CONCLUSION: THE DISCURSIVE REGIME ON JAPANESENESS

In this dissertation, I have argued that in the context of a difficult national economic situation, the lessening of social ties, the resurgence of a nationalist trend in political spheres and continuous diplomatic troubles with Asian neighbours during the last couple of decades, Japanese elites created the projects of Cool Japan and the Japan brand in order to turn the national popular culture into a source of soft power aiming mostly at the recovery of the economy. However, when the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake of 2011 threatened to incite major social, political and economic crisis, the priorities of government, media and corporations took a new direction; it was obvious the urgent need for the strengthening of the national community. Thus, a campaign for the promotion of the national identity and pride began in the terrain of media banal culture, making an intense use of the native celebrities holding abundant media power, which implied a potentially wider influence among society. Japanese media transformed already popular tarento into national ambassadors of the discourses on the national identity and pride; native media idols began to be praised for their appeal and accomplishments at the same time that their Japaneseeness was emphasized.

Apparently patriotic stereotypes have been embedded in those powerful media texts, flagging social qualities as groupism, vertical organization, filial piety, hard work, sacrifice for the group and nation, and respect for the leader. All these features are related to Japanese society in the dominant nihonjinron discourse. At the same time, those influential media idols flag ideas on traditional gender roles: men are the ones who dominate the public sphere, women have a limited public role and must be submissive to men in any sphere of their lives; admirable men are those who focus on their professional activities – because that is the way to fulfil their national duty – while admirable women are those who are docile and contribute to the national interests by spending money in the Japanese market, working in those fields that are considered appropriate to them - retiring or prioritizing their families once they get married - and complying with the roles of wives and mothers.

Japanese elites have been reinforcing this banal representation of the patriotic discourse without any evident reference to the controversial nationalist issues that have been developing in political terrains: the neo-nationalism that appeared in the 1990s, has taken force during the last couple of years, when territorial disputes with China overlapped with
the returning to power of Abe Shinzō - a self-declared patriot, alleged nationalist by analysts, and accused Nazi by detractors. However, the stated aim of Japanese government of domestically restoring the nation’s economy, infrastructure and social cohesion to internationally recover the symbolic brightness of the Japan brand, must be read along with the political moves that Abe and other conservative leaders have been performing in order for Japan to regain military rights, to promote a softer reinterpretation of Japan’s actions during the Pacific War, and to establish the country as leader of Asia.

Contrary to the 1960s and 1970s, when the *nihonjinron* spread ideas on *Japaneseness* from the intellectual circles into society, this time, the troubled Japanese history of traditional national institutions and symbols and the recent political and international context seem to have pushed for a change in the way to flag the national ideas. Media’s *banal* texts became relevant and powerful means to disseminate the official and conservative – this is, the *right*-national ideas among current generations. Borrowing Billig’s (1995) notions, it can be said that, since 2010, people in Japan began to be exposed to a recurrent flagging of the elite-produced discourses on the national identity, pride and destiny, both subtly and explicitly by means of a process of banal nationalism. Japanese elites have relied on the unceasingly repetition of familiar stereotypes of patriotic representation for Japanese to recognize themselves in them and, by means of reinforcing the *we* idea, they are also preparing people to reject the *other*, particularly when it is presented as a threat to the *us*.

If, as Foucault (cited in Hall, 1997b) said, in each society there is a regime of truth produced by multiple forms of constrains that determine which discourses are accepted and which are rejected, then, this is the national identity’s regime of truth of contemporary Japan. The recurrence of the discourses about Japan and Japanese produced by diverse power institutions and wrapped in diverse disguises have allowed their naturalization in Japanese society in such a way that people are compelled to choose between complying with the discourse or face social judgement for not being a *good Japanese*. And, although the everyday life of many Japanese who struggle to achieve the citizen ideal, the experiences of many *non-Japanese* in Japan, and the discourses of international and new media, all challenge the discursive regime of truth about *Japaneseness*, this still remains.
At present, public opinion in Japan is divided regarding the change in Japan’s military status; the regime of truth about Japanese pacifism is dominant over the outspoken national need that some politicians claim regarding a stronger military force. The intensification of the territorial disputes with South Korea and China and of Chinese people’s anti-Japanese reactions may turn into the threat to the we that pushes the change from a patriotic to a nationalist stance of Japanese society. At this moment, it is impossible to assure that this change will take place. Hopefully, the fight for the national honour continues only in the banal media arenas of entertainment and sports. However, as those same politicians are the ones holding the power and have been building a supply of patriotic sentiments through the banal nationalist campaign, they may soon “call to national anger” (Billig, 1995, p. 103).

Currently, the world is experiencing an intensification of nationalism-related violent conflicts. Nevertheless, the strengthening of nationalist issues should not be conceived as only having those kind of flagrant manifestations. As in the Japanese case studied here, a process of building-up a nationalist sentiment may take place through unexpected ways. In social sciences, the study of this type of banal nationalism processes has been largely neglected in relation to countries besides the United States and the United Kingdom. The phenomena of banal media culture have been extensively studied in the frame of construction of gender identities, subcultures, international soft power and diplomacy, but not so much in relation to the propagation of national discourses inside the producer societies.

The present study, despite its limitations, contributes to the understanding of the function of media culture in processes of banal nationalism in contemporary societies. By focusing on the nation-related discourses found in the Japanese media culture, I intended to demonstrate the ways in which a society’s power elites work together from different terrains to establish a discursive regime about the national. It also shows how banal media culture phenomena are particularly useful on this aim, given their inherent quality of being consumed by choice and for pleasure, which makes the discourses flagged in them more easily naturalized through the whole banal package, contrasting to hard political or official discourses, which people receive more sceptically.