans’ and eliminating the Korean ethnic schools that were in Japanese territory, something that caused protests from the affected groups.

The plans were dropped, but in 1952 the Japanese government revoked Japanese nationality to Koreans and Taiwanese and the following years began many campaigns to repatriate them, mainly the Koreans as they were perceived as violent, socially weak, and a danger for Japan. The discourse of Japanese leaders about resident Koreans – zainichi – was filled with distinctions of the ‘bad’ and the ‘good’ aliens; many zainichi, as those who had protested, were referred to as ‘bad aliens’ because of their violent and revolutionary tendencies and their sympathy towards communism (Morris-Suzuki, 2005; 2006). It can be inferred that this discourse predisposed many Koreans to refrain from mobilizing the following years, when the discrimination of other minority groups caused protests and civil mobilization. Nevertheless, dealing with the Korean community continued to be a difficult issue for Japanese and, as the country was building its middle-class society, Koreans’ economic marginality was seen as an obstacle, continuing the stigmatization of zainichi as ‘bad aliens’.

But the stigma and discrimination was not limited to people of foreign origin. Native communities had also been historically discriminated or neglected: the Ainu, the Okinawans and the Burakumin. 29 They also mobilized during these decades to express their inconformities. The Burakumin were racially not different from the majority of Japanese, but they lived in segregated neighborhoods and this made them susceptible to be identified as such when applying for school, jobs or public positions; employers and institutions usually rejected them (Upham, 1993). In 1950, an activist group that had origins in a pre-War movement reorganized and denounced the discrimination against Burakumin. This group pressured the government to take measures to improve the living conditions of the

29 The Burakumin were the descendants of the outcaste groups of the Tokugawa period. Even when in Meiji the status distinctions had been abolished, the discrimination had continued. See Nishimura (2010).
community; in 1969, the Diet passed the Law on Special Measures for Dowa Projects that put in practice many actions aimed at the improvement of education, health and infrastructure for Burakumin groups. Even though the individual discrimination remained, the living conditions of Buraku people improved considerably, narrowing the differences with the majority of Japanese (Nishimura, 2010; Upham, 1993). In the same period, groups of Ainu activists raised and expressed their incomfort due to marginalization in Japanese society and the explotation of natural resources in Ainu lands that were being targeted amid the industrial expansion (Levin, 2001). Okinawans also protested against the presence of American troops in the islands and the administrative control that the foreigners had (Toriyama, 2003).

Therefore, the decades of the 1950s and 1960s in Japan presented two different, but related sociocultural tendencies: on the one hand, a mass consumer society and national middle-class ideology proclaiming that the Japanese nation had achieved a socio-cultural homogeneity, harmony and unity; on the other, the marginalized realities that had been lingering for decades or that had been created in the search for the homogeneous national ideal under rapid industrialization, exploded revealing the fallacy of such depiction. In this context, a discourse centered on the Japanese identity popularized; this phenomenon, known as nihonron, nihonjinron, nihon shakairon or nihon bunkaron, was a cultural nationalism movement that was very pervasive not only in Japan, but also outside, reviving past ideas on the ‘traditional’ Japanese values.

1.2.2 RECOVERING THE PRIDE OF BEING JAPANESE: THE DISCOURSE OF THE NIHONJINRON

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30 The Ainu movement intensified during the 1980s and 1990s supported by the indigenous movements around the world. In 2008, the Ainu were officially recognized as indigenous people of Japan with a distinctive language, religion and culture (Ito, 2008). For more on the Ainu movement, see Levin (2001).
31 Okinawa was originally the Ryukyu Kingdom, but in 1879 the Meiji government annexed it as Japanese territory. After the end of the Pacific War, it was put under American administration. In 1969, the control was returned to Japan on the condition of maintaining the American military bases there. The struggle of Okinawans has been very intense and it continues to this day with many activist groups that protest against the American military bases and some also reject the Japanese control asking for autonomy or resisting the cultural hegemony of mainland Japan. See Aoyagi (2007; 2008), Toriyama (2003).
32 The three terms refer to the same phenomenon: theories on Japan, theories on Japanese people, theories on Japanese society, and theories on Japanese culture. In order to standardize the usage on the document, I will refer to it as nihonjinron, because this is one of the most commonly used terms seen in English literature. See Befu (2001).
Japanese intelligentsia had been working since before the war to ideologically integrate the nation; people like Yanagita Kunio and Watsuji Tetsurō had already written about the peculiarity of Japanese culture and society aiming for such unity. After the mystical veil and political power of major national symbolic institutions – the Emperor and Shinto – had been removed in 1945, the theories on the Japanese identity reappeared among those who had been worried about the national unity after the defeat, while others went on the opposite trend and blamed Japanese ‘feudalistic’ and ‘pre-modern’ values for the tragic situation in which the nation found itself at that moment. In these contrasting discourses, the publication in Japanese of the book of Ruth Benedict (2006 [1946]) in 1948 caused a deep impact among intellectuals, becoming the source of multiple discussions on the pertinence or inaccuracy of the Japanese image that it portrayed.

These debates on the merits and burdens of Japanese traditional values, the presence of the Occupation forces, and the psychological effects of the defeat on the people can be seen as the source of a period of self-denigrating and shameful sentiment regarding the national identity among society. It was only after Japan reemerged as a world leading industrial and economic power, receiving international recognition for such success, and after the establishment of a high standardization in Japanese life-style as a national middle-class was showing some fragmentation forces – as the outburst of activism - when the interest on building a positive self-view and finding reasons to defend a cultural exceptionality generalized and passed from intellectuals to all intelligentsia and, then, to the general population, redefining Japanese identity to become confident, favorable and prideful.

This aim took the form of a discourse that was to be known as nihonjinron, which would acquire relevance enough to become a cultural nationalist movement. Presented as a descriptive model, the declarative nature of this discourse - characterized by generalizing statements - masked the intention of dictating what Japan and Japanese should be, mostly setting Japanese uniqueness in contrast to a world represented by the United States of America or other Western power. As Iida (2002, pp. 164-165) puts it, during this period:

what held the discourse together was not a common theoretical concern, nor a commitment to the attainment of knowledge through reasoned debate, but rather pragmatic concerns and a moral and emotional imperative either to explain ‘Japan’ to outsiders or to seek the restitution of lost identity in national terms.
The cultural model of Japanese society built followed general ideas recovered from already celebrated ideologists from previous periods of nationalism, such as Yanagita Kunio and Watsuji Tetsurō, and notions proposed by contemporary Japanese scholars as Nakane Chie and Doi Takeo – who became almost celebrities – as well as some notable Western scholars studying Japanese society, such as Ruth Benedict, Edwin O. Reischauer and Ezra Vogel. In fact, Nakane (1974) said once that her writings on Japanese society had been a reaction to the imagery that Western scholars had of Japan and, particularly, to the interpretation that Benedict had done about Japanese culture.

The dominant discourse among academics was based on the assumption that Japanese society was “uni-racial and homogeneous in its composition” (Yoshino, 2005, p. 18). Homogeneity was stressed to the point that authors did generalizations dismissing Japanese minorities as not relevant enough to disturb the national culture, while class, gender and regional differences were consciously left apart; and, it was further reinforced by asserting an “equivalency and mutual implications among land, people (that is, race), culture, and language” (Befu, 2001, p. 71). The reception of this idea was facilitated by Japanese vocabulary; the *nihonjinron* proclaimed that Japanese were one-*minzoku* and the term *minzoku* may refer to race, ethnicity or nation.

Evidently, this overlapping of notions in the same word had not only ideological, but also practical implications: if it was said that Japanese were one ethnical community, one nation and one race, then resident Koreans or Ainu, for example, could not be considered part of the Japanese society; on the other hand, those who had never lived in Japan, but had Japanese ancestry, were expected to have Japanese language and culture inherent in them, because the element bonding Japanese *minzoku* was said to be Japanese blood. This stress on blood was taken from the ideas that had been popular since the first decades of the century.

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33 There were also many scholars from the United States and other Western countries that followed the trend and, perhaps unintentionally, supported the propagation of the *nihonjinron* outside Japan. The most popular books written by foreigners were even translated to Japanese to reinforce the internal discourse: Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Benedict, 2006 [1946]) was published for the first time in Japanese in 1948; Reischauer’s *The Japanese* (1978) was published in Japanese the next year it was in English; and, Vogel’s *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (1979) was translated and published both in English and Japanese in the same 1979.
through the studies on eugenics that associated blood types with racial categories and the theories that followed on the relation between blood type and temperament.\textsuperscript{34}

The genetic determinism promoted by the \textit{nihonjinron} implied a link between cultural and ‘racial’ traits. Thus, it promoted a kind of ethnocentrism that inspired not only ethnic, but also racial and national prejudices, implicitly establishing a hierarchy: the Caucasians – meaning basically those from the First World - were placed above Japanese because they had presented modernity to Japan, so they were to be admired to some point; on the other hand, Africans and Southeastern Asians were inferior because they were technologically underdeveloped in relation to Japan and, coincidently, they happened to be not white.\textsuperscript{35}

Once established the premise of national ethnic homogeneity, \textit{nihonjinron} authors were able to define, by means of generalizations, the ethos and characteristic behavior of Japanese people that were said to be also at the core of all institutions. The most distinctive feature on this regard was the groupism of Japanese, opposite to the individualism favored in the West – aka United States. According to this idea, Japanese people are always framed by their belonging to groups – family, school, company, club, etc. Inside the group, there is always a hierarchy that is established according to seniority and everyone recognizes it and acts accordingly (Nakane, 1973 [J 1967]). This vertical structure inside the groups is nurtured by paternalistic relations that promote \textit{amae}, an emotional dependence towards superiors, which strengthens the relationship between them and subordinates (Doi, 1981 [J 1971]; 1988 [J 1985]). The background of these type of relations are attributable to the Neo-Confucianism that Japanese government privileged since centuries before with the samurai leaders, which stated that the most basic relation in human existence was that of parent and child, tied by filial piety, and this was taken following a similar logic of hierarchies between man and woman, lord and servant, etc. (Lebra, Identity, gender, and status in Japan, 2007). This groupism was to be found also at the macro level among institutions.

\textsuperscript{34} See Oguma (2002).
\textsuperscript{35} These ideas have caused that for Japanese people “[t]he notion that foreigners could fully comprehend Japanese culture and therefore act and behave like any Japanese threatens their ethnic and national integrity” (Befu, 2001, p. 67).
Then, the Japanese ethos was to be found shaped by such social structure. Moving among zones of inside and outside groups, as well as the hierarchy in each of those contexts, the display of attitudes and thoughts of Japanese people is determined by notions of on (indebtedness), girī (obligation), and sekentei (decency according to society’s standards). A constant play between the expression of self-consciousness (honne) and the expression framed by social conventions (tatamæ) represent, arguably, a unique way of thinking and acting so particular to Japanese that some of the daily terms to refer to those attitudes do not even have exact translation in English. For this reason, Japanese people are used to behave and express in different ways depending on the very particular context they are in, without the resultant inconsistency becoming an issue of hypocrisy or dishonesty.  

The avoidance of conflict and shame, and the favoring of harmony were also said to be at the center of Japanese nature. A ‘unique’ thought process reflected in the language structure and the patterns of non-verbal communication, a ‘unique’ esthetic sense and a syncretic or dual value inclination, were also part of the Yamato damashii (spirit of Japan) or the Nihon seishin (Japanese spirit). In this sense, authors argued the unique ability that Japanese people had to adapt different - even opposite - ideas or values into a same thought or objective – for example Japanese spirit with Western science, or Shinto and Buddhism. This was due, they claimed, to the Japanese thought process that could not be understood under Western logic.

These ideas originated in specialized sectors of Japanese and Western academia: sociologists, anthropologists, social psychologists, etc. However, they soon disseminated among all intelligentsia. At the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s, as Japan’s economic growth was being acclaimed around the world, Japanese corporative model caught the attention. Thus, Japanese and foreign businessmen, reporters, and academics on economic and business matters began to look at the sociocultural theories on Japan to explain its economic success.

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36 For an extensive exposition on the way that these different context are said to play in the behavior of Japanese people, see Lebra (2004).
As it was said in the previous section, this period was one characterized by mass media explosion with an almost absolute presence of television sets in Japanese homes, plus the already important tradition of printed media. Hence, the popularity among intelligentsia of talking about the unique attributes of Japanese society was soon absorbed by media and supported by the government, turning the discourse into a mass consumption phenomenon. The Japanese government began endorsing and promoting these ideas by publishing and distributing some of the most representative titles and designing its public policies taking into account the cultural model proposed, accordingly shaping the dominant discourse.

As the books of Doi, Nakane, Benedict and the rest of the academics were printed in versions for mass consumption and became eagerly consumed, hundreds of titles dealing with the topics of Japan and Japanese people, culture and economic model appeared in the shelves of every bookstore in the country. It was then that the name of nihonjinron appeared, as it was the name given to this genre of literature. The majority of the production was not formal theoretical work, Befu (2001, p. 33) says that most writings followed a “methodology of nonmethodology;” nonetheless, because most authors used the notions proposed by the already celebrated scholars from prestigious universities and supported by the government, it had a scientific and official aura. The figure of the hyōronka (critic or commentator) – sometimes intellectuals, but mostly pseudo-experts – also became imperative for the shaping of the opinions of people through media.

The publication and media coverage of nihonjinron as a mass-consumption phenomenon peaked between the 1970s and 1980s as manifestation of a “maturing process of Japanese identity, taking form as a highly advanced ‘postmodern’ consumer society in which the absence of exteriority or the Other […] was] increasingly felt” (Iida, 2002, pp. 206-207). From the nostalgic glory of samurai culture, Buddhist monks and the Imperial Court, elite cultural practices as bushido (way of the samurai), the tea ceremony, and ikebana (flower arrangement), were also heavily promoted as practices that represented the Japanese philosophy, aesthetic and way of life that nihonjinron defended. In this way, these – or at least their etiquette - were disseminated among society as part of the cultural knowledge that any good Japanese should possess.
The following decade, many elements pushed the *nihonjinron* as a dominant discourse and cultural movement to the back of the main topics of interest among society: an economic crisis hit Japan putting on question the efficiency of the traditional models that had been acclaimed as the key for the Japanese miracle; the Great Hanshin Earthquake and the attacks in the Tokyo subway of 1995 exposed the inefficiency of Japanese institutions to protect the society; and the society itself began to show signs of erosion. Many youth subcultures took distance from Japanese ideals, many women refused to marry or have children when the society expected to, young people failed to enter the typical working system, etc. Amid those circumstances, people began questioning the value of *nihonjinron*’s “narcisistic pride” (Iida, 2002, p. 208).37

Nonetheless, the ideas that had been heavily endorsed during the peak of the *nihonjinron* did not disappear, on the contrary, they had been so greatly assimilated by Japanese people that Befu (2001) suggested that the discourse has achieved the status of civil religion, because in it, Japanese society and nation are undoubtedly the same and, without other corp of discourse enjoying a higher degree of consensus, it provides people with the symbols, rites, beliefs of their national identity, situating them in the world with a particular history and particular goals for the future. For Befu, the authors of *nihonjinron* act like ‘spiritual leaders’ of contemporary Japanese society. Although I agree with him with the relevance of the discourse as the ideology of Japanese identity valid to this day, I will argue later the role of ‘spiritual leader’ has change hands, as it has the medium of promotion of the discourse.

The last decade of the twentieth century opened with the burst of the ‘bubble economy’ that led Japan to experience the major economic crisis since it had become a First World country, beginning a long period of stagnation;38 amid this situation, the demographic conditions of an inverted pyramid that was showing a growing gap between yonger and older people pushed a restrucrturisation in the company system that had been so much praised as the key of the Japan Inc model; and, in the international context, Japan’s neighbors were showing signs

37 See also Befu (2001), Lebra (2004), Sugimoto (2003), and Yoshino (2005).
38 For an analysis on the circumstances of the crisis, see Cargill, Hutchison & Ito (1997).
of accelerated economic growth. Although the *nihonjinron* as a cultural nationalist movement that had actually grasped the interest of regular citizens was vanished by that time, another trends of nationalism were being perceived and called the attention of analysts: the neo-nationalism among political circles, related to actions and campaigns towards the revitalization of the country’s military stance in the international scene; and, *petit* nationalism, as it has been called a trend among youngsters expressing their patriotism in loose ways.

As it was mentioned in a previous section, after Japan lost the war in 1945, a new Constitution was promulgated with a controversial Article 9 in which Japan renounced to its right to have armed forces and engage in war. Not having the economic burden of maintaining an army was the perfect opportunity to use all resources for the rebuilding of the industry apparatus right after the end of the war. However, five decades later, Japan had established itself as an economic power, but its role in international affairs remained marginal and, among international conflicts as the Golf War, its financial contribution was said to be merely ‘checkbook diplomacy’.

Some right-wing politicians began to argue that this shameful situation was due to the fact that the country could not have an army and be more actively involved in international affairs, thus, keeping such status, Japan would not ever be seen as an equal by the United States. Moreover, as China and South Korea began to grow in economic and military resources, and having the permanent menace of North Korea too close, they had more reasons to call for the revision of the Article 9. This was just the top of the iceberg of other relevant situations regarding Japan’s security policy, international affairs and internal politics that this wing has been discussing since then; this trend has been called *neo-*nationalism or new nationalism.

Japan’s security has been protected by the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty since it was signed in 1960, which established that the United States would defend Japan in case this was attacked, without Japan having to help – because it was supposed not to have any forces to do so. However, for such aim, Japan had to provide permanent military bases for the American. These bases are found all over the country, but there is a high concentration in Okinawa, which has been a constant and problematic issue for the Japanese government.
Okinawa had been directly controlled by the Occupation forces after the end of the Pacific War; in 1972, the United States turned the administration back to the Japanese government. Nevertheless, the Okinawans have been unsatisfied both with the presence of the bases and the administration of the government over the islands, having constant demonstrations along the years: the US soldiers have been accused of molesting Okinawan women and causing trouble when going out from the bases; some others are against the cultural invasion that means having Americans permanently around; and there is also the historical issue defended by some groups about getting independence from Japan. Thus, the change of Article 9 to allow Japan defending itself, would mean the elimination of American bases; on the other hand, it could tense the Okinawa-Japan relationship regarding the freedom some people ask, as Japanese government could use military forces to eliminate uprisings.39

Then again, even though Japan does not have a so-called army, it has maintained Self Defense Forces (SDF) and the annual budget for them has been gradually increasing – particularly since 1987, when it exceeded for the first time since the war the one percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Matthews, 2003). These SDF have been acting as humanitarian help in national and international disaster zones. However, the continuously increasing budget destined to military expenses and the developments of military technology and nuclear power during the last two decades, have made many people suspect that Japan has real military power latent (Kase, 2003; Lee, 2013; Sunohara, 2010). Also, although for decades, Japanese citizens were less than interested in the issue of Japan’s right to hold armed forces, or were supportive of such restriction for fear of the country to get involved again in a disastrous war, since the beginning of the 1990s a change in this matter is perceptible according to some surveys of Japanese media – right-wing media – which has showed that Japanese are increasingly interested in the topic and supportive of an amendment (Hook & MacCormack, 2001; The Yomiuru Shimbun/Asia News Network, 2014).40

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40 Yomiuri Shimbun is acknowledged as a conservative news household. According to this medium’s popular surveys along the years, there has been a shift in public opinion regarding the issue and, since the 1990s more of half the respondents to the open poll are in favor of a constitutional revision.
Adding to this, there have been symbolic actions that identify this strong nationalist trend among high level politicians and have offended neighbor nations that suffered under the colonialist regime, giving place to constant diplomatic and media frictions. One of the main critiques towards the Japanese government from China and South Korea has been its reluctance to express apologies for the atrocities that Japan caused during its imperialist era. As it was mentioned when discussing the imperialist period, during the colonization of East Asia, Japanese military was involved in actions that have been accused as major humanity crimes, as the Nanjin massacre and the use of comfort women. In the first half of the 1990s, Emperor Akihito and then Prime Minister Murayama released statements with apologies (Ching, 1994; Yasumoto, 2009), but that has not been of much help since other actions have been seen as withdrawing such goodwill words. Many conservative politicians, intellectuals and powerful households have rejected “the government’s apologies for Japanese war atrocities in Asia and the compensation of ex-‘comfort women’” (Iida, 2002, p. 245).

On many occasions, Japanese leaders have made public visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, a place that has a strong symbolic weight regarding Japan’s military and imperialist past. The Yasukuni is a Shinto shrine, meaning that it is part of what was regarded as the state religion until 1947, when the Constitution established a separation between state and religion institutions; nevertheless, Shinto has remained part of the main cultural organizations of Japan and its ceremonies are regarded as customary observances by most Japanese, including officials and leaders.

The Yasukuni was established in 1869 and took its present name in 1879; its aim has always been to enshrine the soldiers who died for the nation; in 1978, it took among those, fourteen people accused of war crimes during the imperialist era. In 1985, the then Prime Minister Nakasone paid an official visit to the shrine, arising criticism from around East Asia; then, in 1996, then Prime Minister Hashimoto did the same causing an identical reaction. On August 15, 2001, the then recently elected Prime Minister Koizumi – who during his campaign had promised to paid an official visit to the Shrine – went to pay his respects and continued to do it annually until 2006, when he left office. August 15 is the commemorative date of Japan’s surrender during the Pacific War; it is also the date that Asian countries that
were colonies celebrate their release. Hence, the visits were significantly disrespectful according to those nations, rising suspicions of Japan’s intentions in Asia.  

There is also the topic of the crusade that has been promoted by conservative intellectuals and some leaders in the government in order to publish History textbooks that minimize Japan’s actions during the wars of the first half of the twentieth century. After the end of the war, the government established that the textbooks to be used in schools had to be approved by the Ministry of Education. In 1995, some conservative university professors and a popular mangaka initiated the Association for the Advancement of the Liberalist View of History. The members of this Association declared their intention to change the bad image that Japanese History textbooks were teaching children about their country and, instead, promote books that helped children love Japan (Japan Society for History Textbook Reform, 2014). In the following years, they gained support from the conservative wing of intellectuals and politicians, as well as from the right-wing leaning media and tarento, attracting civilians – among them many youngsters - to the movement. By 2001, the textbook written by the intellectuals of the Association – which stated that the colonization was necessary under the context it happened - received the approval from the Ministry of Education and it was even sold as a commercial version, becoming a best-seller. Nevertheless, the approval of the book caused an angry reaction from diplomats and civilians from South Korea and China, who argued that Japan was showing no remorse for the actions of the past (Shibuichi, 2008). The book was only used by a small percentage of schools, so the international complains softened (Matthews, 2003), but the Association has continued to push its cause, and every time the government approves a book that softens Japan’s role in war or avoids mentioning some of the most shameful episodes, angry reactions are felt in East Asia.

Adding to the symbolic actions accused by neighbors and liberals as a comeback of the nationalist stance in the power houses, old territorial disputes Japan has had with China and South Korea have shown increasing tensions during the last years. Japan and South Korea

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41 For an analysis focused on the Yasukuni issue, see Okuyama (2009), Shibuichi (2005), Tanamoto (2001).
43 Writer of Japanese comics.
have been disputing the Takeshima/Dokdo islands, which are in the Sea of Japan; likewise, the tensions Japan and China have been having many diplomatic and nearly military arguments for the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands found in the East China Sea. In both cases, the islands are merely huge rocks, isolated and uninhabited; nevertheless, the reason behind the disputes is the right to exploit a wider part of the sea: fishery resources, oil, and strategic bases and airspace to keep an eye over potential enemies.\textsuperscript{44}

In more than twenty years, none of these issues have found a solution; they continue causing polemic inside and, even more, outside the country. In the second decade of the twentieth first century, the so-called new nationalism is not new anymore; it has established as part of the Japanese political scenario. Although related to political issues, it has been receiving more and more attention from civilians, among whom a soft kind of nationalist trend has also been perceived in about the same period, with very particular cultural expressions.

In 2002, an essay book written by psychiatrist, university professor and media hyōronka Kayama Rika was published in Japan; it was called Petit nationalism syndrome: youth’s Japanism\textsuperscript{45} (Kayama, 2002). In the book, the author reflects about the apparent patriotic resurgence among young Japanese expressed in the fervent support of the national football team, the popularity of anti-China and anti-Korea manga, the spread of Japanese language related literature, the popularity of traditional festivals, etc. According to Kayama, at the turn of the century it was perceived among young middle and high class Japanese an increasingly free expression of their patriotic feelings - their love for Japan - which could be regarded as a break from previous generations’ view of explicit manifestations of patriotism as taboo for the recollections they had of the war. She argued that, as society’s economic gap increased amid the crisis, this petit nationalism may transform into a radical one if people turned their concerns for the future into a sentiment of support for their nation against the world.

\textsuperscript{44} For an analysis on the Takeshima/Dokdo dispute, see Dyke (2006). For an analysis on the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute, see Koo (2009).

\textsuperscript{45} Puchi-nashonarizumu shōkōgun: wakamonotachi no Nipponshugi.
The book is similar to many nihonjinron literature in the fact that it is more anecdotal than academic; nevertheless, Kayama’s suggestions attracted the attention to the topic not just from other academics and analysts, who began responding with their own points of view on the issue, but also from media, which gave exposure to all those ideas. Some academics, although not entirely in the same tenor, agree with Kayama on the recognition of an increasing nationalism among young people since the 1990s, finding in the breaking of the socioeconomic status quo of the national middle-class the reason for an increasing anxiety that is expressed as a love for their nation and a dislike for some other Asian nations, namely China and South Korea (Honda, 2007; Yang & Lim, 2009). On the other hand, others consider that even though there may be some nationalistic expressions among young people, there are also many other manifestations of transnational views and, because contradictory data is found regarding the pervasion of the patriotic feeling among youth, it may be soon to declare Japanese new generations as nationalists (Condry, 2007; Honda, 2007).

Even if the extension and force of the so-called young nationalism in Japan is debatable, there is a definite influence of it on the way Japanese media has been constructing the discourse of patriotism since then. Apparently independent of neo-nationalism, youth’s patriotism has been increasingly portrayed as trendy, without the heavy political weight. The consumption of Japanese goods, sake and food, the visiting of traditional onsen (hot springs) - all of which can be easily linked to an economic campaign that will be analyzed in the next section - even some more ideological expressions as the study of Japanese history and literature, the singing of the national anthem or the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine; these actions are presented by media in a light fashion, barely linking explicitly their discourses with the polemic issues of the new nationalism. Nevertheless, as Condry (2007) argues, entertainment media are important sources of political education, particularly – yet, not exclusively - for young people. Thus, the presence of nation related discourses in banal contents deserves a closer attention.

1.4 BEYOND NATIONALISM? THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL PROMOTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The twentieth century was challenging for Japanese society. The Japanese had begun the century living under the fukoku kyōhei (rich country, strong army) policy, which made it a
national goal to be the leader of Asia, taking the country to its imperialist era and a series of wars that concluded in Japan’s defeat in 1945. During this time of ultra-nationalist militarism, the national identity was centered in symbols such as the Imperial and Shinto institutions, the anthem and the flag, and the national pride was fueled by the territorial additions and wars won. The defeat in the Pacific War had left Japan devastated, the national symbols stigmatized and the Japanese having to deal with rebuilding their country under the guidance of the previous enemies, denying all virtue to what had been considered the Japanese traditional values. The democratic reform and reconstruction of the country had been the main goals during the period of Occupation; structural changes in the political, legal, educational and economic fields kept the hands of Japanese leaders full and the minds of people busy while adapting to their new reality. In 1952, when the Occupation forces left Japan, Japanese elites directed all the efforts towards the new national objective: the economic growth.

By the end of the decade of 1960, Japan had achieved considerable social improvement and, in the international arena, had become a leading economic power, but the national identity remained in an uncertain place with no concrete symbols to be attached to, while civil movements and some political radical demonstrations threatened the ‘Japanese harmony’. This gave place to the cultural nationalist movement of nihonjinron which, through the acclaim of Japanese society’s unique characteristics as the key for the economic success, aimed to take the national identity out from limbo and restore it in a positive light, encouraging the national pride once again. The cultural model created by the nihonjinron was supported by the government, turning it into a hegemonic ideology that was highly instructive on the behavior and attitudes expected from Japanese. This discourse achieved a high degree of consensus among Japanese people by putting the attention on people themselves, not on flags, anthems, emblems or institutions that had been tainted by war and had lost credibility.

However, the economic and social downturns of the 1990s and 2000s – the so called ‘lost decades’ – affected the prominence of the nihonjinron, perhaps because the confidence on those unique characteristics weakened. Lacking a strong army and with a national economy that was no longer something to be proud of – adding to the increasing pressure
from the Asian neighbors - the Japanese had to find something else to direct their national
pride to. In the elite circles, some began to think about reforms that allowed Japan to regain
its right to have an army and to stop apologizing for the actions during the war; among young
people, some attached their social insecurities to a sentiment of patriotism that had also an
anti-China and anti-Korea counterpart. In this context, the admiration of some Japanese
media culture products abroad opened a new possibility of inspiration; and, slowly, it was in
that terrain where the national identity discourse was to be placed.

In this section, I will explore the context that prompted the advancement of media
culture as an important domain for foreign and domestic policies - as those that took the form
of the projects of ‘Cool Japan’ and the ‘Japan brand’ - which targeted mainly the marketing
of Japanese cultural products abroad as a way to revitalize the economy. I argue that after the
Great Eastern Japan Earthquake of 2011, these strategies took a new turn and, besides
keeping the policies towards the foreign markets, they strengthened the domestic campaign;
this, in particular, was highly ideological, carrying a discourse that followed the premises of
the nihonjinron, it flagged the traditional and unique cultural qualities of Japan as the key to
face the foreign and domestic challenges, something that can be seen as a form of banal
nationalism.

1.4.1 COOL JAPAN, SELLING CULTURE AND BUILDING SOFT POWER
At the beginning of the new millennium, Japan was struggling with a decade of economic
recession due to the burst of the ‘bubble economy’ of the 1980s; at the same time, its
neighbors, particularly China and South Korea, had initiated a process of accelerated
industrialization that was threatening Japan’s position as economic power in the region.
Nevertheless, in 2002, an article of the North American magazine of international politics
and economics Foreign Policy was proclaiming: “Japan is reinventing superpower-again”
(McGray, 2002, p. 44). The author, Douglas McGray, argued that Japan’s cultural presence
in the foreign markets had been consistently growing – mainly through the popularity of some
media culture products - creating an important base of fans and consumers abroad, something

46 Higashi Nihon Daishinsai, as it is named in Japanese.
that had the potential of becoming the key for Japan to recover its powerful economy. He called the phenomenon ‘Japan’s National Cool’.

The main argument behind McGray’s exposition was that Japan could be expected to make actual use of the soft power derived from the popularity of its culture to “serve political and economic ends” (2002, p. 53). Soft power, a notion coined by Joseph Nye (2004a; 2004b), denotes the ability to shape the preferences of others and create general influence by means of attraction. More than simple influence or persuasion, which can also be obtained by hard power (military or economic resources), soft power uses intangible assets - such as personality, culture, or values - to attract people, giving advantages of maneuver to the one who possess it; in talking about nation-states, it “arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals and policies” (2004a, p. x).

McGray’s article became a breaking point in Western awareness of Japan’s international cultural impact, being featured even in mainstream media in Europe and the United States. If during the 1970s and 1980s there were constant news on Japan’s economic and business models and strategies, from the 1990s there was a constant flow of writing about the country’s cultural phenomena. In the international academia, scholars had already been discussing the issue of Japanese cultural presence in the markets of Asia, Europe and the United States from different angles, and the popular interest on the issue prompted even more debate. Asian authors were focusing on the analysis of the expansion of Japanese media culture in Asia and the relation that this could have with Japan’s economic and political influence in the region. Non-Asian and Japanese analysts, on the other hand, seemed more interested in the characteristics of the cultural products that were being so well received in the exterior and in the impact that Japanese culture was having in the West.47

47 Among Asian authors there have been three main positions: one that sees the indigenization of Japanese models of media culture in Asia as a way to build a Pan-Asiatic, East-Asian, or Asian culture (Iwabuchi, 2002; Ng, 2005; Chua, 2010); another that debates the presence of Japanese cultural products in other Asian countries as a way to redefine Japan’s image in the continent or as new form of imperialism (Aoyagi, 2010; Ching, 1994; Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Igarashi, 1995; Jung, 2007; Lam, 2007; Ogawa, 2010). For some analysis on Japanese media culture products that were attracting attention in the West during the 2000s, see Craig (2000), Kelts (2007), Napier (2001), Tsutsui & Ito (2006). In Japan, the book edited by Igarashi (1995) presented the opinions of diverse critics about the then recent break of Japanese media culture products in Asian markets. During the same year of the publication of the article of McGray, Iwabuchi (2002) published a book on the topic for the
Although Japanese cultural expansion to foreign markets was attracting so much attention, the Japanese government had not been actively involved in that development. “Sometimes we come to know ourselves less through our own efforts than through the actions of others,” began a report of the Economic Research Department of the Japan External Trade Organization – JETRO – (2005, p. 1) referring to the international attention that Japanese media products were attracting since the publication of McGray’s article. It can be identified as the breaking point for Japanese government to acknowledge the issue, name the phenomenon Cool Japan and begin to consider cultural production as a strategic area for diverse policies.

In 2003, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI)48 published a report entitled Towards the internationalization of the Content industry. Sending Japan brand to the world (Keizai Sangyōshō, 2003). The METI identified that the expansion of the media industry – the main producer of Cool Japan - overseas could actually have positive economic effects on other industries and, also, that it could improve the image of Japan, adding value to the Japan brand – that is, the image of the country that was associated to all the national products and services. Bureaucrats also took notice on the strategies that the United States, England, Germany, South Korea and Taiwan were applying for cultural internationalization and stated that, while “national contents […] ha[d] been neglected domestically as an industry because they [were] perceived as something for kids or for play” (p. 21), other Asian countries were already applying policies to back up their respective content industries and profiting from it.

During the following year, the METI took one more step and prepared the Seminar on the Contents Industry’s International Strategy with people related to the main fields of the industry in order to discuss the possible approaches to capitalize on the popularity of Japanese contents abroad, particularly in Asia. It was recognized that the core of the strategy should be media products that were already prevalent overseas: anime, manga, videogames,

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48 Or Keizai Sangyōshō in Japanese. In the main text, I will refer to it as METI, but, because it publishes different materials in English and in Japanese, the referential notes are under either name, according to the language in which they were published.
music – known as J-pop - movies and television dramas. But more important, it was acknowledged the growing pressure that the dynamic strategies of South Korea were putting on Japan (Keizai Sangyōshō, 2004). The Korean Wave, equivalent to Cool Japan, was the growing phenomenon that was taking media products from South Korea to the rest of Asia.

Around the same time, Joseph Nye (2004a) published a book in which he praised Japan as the nation with more latent resources of soft power in Asia. He identified that Japan’s cultural attraction included also traditional products and practices, not just contemporary media products, however there was a restraining issue for it to get its full potential: Japan’s military past and its effects on Asia. Indeed, according to a survey done four years later, around 60 percent of Chinese, South Korean and Indonesians perceived Japan as a potential military threat (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2008, p. 8). Even if not in terms of belligerency, the presence of cultural contents and products from Japan had been continuously criticized by some as a cultural facade of its new imperialist intentions (Ching, 1994).

49 These were the key products of the Cool Japan phenomenon: anime counted for over 60% of animated cartoons broadcasts around the world; manga and literary works were being acknowledged in Asia, North America, and Europe, resulting in important money influxes from licenses for translation and publication; Japanese video games, both hardware and software, were worldwide leaders; and characters, movies, television programs, J-Pop music and fashion were being well sold in East Asia markets. Because of all these facts, the content industry was producing a value that was around the double of that produced by the iron and steel industry. It was also having a positive repercussion in other sectors, such as agriculture which began to face an increasing demand of fruits, vegetables, rice and tea, from East Asia, where the expensive Japanese produce was becoming a brand and, given the rising in personal incomes of people of the region, its consumption had become a symbol of status (Japan External Trade Organization, 2005).

50 In Korean known as hallyu. In Japanese, kanryu.

51 South Korea had seen a change in regimes during the late 1980s. In 1988, after years of media censorship, it began a process of media liberalization that allowed the arrival of foreign products. This put Korean media in danger: its film industry lost most of the local market to Hollywood and the television programming became increasingly foreign. In 1994, the government noticed the potential contributions that cultural industries could have for the economy and, accordingly, established the Cultural Industry Bureau. Then, among the effects of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, Korean media culture was further promoted as part of the export industries destined to rebuild the economy. In 1999, President Kim Dae Jung - self-nominated ‘President of Culture’ - established the Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion (Shim, 2005). Since then, the Korean government began working closely with cultural producers and big corporations to promote cultural exports, tourism and the Korean brands around Asia and, gradually, in other markets. However, the active role of the government, including the economical grants that it was giving to companies for promoting the national popular culture overseas began to be interpreted by some as a hard nationalistic strategy. See the comments of Prof. Choi in the article of Nakagawa (2010e) or the remarks mentioned in the report of Penh (2010). For discussions focused on the Korean Wave, see Chua & Iwabuchi (2008), Huang (2011), and Shim (2005).
South Korea and China, Japan’s two most important foreign markets in the region, have also been the ones that have involved the most problematic affairs. At the political level, there are continuous tensions and disagreements – as those related to Japanese neo-nationalism - but they are also highly co-dependent; in the economic sphere, they are Japan’s strongest rivals, but also two of its most important markets; and in the cultural side, there is a remaining animosity from certain sectors of those societies toward anything Japanese, but also those ethnicities constitute the biggest non-Japanese communities living in the country. Even though the Japanese diplomats have tried to build an identity of a peaceful nation that is a promoter of democracy and freedom in Asia (Yoshimatsu, 2012), it can hardly be perceived that way when so many problematic situations – as those described previously - persist.

So, for Japan to be able to advance in Asian markets, some serious effort had to be dedicated to rebuild an image that allowed Japan to apply larger strategies. Nevertheless, during the first decade of the twentieth first century, Japanese public and private sectors were fixated on the potential economic benefits that a promotion of the national cultural production outside their territory could carry, and the first series of plans had a dominant industrial approach, neglecting the soft power element; but then again, this came at a moment when the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dropped to its lowest since the financial bubble burst in the early 1990s (Cabinet Office Government of Japan, 2013).

As Japanese bureaucrats continued analyzing the situation, the Korean Wave hit Japan. Between 2002 and 2005, various sectors of Japanese women had become avid consumers of Korean popular culture. The cultural product that opened the Japanese market was the television drama Winter Sonata, a ‘very Korean’ product that was embraced mainly by a sector of middle aged women. According to the findings of Ogawa (2010) and Yasumoto (2009), the drama had the effect of waking up the interest of those sectors of Japanese people in Korean culture in general. At the same time, a teen Korean singer – BoA - had been setting records in Japanese music industry (Recording Industry Association of Japan, 2002), appealing to younger audiences, but presenting herself not as particularly Korean as the drama was; on the contrary, she was promoted by a domestic music label, learned the language and sang and interacted with fans and media in Japanese.
In 2007, the METI published a final report on the contents global strategy (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2007, p. 1), in which leaders of the industry and some observers from JETRO urged governmental actions to avoid that “the entire Japanese contents industries [were] swallow[ed] up by US and European counterparts.” They reported that national exports of Japanese contents had barely grown in the last years and that the domestic demand was also shrinking. They were precise on their concerns: although they were aware that this industry involved both cultural and economic aspects, at the moment, they were focused *exclusively* on the business and the way in which culture could translate into economic gains. They were also particularly careful to point the closer threats: South Korea’s national project to expand its content industries to Asia and China’s censorship and quota systems, which made it a difficult market for the Japanese to ascertain. The content producers were seriously worried, talking about a crisis of the national industry and the losing of advantages in the global market; thus, they were proposing an initiative to focus the efforts on that region, in order to recover the position that Japanese content industry had enjoyed previously.52

Regardless of these callings for attention, by 2009, the Korean Wave was all over Japan.53 It was no longer limited to the content industry. Korean cosmetic brands had made their way to the Japanese malls, the ‘Korean town’ in Tokyo – Shin Okubo – had become a trendy place for Japanese to get everything from food to the latest posters of the Korean idols,

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52 Interestingly, when presenting the key strategies to introduce music products there, they stated the importance of releasing versions in the local languages – the approach used by BoA and other Korean singers in Japan – but it was hardly done.

53 This was reinforced by the Tohoshinki phenomenon. Tohoshinki was a Korean male idol group that had been splitting time between Japan and Korea/rest-of-Asia since 2005; it had been actively building a Japanese female fan base and, by 2008, got Japanese media attention for successful sales. For an analysis on the way this Korean group influenced the reinforcement of Japanese male idol industry, see Mandujano Salazar (2009). BoA, Tohoshinki, and other Korean artists arrived under the same strategy: they were scouted and polished by a Korean promotion agency that held their Korean and global – except Japanese – activities; after proving successful in their native country, their agencies established relations with a Japanese one or opened a Japanese office; consequently, the same artist had two different contracts. In 2009, when Tohoshinki was steadily gaining terrain in the Japanese market, they had conflicts with their Korean management and decided to split. However, because they had another contract with a Japanese recording label, they had to continue their activities together in Japan until the end of that agreement (Oricon Style, 2009). This K-pop fever was capitalized also by other Korean artists that had been preparing their Japanese debut: during 2010 and 2011, many K-pop artists debuted in Japan with considerable immediate success: Kara, Girls Generation, Big Bang, 2PM, Super Junior (Recording Industry Association of Japan, 2011; 2012).
and the tourism from Japan to South Korea had greatly increased due to the rush of Japanese women, who were fans of Korean artists. This was a clear result of the policies that the Korean government was applying to export its national contents. Just as years before the Cool Japan phenomenon, now the Korean Wave was making it to the foreign news. Nye (2009) said that Korean media culture crossing borders could be taken as a sign of South Korea becoming more active in the international terrain; *The Economist* reported that Korean international market share in the video game, television dramas and *pop* music had doubled in a ten-year period and were posing some pressure on Japan (Penh, 2010). There were also some who believed that Japanese music and talent industries were not keeping pace with those trends, risking their market position (Poole, 2010).

The Japanese bureaucrats knew it; Japanese media products were not only losing internationally, but domestically there were also struggling because of the popularity of the Korean Wave (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2010). In 2010, the Japanese Cabinet released a new strategy for growth that stated the importance of the Asian market and the flow of people, goods, and money from Asia into Japan to boost “Japan’s brand power and diplomatic strength” (Cabinet Office Government of Japan, 2010, p. 28). It identified as key areas to achieve the goal of getting foreign capitals at different levels the Japanese *creative industries*, the promotion of the country as a tourism-oriented nation, and the development of skillful human resources in fields like sports and culture.

For such reasons, in June of that same year, the METI established the Creative Industries Promotion Office Cool Japan to be in charge of the planning and applying of strategies to promote that sector, facilitating its expansion inside and outside Japan (Keizai Sangyōshō, 2010). From this moment, Cool Japan was to include all the range of media culture products and contents, architecture, antiques, crafts, publishing, computer software

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54 According to the statistics of the Korea Tourism Organization - taking as sample the first month of every year - in January of 2003, before any Korean Wave hit Japan, the Japanese female visitors were just a 41% of the 153,703 Japanese who entered South Korea. In January 2008, after the *Winter Sonata* phenomenon - but before the Tohoshinki boom - the numbers for male and female were almost even with female counting for the 47% of the Japanese visitors. However, one year later, in January 2009, when Tohoshinki was competing in popularity with the Japanese idols, the Japanese female visitors to Korea were almost 59%, maintaining the majority against their male counterparts since then and increasing to around 200,000 visitors in total until January 2013, latest data checked (Korea Tourism Organization, 2013).
and services, furniture, jewelry, food, and tourism. From this holistic view, the sector Cool Japan was to become more relevant for the national economy than the automobile or the consumer electronics industries in terms of sales and people employed (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2012).

After nearly a decade since McGray had envisioned Japan as reinventing itself in an active way through its culture, the government had lastly took actual measures on that respect. The Cool Japan policy directed by the METI, although predominantly industrial, was also a strategy of cultural promotion; the business elites were relying on Japanese cultural products to appeal to international markets and increase the value of the Japan brand. In the meantime, other policy of cultural promotion was being applied through the close cooperation of cultural producers, media, corporations, and the Ministry of Land Infrastructure Transport and Tourism (MLIT) with a major emphasis on the cultural aspect and the national consumers.

1.4.2 FLAGGING THE NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MEDIA CULTURE
At the beginning of the 2010 fiscal year, before the establishment of the Cool Japan Office, but just in the middle of the Korean Wave hit and the increasing tourism from Japan to Korea, Japanese media reported that the Japan Tourism Agency55 (JTA) – dependent on the MLIT - had designated the Japanese idol group Arashi as ‘Ambassador for Tourism Promotion’56 for the campaign Japan. Endless Discovery. At the moment of the designation, the five-member group was widely acknowledged as the most popular and successful artist domestically and it also had an important base of fans in East Asia, reasons openly stated by the JTA for its election. The official announcement and media reports stated the expectation that Arashi, in the role of ‘face of Japan’ inside and outside the country, could help increase the national and international tourism; it was also declared that the group and its management agency were contributing to the whole campaign by goodwill, without any remuneration (Kankōchō, 2010b; Kankō Keizai Shimbun, 2010).

55 Kankōchō.
56 Kankō rikoku navigator.
A few days later, the JTA announced that it would be joining forces with the Tokyo International Airport\textsuperscript{57} to promote the domestic tourism (Kankōchō, 2010c). By September of the same year, Japan Airlines (JAL),\textsuperscript{58} one of the main providers of domestic flights in that airport, signed Arashi for its national campaign and began using the group’s music and image in one of the planes that served three important domestic destinations. In the press release from JAL, it was stated that Arashi was chosen to be the image of the airline because the group and its agency shared with JAL the goal of sending a joyful message from Japan, but also for the group’s wide popularity and its role as the face of tourism (Japan Airlines, 2010).\textsuperscript{59}

During that same month, the JTA published a book aimed at the promotion of the national culture and distributed it among all elementary, middle and high schools in Japan with the explicitly stated objective of inspiring in the young generations the love for their country and the desire to work for its constant improvement (Kankōchō, 2010d). The book was called \textit{Nippon no Arashi} (The Arashi of Japan)\textsuperscript{59} and it presented the members of the group ‘rediscovering’ their country: through essays and conversations they had with local people in different regions and among themselves, they encouraged Japanese children and

\textsuperscript{57} The Tokyo International Airport, or Haneda Airport, serves for most domestic flights and some international, mostly regional. See http://www.tokyo-airport-bldg.co.jp.

\textsuperscript{58} Japan Airlines was established and owned by the government until 1987. Currently, it is fully private capital owned, but the close relation continues. See http://www.jal.com/en/history/history.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Arashi} means storm, so literally, the title could be translated as ‘The storm of Japan’.
teenagers to value aspects that were presented as key of Japanese culture: crafts, art, architecture, fishery, culinary culture, agriculture, welfare services, Shintoist and Buddhist practices, and entertainment. The words written in the book are very eloquent:

We have contemplated true globalization, but the best way to get close to the world is to move forward while having at the very core of ourselves the thoughts of Japan, our town, our family, ourselves. Right now, what we have to do is to be truly proud of ourselves as Japanese. In Japan, where we live, there are many people who are kind and sincere. Living in the big cities it has become difficult to see that; this is why we went on a trip to reencounter those people [...] and produce in Japan a storm of kindness. (Arashi, 2011, p. 9)

On the other hand, the international campaign *Japan. Endless Discovery* began broadcasting spots around East Asia, which showed the idols inviting people - speaking in Chinese, Korean and English - to visit Japan and enjoy both *typically* Japanese tourism spots, food and products and the *new* Japan related to the imagery of Cool Japan.

This strategy towards the revitalization of the national tourism was two-folded: outside the country, while promoting the already popular products and conventional imagery of Japan, Arashi was expected to attract international tourists and consumers who wanted to enjoy the infrastructure, products and services they showed in the spots; in contrast, the national campaign was deeply ideological and, besides strengthening the conventional symbolism, it aimed to regain the domestic interest and pride in a set of features that were said to be essential to Japanese, that is, putting the emphasis on the people.

This case also revealed the subtle and well-coordinated cooperation among government, business, media and cultural producers: the contribution of the members of Arashi for the tourism campaign was presented as a *generous* participation for the sake of their country, as a patriotic duty; the promotion for JAL was presented as relatively independent - just one among the many Japanese products and services that Arashi endorsed - so the use of the group’s image while being tourism ambassadors could be presented as a common marketing move and not necessarily as a consciously joint move among elites; thus, government and media were able to *flag* national identity elements through the coverage on Arashi regular entertainment activities and the producers and sponsors of Arashi could
capitalize on the increasing attention and status the group won as they were transformed into the national idols.60

On March 11th of 2011, the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake caused a tsunami that demolished villages, damaged the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, and killed thousands of people, causing other troubles that Japanese had to face amid the emotional shock of having part of their country destroyed. At this moment, the measures and campaigns related to the promotion of Cool Japan were intensified and redirected to focus even more on the ideological aspect. Fearing a major crisis, the government noticed the need to prioritize the involvement of Japanese people in the plans of revitalization of both the disaster zone and the economy – and, perhaps, to keep them away from reacting against the government itself. In order to achieve this, it was crucial to strengthen the national identity and make people recover once again their national pride.

The Cool Japan Advisory Council (CJAC) - formed by business people, scholars, journalists and representatives from the different governmental ministries - responded quickly with a strategy meaningfully called Creating a New Japan Tying together ‘culture and industry’ and ‘Japan and the world’. This plan put the stress not on the economic, but on the ideological aspect of Japanese cultural production. The council members perceived the needs and opportunities that the circumstances were offering to transfer the core of the Japan brand from the cool to the traditional qualities of Japanese; this is, to humanize it. It was also implicit the hope that, by relying on those features, Japan could recreate the economic miracle of the 1960s, as it has been celebrated for years by nihonjinron.

[T]he spiritual strength and depth of the Japanese people as they calmly deal with the disaster is being praised by people around the world. […] Domestically, the earthquake has had the effect of reviving “empathy and solidarity” and a “spirit of cooperation,” qualities that traditionally existed among the Japanese people. […] At the same time, the Japanese people’s strong sense of responsibility in meeting delivery schedules, teamwork, innovation, and on-the-spot capabilities have allowed quick restoration of the product supply chain. And managers and employees, who despite being affected by the disaster, continue to engage in business so as not to trouble their customers. Undoubtedly, it is such ordinary aspects of Japanese society that are the hearth of the “Japan brand.” What is needed at this time are accurate supply of information that starts with the disaster itself and extends through to restoration, action to promote restoration of the affected regions and the revitalization of Japan, and steps to restore shine to the “Japan brand.” […] [A]ll concerned government ministries will need to stand together in implementing relevant measures toward these ends. […] [T]hey should return the Japanese people to

60 The details on how the group won its popularity will be discussed in the next chapter.
the essential spirit that they traditionally possessed, while also achieving new “evolution.” (Cool Japan Advisory Council, 2011, p. 7)

The plan was to reinforce Japanese identity and *self-image* in the context of a “story of recovery” and “overcoming of challenges” and, subsequently, show these imageries to the world in order to supplement the already admired innovative and postmodern side of Japanese culture that was associated with the Cool Japan phenomenon:

Japan must work quickly to dispel any short-term negative impact to its image by supplying information accurately and immediately. It must then continuously tell the world of the unshakably strong qualities of Japan and comprehensively engage in proactive public relations that highlight Japan’s recovery. Moreover, as the world’s concern focuses on Japan, it must also send out messages that utilize the power of sympathy and feelings of gratitude. (Cool Japan Advisory Council, 2011, p. 7)

In a short time, national media, cultural producers and corporations began numerous projects that proclaimed to be aimed at the revitalization of the affected zones; through this, it was expected that the image of the country in the exterior could be “restored and new fans of Japan created by broadcasting a new Japan ‘story’” (Cool Japan Advisory Council, 2011, p. 14). At that point, a patriotic discourse about the solidarity, sacrifice, resistance and strength of Japanese people and the love for their nation that should be expressed in actions aimed at the common interest began to be promoted heavily across the country. The campaign that began with the JTA was reinforced, as were the collaborations of Arashi with different media and corporations in productions related to the reinforcement of the national identity and pride.

Another move that can be seen as part of the measures to support this discourse, the Japan brand value, and the development of the country’s soft power was the Tokyo 2020 Olympic bidding campaign, which was built around the following message:

Right now, the power of this dream is crucial for Japan. The Olympics and Paralympics give us a dream. The dream gives us power. The power builds the future. At this moment, for us, this power is crucial to become one, to become strong. Let’s communicate to the world the strength of Japan because, for sure, that will give courage to the world. (Tokyo 2020 Candidate City, 2011)

This was to be a medium term strategy invading Japanese media and landscape from late 2011 until late 2013, when the election of the host for the 2020 Olympic games were

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61 All the original quotation marks in these extracts were respected.
announced.62 During that time, it was to function together with the rest of the projects that were filling citizens’ lives with the discourse of Japanese unity lightened by the use of the attraction power of *tarento* and popular images.


“Now, the strength of this dream is necessary for Japan. The Olympics and Paralympics will give us a dream. The dream will give us strength. The strength will create the future. For us, this strength is essential. To become one. To become strong. Let’s communicate Japan’s strength to the world. Because, for sure, that will become courage for the world. So, the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics for Japan.” From mid-2012 to September 2013, Japan – particularly Tokyo – was invaded by a campaign intended to convince Japanese people of

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62 During fieldwork from September 2012 to January 2013 in Tokyo, I witnessed this campaign. All major buildings, streets, train and metro stations, and the same trains and metro cars had posters with the message and images of athletes or media personalities supporting the bidding. There were also continuous spots in television and special events around the city, inviting neighbors to share time with former Olympic champions. By the fall of 2013, when I came back, the Olympics had been awarded to Tokyo and all the campaign had changed to one of celebration and expectation; this self-congratulatory campaign contrasted with the worries and dissatisfaction I heard from regular people in the city because of the upcoming increase on taxes that they attributed to the hosting of the event.
the importance of them supporting Tokyo’s bidding to host the 2020 Olympic Games. The messages appealed to Japanese emotional recovery from the tragedy of 2011 and the need of national unity towards the one same goal, which also could improve the country’s international image.

Nye (2011) visited the country some months after the earthquake and wrote that the disaster could have resulted in a stimulus for Japan’s soft power. Certainly, that was the goal of Japanese elites; towards such aim, on June 19 of 2013, the Diet promulgated an act for the establishment of the ‘Japan Brand Fund’, its aim being to advance the development of Japan’s attractiveness into new business and to draw overseas demand by making use of “the unique characteristics of Japanese culture and lifestyle” (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2013).

The earthquake of March 11, 2011 – dubbed in Japanese media as 3.11 - had given a new focus to the project of the promotion of Japanese culture which, before that, was fairly new and segmented with the projects of the METI and the MLIT. This time, the policies seemed to be well focused on reinforcing the Japan brand beginning from the domestic side, by emphasizing the human side linked to a traditional character of Japanese people in a contemporary media fashion. At first sight, this campaign could be considered simply patriotic, as it was aimed at the recovery of people’s pride on their national identity in order to “continuously tell the world of the unshakably strong qualities of Japan” (Cool Japan Advisory Council, 2011, p. 7). However, as Billig (1995) argues, even when many academics and ideological leaders defend patriotism as a necessary, beneficial and defensive sentiment, while condemning nationalism as an aggressive and irrational force, in practice they usually get the same results. This might be particularly so when the leader of the government promoting this sentiment has an undeniable nationalist background.

1.5 ABE’S POST-3.11 ADMINISTRATION: AIMING FOR A PATRIOTIC BOOSTING OR A NATIONALIST REBIRTH?

In December 2012, Abe Shinzō, a well-known and popular politician of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)63 took sit as Prime Minister of Japan, having as main points of his

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63 The LDP is a major conservative party in Japan, see Scheiner (2012).
agenda the recovery of the national economy and the normalization of Japan’s international status as a sovereign and powerful nation in all its rights. This was Abe’s second term, as he was in office between 2006 and 2007, when he had to quit due to health issues. Abe has always expressed his patriotic – one could say nationalist – stance. In 2006, just before he was elected Prime Minister for the first time, his book *Towards a beautiful country: For a confident and proud Japan* was published. In this extended essay, Abe exposed his political philosophy – shaped by his also prominent political ancestors – by which he defines himself as a conservative with an open mind; he also shares his thoughts on how Japanese society should be (Abe, 2006). From economic to constitutional reforms, Abe already had defined the politics he wanted to implement domestically and internationally for Japan to regain the place he believes it must have.

During his 2012 campaign, Abe’s slogan was ‘Restore Japan’, appealing to the much needed infrastructural, economic, social and emotional restoration after the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami, but also relating this with the idea of restoring Japan’s international position in economic, military and political spheres. In this campaign, the economic aspect of the restoration was highlighted, even turning the term *Abenomics* in a hot topic in Japanese media. *Abenomics* was the name given to the set of economic reforms and politics that Abe designed to finally end Japan’s ‘lost decades’; they involved an important increase in public spending to pump money into the financial system and deflate the yen, aiming to improve exports, necessarily linked to increments in taxes, and a growth strategy including a very controversial incorporation of Japan into the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) – a regional trade agreement that would open until now protected key industries to the free trade.

Nevertheless, behind Abe’s economic aims were always the more relevant political ones, which relate to all the topics regarding *neo*-nationalism. During all his political career he has made different visits to Yasukuni Shrine and these did not stop after he took office, even when people in China and South Korea have protested and allies have warned him about offending his neighbors. He is also a supporter of the historical revisionism, arguing that

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64 In Japanese *Utsukushii kuni he, jishin to hokori no moteru Nihon he*. An English version was published in 2007, entitled *Towards a beautiful country: My visions for Japan*.
65 *Nihon wo torimodosu*. See Abe (2012).
66 For more on the implementation of Abenomics, see Haidar & Hoshi (2014).
Japan’s military movements during war times were needed. He has also said that Japan has to move from a ‘passive pacifism’ to a ‘proactive pacifism’, meaning that Japan has to make the needed Constitutional changes to allow the SDF to join military operations with Japan’s allies in order to protect itself or them. This has been a major argument in his favor since the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands disputes have worsen (Scalon, 2014) and North Korea’s officials have compared Japan with Nazi Germany (Keck, 2014). Abe’s team has even recalled the slogan fukoku kyōhei (rich country, strong army) of Meiji times in order to express the logic behind Abe’s measures: Japan needs to recover its powerful economy, so it can build the strength to defend itself (Takahashi K., 2014).

Abenomics have been applied according to the plan with the expected results to this point, although it is too early to evaluate their long term impact. Nevertheless, they have allowed Abe and his people to move on the more difficult agenda, the political movements towards a constitutional reform. Since Abe assumed the Prime Minister chair, the national and international communities have been expectant about the measures he may take regarding Japan’s military stance. One of his main outspoken goals has been to get approval on a reinterpretation of the constitutional Article 9 to allow Japan military involvement in affairs implying the defense of the nation’s interests.

In Japanese media, Abe has been consistently represented as a proud patriot – nationalist by his critics - who wants Japan to recover all its glory; this has won him both supporters and detractors, but, according to the same media, his domestic popularity has been considerably higher than that of his predecessors; according to Japanese media polls, between 50 and 60 percent of Japanese approve Abe, which is considered high for a politician (Sekiguchi, 2013; 2014). In international media, however, the discourse about him is mixed. As China and South Korea have seen Abe’s rise to power as a threat to their interests or to Asia’s stability, those governments, through their media, have played the History card to accuse Japan as a menace. On the other hand, for Japan’s allies, as the United States, the proposal is promising for their own interests, so dominant media takes an apparent neutral stance when covering the evolution of Abe’s movements.
On July 1, 2014, news inside and outside Japan informed that Japanese Cabinet had finally approved a new interpretation of the constitution, allowing the government to participate in military joint actions aimed to defend Japan or its allies (NHK, 2014; Sieg & Takenaka, 2014; Yamaguchi, 2014). This was seen by many as a symbolic turn of the nation’s pacifist stance, which has been an essential feature of the post-war Japanese national identity. Demonstrations surged in Japan and China against this approval. In Japan, protesters accused Abe of fascist and expressed their fears of Japan getting involved in wars, even though the official statements of Abe have maintained the discourse of Japan as a pacifist nation, saying the change only means that the government will be able to actively protect the citizens in case of receiving an attack and not that it aims to begin the attacks on other nations (Yoshida & Mie, 2014). Chinese government protested by making public some files of the confessions of convicted Japanese World War II criminals in order to show the world what Japanese imperialism could mean (China Daily, 2014). Despite this, Japanese media corporations have kept presenting to the national and international community information about Abe’s considerably high approval rate (Yoshida & Mie, 2014).

Abe’s arrival to the Prime Minister chair has not changed to this point the trends on the politics of cultural promotion in media. If anything, these seem stimulated by the whole patriotic discourse circulating all around Japan. This is the political and economic context in which the sample of media idols and their attached discourses on nationhood are inserted. In order to get a fairly proper grasp of the dominant or preferred messages and meanings inserted by Japanese power elites in the texts related to the selected pop idols and football players, one must interpret them always keeping in mind their interactions with the other dominant texts circulating in Japanese media and the daily social environment in which they are perceived by Japanese people. This is what I will attempt to achieve in the next two chapters.