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"Media idols and national 'representation': Strengthening the national identity in contemporary Japan (Ídolos mediáticos y 'representación' nacional: Fortaleciendo la identidad nacional en el Japón contemporáneo)"

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To my parents, who have always supported my crazy dreams.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In this dissertation, all Japanese and Korean names will be written following their custom of putting first the surname and then the given name.

Except if indicated otherwise in a footnote, all the translations into English from written and media materials, interviews, and so forth, which were originally in Japanese or Spanish are from the author.

For the transliteration and transcription of Japanese language it will be preferred the form commonly employed in the Japanese media, if any. Many of the names and words that will appear in this study are commonly romanized and used as an alternative of the Japanese form for style in some contexts (for example the names of artists, sport players or places). However, when no equivalent in romaji (a system of romanized spelling used to transliterate Japanese) is typically used, the method followed will be the one of the *Kenkyūsha's New Japanese – English Dictionary* (3rd and newer editions). The Japanese terms that have been adopted in the English language and incorporated in the Oxford English Dictionary (6th and newer editions), as well as the names of people, places, groups or teams, will not appear highlighted as foreign words.

The referential style used in this document follows APA's 6th edition guidelines. There are two sections of references at the end of the document. The first is for all bibliographical and referential sources mentioned in the text. The second enlists the media sources that were part of the analysis and involved several episodes, numbers or a continuous follow up (television programs, magazines, commercials, web pages, blogs, promotion videos, concerts, etc.); for these, the dates correspond to the period of production that was analyzed or the period that the resource was monitored. For example, if many episodes of a television program transmitted from 2005 to 2008 were analyzed, then (2005 – 2008) will be written; on the other hand, if a web page was monitored from 2011 to 2012, then (2011 - 2012) will be indicated. In the case when a specific number or episode is referred in the text, then the data of the source will be detailed in a footnote.

ABSTRACT

From the perspective of the Cultural Studies, building on notions of national identity and theories of cultural and banal nationalism, through extensive interpretative textual analysis of two samples of dominant media phenomena and supported by observations and experiences obtained from fieldwork, this dissertation focuses on the examination of the discourses produced by Japanese power elites about the national identity, embedded in contemporary media *banal* texts inside the producer society. In Chapter 1, the historic context of Japanese nationalist movements and the construction of the national identity discourses are reviewed, finding that the hegemonic discourse on Japanese identity has maintained some essential traits across time. This discussion leads to evaluate the current political and economic context in which the discourses of interest have developed, resulting in the promotion of Japanese national culture as a mean to solve the nation's economic issues. In Chapters 2 and 3, through the analysis of the sample media phenomena, it is argued that in Japanese media there is a hegemonic patriotic discourse promoted in *banal* ways, intended to strengthen the national identity while lessening the provocative nationalist references linked to Japanese military past. The dominant discourse inserted in these phenomena is related to a national representativeness linked to traditional Japanese gender roles disguised in a contemporary and cosmopolitan outfit. Chapter 4, presents the discussion on the incongruences found in such discourse regarding the limited definition of what is considered Japanese and its implications for the relation of Japanese with non-Japanese. In the conclusion, it is argued that the elite-produced discourse on Japan and Japanese people appears to be already naturalized in society, acting as a regime of truth on the national identity. Finally, this study also calls the attention on the potential uses that the elites may try to give to the patriotic feelings that are being promoted by banal texts, which may signify an open and hegemonic resurgence of Japanese nationalist stance in the world.

Keywords: Banal nationalism; cultural nationalism; national identity; media culture; Japan.

RESUMEN

A partir de los estudios culturales, basada en las nociones de identidad nacional y nacionalismo cultural y banal, por medio de un extenso análisis interpretativo de texto de dos fenómenos muestra y apoyada en trabajo de campo etnográfico, esta tesis examina los discursos producidos por las élites de poder en Japón acerca de la identidad nacional insertos en textos mediáticos *banales* dirigidos a la sociedad nipona. En el capítulo 1, los diferentes movimientos nacionalistas de la historia moderna japonesa y la construcción de los discursos sobre la identidad nacional son revisados, encontrando que el discurso hegemónico sobre la identidad japonesa ha mantenido algunas características esenciales a través del tiempo. Esta discusión da paso a la evaluación del contexto político y económico en el cual lo discursos de interés se han desarrollado, resultando en la promoción de la cultura nacional como medio para resolver los problemas económicos del país. En los capítulos 2 y 3, a través del análisis de los fenómenos mediáticos muestra, se argumenta la presencia de un discurso patriótico hegemónico promovido por medios *banales* que busca fortalecer la identidad nacional, mientras disimula las referencias nacionalistas ligadas al pasado militarista japonés. Se encuentra que el discurso dominante inserto en ellos está relacionado con la representatividad nacional y el apoyo a cualidades de género y roles sociales tradicionales cubiertos por exteriores contemporáneos y cosmopolitas. El capítulo 4 presenta la discusión sobre un doble discurso acerca de los japoneses y no japoneses que promueve que esta sociedad se mantenga cerrada a cualquiera que no cumpla con los atributos naturalizados del ciudadano ideal. En la conclusión se argumenta que el discurso producido por las elites sobre Japón y los japoneses parece estar naturalizado en la sociedad, actuando como un régimen de verdad sobre la identidad nacional. Finalmente, este estudio llama la atención hacia los usos potenciales que las élites podrían dar a los sentimientos patrióticos que están siendo promovidos por medio de los textos banales, los cuales pueden significar un resurgimiento abierto y hegemónico de la postura nacionalista japonesa en el mundo.

Palabras clave: Nacionalismo banal; nacionalismo cultural; identidad nacional; cultura de medios; Japón.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the Japanese government established the Cool Japan Office, which would coordinate the promotion of Japanese culture for economic and soft-power aims. In 2011, after a natural disaster, the government called all national power elites to unite in the promotion of a discourse on the essential features of *Japaneseness* to make use of the state of affairs and, by revitalizing the national spirit, focus people on the rebuilding Japan's greatness and its international role.

On March 11, 2011, when an earthquake of magnitude 9.0 hit Japan, I was applying to enroll in the doctoral program. During my Master program, my research interest had been on Japanese popular culture, particularly the phenomenon of male pop idols; now, I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the social and cultural implications that media culture phenomena had in societies. Because I was already following Japanese media related to the mentioned cultural products, I had identified some changes in the discourses regarding the idol group Arashi; it was been called 'national' and the members of the group had been involved in governmental campaigns to promote Japan inside and outside the country. However, after the natural disaster, it was noticeable the increment in the use of these idols in contents aimed to show to the same Japanese society the attractiveness and richness of the country and the arguably 'typical' lives of regular Japanese people. Around the time I entered the program and began working on my project, I perceived that Japanese media was increasingly relating these 'national' idols to other 'national' representatives: athletes. At that time, there was a heavy presence of football players in domestic news and entertainment shows where Arashi appeared. I noticed some similar messages related to both phenomena, particularly regarding a representation of Japan and gender issues. As I followed the news about Japan, the diplomatic clashes with China and both Koreas, and the internal social and economic crisis, I became interested in the relation that might exist between these circumstances and the persistent discourse on the nation in entertainment. Thus, I decided to focus my research on the topic of the current media discourses on the nation as they were represented in celebrities' texts.

Fiske (2001) has said that, generally, when there is an attempt to produce or defend a national culture through media, the middle-class tastes and definitions of culture and nation dominate the public broadcasting. In Japan, during the period of reconstruction after the war, Japanese both public and commercial television played a crucial role in constructing and maintaining a sense of national community based on the ideological foundations of a national middle-class society through the images and messages of socially realistic productions (Lukács, 2010; Vogel, 1971). In contemporary Japan, after the market development of the 1990s lessened the 'mass-consumer' imaginary, the prevalent social distinction in media has not been made in terms of class, but in terms of individual preference. More important, the producers of all types of goods and services, the media - both public and commercial – and the government, all rely on the same celebrities to sell their products or represent their ideas, according to the particular image developed by media and producers of each and every celebrity. Therefore, in Japan, any attempt to defend the national culture through media can be expected to be represented by celebrities, not by a particular type of medium; media personalities, by means of their totemic function, seem to be the ideal texts to be embedded by a discourse about the national identity. Among those celebrities 'naturally' suitable to embody such discourse one must also consider the athletes who, through the practice of their sport, represent the nation in international competitions or international scenes.

Since 2011, through powerful media personalities, the daily lives of Japanese people – and any other residents – have been invaded by *obvious,* but somehow *soft* patriotic messages about Japan's dreams, union, strength and future. However, the discourse that is embedded in the whole campaigns is broader, deeper and less available to non-Japanese; it had also been around since long before.

The last couple of decades have been particularly difficult for Japan because of an economic stagnation, social changes that are seen as part of such poor performance, external pressures and political instability. Amid these circumstances, the state and other elites give the impression of focusing all efforts on economic policies and the building of soft power; but, when the emergency of a major crisis - as the one caused by the 2011 earthquake – presented, messages focused on Japan as a nation – putting an emphasis on people - proliferated noticeably, using popular culture phenomena as main emblems.

Although all states work constantly to reinforce the national identity in their societies, the mediums and discourses are different according to the particular context and aims they face. In the case of Japan, nationalism and patriotism have been notions regularly found in its historic development, with the ideologies they portrayed evidently endorsed by the government as hard policies related to education, military and industry. In the present case, however, the medium is different; through media culture and *banal* phenomena produced by media and economic elites, the hand of the government is hidden; also, as they are not imposed, but consumed willingly and freely by people, the discourses embedded in them are potentially more easily accepted and, through a naturalization process, easily reproduced. This is the way banal nationalism functions in contemporary societies around the world.

OBJECTIVE

Thus, from the perspective of the cultural studies, building on the theories of nation and nationalism, and supporting itself by the theoretical and methodological tools of media and celebrity studies, the purpose of this dissertation is to present a comprehensive analysis of the dominant discourses about the nation found in contemporary Japanese media banal contents and directed to the national audience, particularly since 2010, in order to elucidate the context in which these apparently *soft* patriotic messages increased, which elites or institutions are behind them, why are they choosing the terrain of media banal culture and phenomena to portrait them, what is the complete discourse that is being endorsed about the nation and national identity, what are they trying to say to Japanese, besides the obvious first reading, and which are the potential developments that may arise from this strong ideological promotion.

In order to achieve this, two samples of Japanese media phenomena are to be analyzed: the *pop* idol group Arashi and the female and male national football teams. These media idols are not, in any way, the only ones who have been promoting - and who have been promoted by - the national discourse; Japanese media culture is very standardized, in some sense, and once a trend takes place, it invades all contents until the next big thing happens. However, this dissertation is not focused on the social significance of media personalities in Japan, nor on the whole spectrum of discourses contended in them; it is focused on the media discourses on national identity embedded in banal contents.

Thus, the reason I chose these samples for analysis is merely practical. I needed a dense sample of banal contents related with particular celebrities who were constantly associated to national messages, in order to become used to the messages inserted in them through the very vast intertextuality Japanese media involves. However, this sample should be manageable enough for me to go through it in the limited time I had to finish this dissertation. Having these different requirements in mind, I decided to analyze two phenomena that I was already familiar with, had a substantial media presence during the period of interest, had different core audiences, and were constantly linked to a national discourse mostly towards Japanese people themselves.

Through the analysis, it is expected to find if the prevalent notions of *Japaneseness* presented and represented in media through Japanese celebrities – as those studied here – create a discursive regime about the national, which mutated of medium but continues to represent the discourses of cultural nationalism of other historical moments, supporting notions of ethnic and social homogeneity and the male as active center of the society. Furthermore, considering the political and international context of Japan in the last two decades, it should be questioned if the presence of a strong ideological campaign could be seen as a departure from Japan's pacifist stance and a threat to the stability of East Asia.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Foucault (1968; 1979) argued that theories do not provide absolute truth or universal knowledge; they have always been instruments to achieve particular aims. Following this idea, theories should be seen as stances, as points of view to analyze phenomena according to the particular goals that one has in mind. This dissertation is positioned within the cultural and media studies, making use of some of the theoretical and methodological tools developed in such disciplines, according to the specific phenomena analyzed and the kind of discussion that expects to address.

Culture permeates all levels of society and the construction of the identity of the individual. As their object of study is culture, its production and function in society, it is no surprise that cultural studies are an amalgam of the theories dealing with society and the individual from different perspectives. The discipline developed from the neo-Marxist

Frankfurt School, which dealt with the critical analysis of what they called for the first time 'culture industries', referring to the mass-produced culture as opposite to the *authenticity* of a 'high culture'. The Frankfurt School, influential between the 1930s and 1950s, defended that culture industries, as fundamental element in the leisure activities of people, gave an ideological legitimation to the capitalist regime, by their ability to turn consumers into a passive mass. In the 1960s, the Birmingham School appeared to reinstall the agency of people as consumers of cultural products, rejecting at the same time the term of mass culture and masses. By using the developments about hegemony from Gramsci, this school proposed that culture was a terrain in which a political struggle between powers and society tried to dominate and resist.[1]

These schools relied heavily on political economy theories for their discussions. However, since around the 1960s, the developments in the French structuralism and post-structuralism and the analysis of the relationship among language, ideology, power and individuals, done by Foucault, Derrida, Barthes and others, began to converge with the cultural studies, as cultural products and practices began to be seen as texts with multiple levels of readings that represented more than one ideological side.

In this study, I will rely on some of these ideas – which will be developed later - as I find that there is not a single theory that covers the different levels of analysis of the phenomenon I am addressing, but also because there are different valuable insights on culture, society, power, ideologies and identities that I find useful to obtain a deeper understanding of it. As well, it is important to establish from this point that I will be referring to a media culture, instead of talking about popular or mass culture. I follow Kellner's (2009) argument about the problematic use of mass culture – which implies the positioning of the Frankfurt School – and popular culture – sometimes used to refer to the culture arising from people, others to denote the products of the cultural industries without the critical connotation of masses. Instead, media culture, as he indicates, draws the line to the cultural phenomena produced, distributed and consumed by and through media, while distancing itself from a predetermined judgment of value towards these type of culture.

[1] For a throughout critical analysis on the development of the Cultural studies, see Kellner (2003; 2009).

Just as with theory, methodological tools in cultural/media studies are diverse. As this dissertation focuses on the Japanese media nation-related discourses, it is built substantially on an intensive interpretative textual analysis of the sample phenomena of media contents, using a hybrid of methods dealing with linguistic and discourse analysis. In these, the context - the social and historical moment in which the texts are produced and consumed - and the intertextual dimension - their relation with other texts and discourses - are fundamental. For such reason, field work in Japan was also essential to obtain an enhanced understanding of the dimensions in which the media discourse of interest was active and how it related to the social situation of Japan. This field work was performed in a total of ten and a half months in two different periods.

My first research stay was based in Tokyo between September of 2012 and January of 2013. During sixteen weeks, my aim was two-folded. First, I intended to improve my understanding of the media dominant contents, so I could obtain a more suitable preferred reading of the texts I was analyzing. In order to do it, I needed to involve myself, as much as my own limitations as a foreign woman allowed me to, in the Tokyoite life; by doing this, I was also expecting to identify the media messages and images that Japanese people were been exposed to - even unintentionally - through the overly present billboards, posters and screens found around the city, among them, those related to the sample phenomena, and comprehend their intertextuality, so I could attain more pieces to complete the puzzle of the dominant media discourse on the national. Second, I planned to be able to evaluate to some extent the reception side in order to enrich my interpretation of the media texts. With these purposes in mind, I used some ethnographic tools to work around the city.

I decided the best way to achieve both goals in the limited time I had was to try to experience the typical exposure to media messages from the point of view of Japanese of different characteristics. I wanted to have a people of different backgrounds and social conditions to get a better understanding on which media and what messages are consumed by whom and how they influence them. I planned to get native volunteers to give me a sample of their typical weekly schedules, including the places they went, the routes and transportation they took, as well as their intended media exposure, this is, the television programs they typically watched, the radio shows or music they listened, the web sites they

constantly visited, and the live shows or events they use to go to. After I could get this information, I intended to follow the schedules to experience – in the limit of the possible given the time and my status as a foreigner, a woman and a young researcher – the exposure to media messages and, during the hours people told me to be at work or school or in any other activity that did not imply a media exposure or that I could not have access to, conduct participant observation around the city and expose myself freely to Japanese media.

I found it was very difficult to approach Japanese people without any intermediary, let aside ask them to provide an unknown foreigner with their detailed schedule. Thus, I asked foreign friends who had been living in Japan for some years to introduce me to Japanese friends who may be willing to help me. I was able to get nine people to participate: a house wife, a *salaryman*, an office lady, a female graduate student, a male university student, a high school girl, a male *freeter*, a retired man and his wife. After they gave me their rough schedules, I began to follow them as maps of media exposure.

During this time, I also sought to get some opinions of Japanese people about the sample phenomena and try to unveil to some degree the way the discourses were being perceived. However, this goal turned out to be much more difficult to attain. I noticed, when I tried to perform semi-structured interviews and surveys, people began to repeat the same evident messages that media portrayed. I realized that knowing they were being interviewed, particularly by a foreign woman, posed Japanese people in their *tatemae* mode.[2]

Although the objectives of this dissertation do not include a reception analysis *per se*, I still found relevant to have some insides about it for my textual analysis; thus, I decided to change my approach and try to obtain a sample of people's opinions through casual conversations. Also, through the information obtained by the volunteers on the media exposure schedule, I noticed a common trend: seven of them declared to visit the Japanese internet text board 2channel and post something there at least once every two days. 2channel is an open, free and anonymous website in Japanese, where people write whatever they want about whichever topic imaginable. I used this and other Japanese blogs as sources to complement my perspective on the ways Japanese citizens made sense of the media texts and

[2] Their official, polite, studied version. The notion of *tatemae* will be discussed later.

discourses of interest, but I did not rely heavily on them, because the same free access and anonymity of the sites do not allow to verify that those written opinions are actually from Japanese people or if many of them are not from the same person, among other bias.

At the time I was performing this stay, Japan's diplomatic troubles with China intensified and there were also national elections. Watching, on one hand, how these events were presented in media and, on the other, the messages in entertainment and sports contents, allowed me to expand my understanding on the way Japanese elites produced a unified discourse relating *hard* and *soft* contents. This is, as the hard contents – news, political debate shows and columns, documentaries, etcetera – focused on those issues of national interest with a dominant nationalist agenda, soft or *banal* contents – entertainment, sports, fiction – reinforced the national sentiment without explicitly referring to the political national and international situation of Japan.

After I returned to Mexico from that stay, I focused on the textual analysis of the contents, supported by the experiences and insights I obtained in Japan. By this time, my interpretation of the texts had changed without myself realizing it. As I began writing about the national discourse found in Japanese media, I noticed I had to include the gender dimension. I have not been involved in gender analysis before, even if my interest has been partial towards male celebrities, I had avoided to analyze them from a gender perspective. However, this time I found that my experiences as a female non-Japanese researcher in Japan and my field observations, had unconsciously made me recognize the relevance of the gender dimension in the national discourse.

In September 2013, I went back to Japan for a 6 and a half month stay. This time, I spent most of my time in Osaka, the second largest metropolis in the country. The aims and conditions were also different, as I was participating in a program for foreign specialists in Japanese culture sponsored by The Japan Foundation. I continued my field work, this time contrasting the dominant media messages in this other city and Tokyo and their evolution from one year to the other. I also was able to enhance my media analysis by visiting the Broadcasting library in Yokohama and the Tokyo Magazine Bank. By this moment, I had an advanced idea on the dominant discourse that Japanese media was promoting to Japanese

citizens, but now, as invitee from an official institution, I obtained a first-hand experience on the discourses Japanese elites were promoting to non-Japanese, so I could compare these to the ones found in media.

My residence during this time was provided by the Japan Foundation, it is called Kansai Center by participants and staff, and it is a paradise. Keeping my social researcher awareness always on, I immediately was aware that the facilities offered by the Kansai Center - a karaoke room, many lounges with sea view and massage chairs, easy access to Japanese beers and sake, and many 'roommates' from all over the world – and the cultural programs we were invited to were designed according to a very well structured discourse on Japan, Japanese people and Japanese aims in the world. The organization also makes it hard for foreign visitors – mostly students or diplomats - to experience Japanese society in a critical manner; thus, one can hardly find a flaw on the image of Japanese perfectly polite, kind, organized, developed and traditionally rooted society.

The Kansai Center is located at the skirts of Osaka, facing the sea and the International Kansai Airport; there is a long artificial beach in front and many parks around. It is rounded by massive shopping malls intended for thousands of tourists that arrive at the airport; in the relatively few housing buildings found around live mostly retired people or very young couples with children, so, when going to the beach or the park, it is common to find people exercising, playing with their kids or walking their pets.

Many of these Japanese are volunteers in the institute: they like to relate with foreigners and give them the 'Japanese experience'. They are conversational partners, they invite the participants to spend time in their homes or go with them on small trips during the weekends, they show the foreign visitors how to move around and are always willing to go with them to wherever one may want to go. The relation with these Japanese was relatively closer than the ones I had with the volunteers of my previous stay; I was able to spend much more time with them and to talk much more, while also observing their attitudes and activities. However, I noticed that many of their comments regarding Japan and Japanese followed a much naturalized discourse aimed to show a foreigner the best of their country.

Nevertheless, it turned out to be very valuable to share more than half a year with people from around the world. Through many long conversations with other graduate students specializing in some Japan-related topic and with diplomats who were in Japan for the first time, I could get many different perspectives and opinions on Japan and the change in their perceptions before and after being there. This proved to be highly useful not only to evaluate how well the policies of Japanese government were working, but also to enhance my own analysis by turning my attention on some elements that I had missed in my readings of the texts.

After finishing this second stay in Japan, I found myself writing not only about the national media discourse and its gender dimension at the domestic level, but also about the existence of an alternative discourse on the relationship between Japanese and non-Japanese, and the *Japaneseness* discourse directed to foreigners. Although my dissertation objectives do not include the analysis of the Japan-produced media discourse towards the exterior, I still think my findings in this regard are an important result of the research that should be mentioned. Thus, in the last chapter I will briefly discuss this issue.

I will next present my debate on the notions about nation and nationalism that are the foundation of my discussion, as well as the theoretical and methodological tools I use for disclosing the discourses embedded in the sample phenomena.

DEBATING THE NATION MATRIX

After the World War II, the dominant ideologies of liberalism and Marxism relegated the debates about these topics as they considered them soon to die phenomena when the world became one of citizens – in the liberal view – or one in which the national worries would be absorbed by the bigger and more relevant classist revolution – in the most common Marxist trend.[3] However, the last decades have seen a re-emergence of movements that have claimed *national* motives, bringing back to the terrain of debate the notions of nation, nationalism, patriotism and national identity.

[3] See Anderson (1991), Cruz Revueltas (2003), Díaz-Polanco (1981), Gellner (1994), Smith (1998).

At the beginning of the 1980's, Benedict Anderson (1991) noticed that there were no classical or grand thinkers about nationalism; but it was around that time that some names began to arise as important reference on the study of the phenomenon. The same Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Anthony D. Smith led trends of critic analysis that rehabilitated the debate and advanced a theorization on nations and nationalism. The discussions have emerged with such strength that nowadays "academic presses are replete with nationalism-related monographs/collections" (Zuelow, Young, & Sturm, 2007, p. 1). This is also due to the multiple connotations that the have been attached to *nationalism;* the term "has been used to refer to a *process*, a kind of *sentiment* or *identity*, a *form of political rhetoric*, an *ideology*, a *principle* or set of principles, and a kind of *social-political movement*" (Norman, 1999, p. 56).

Although it is evident that these approaches to nationalism are all important and related, they imply different categories of study and, for such reason, each of them involves a separate route of analysis. I say this as a disclaimer on the discussion that I am presenting here: it is not intended to be exhaustive on all the variants and trends on the study of nation and nationalism.[4] Whereas I will review the works of theorists who covered many aspects of the phenomenon, I will not stop on normative debates, as it is not my aim to argue those aspects in the present study.[5] Instead, I will focus on the different positions in the critical theories of nation, nationalism and patriotism that contribute to the analysis of those categories in relation to culture and national identity in the modern and contemporary context of Japan.

THEORIES ON NATION AND NATIONALISM

Four broad tendencies can be discerned in the theorization of nation and nationalism: perennialism, modernism, primordialism and ethno-symbolism.[6] Perennialism was the source of the nationalist ideology and movements seeking the conformation of nation-states

[4] For a throughout review and critique on them, see Smith (2001).
[5] For some views on those debates, see the book edited by Beiner (1999).
[6] Other important reference for the debates on nationalism is Ellie Kedourie (1961). His approach was historicist and he centered his discussion on the political aspects of the phenomenon, thus falling outside the scope of this study, but his ideas inspired the theorization of modernists as Benedict and Gellner. He saw nationalism in a negative light as a political ideology meant to impose a political culture and legal and moral principles, while causing divisions among humanity.

during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century; it claimed that nations have always existed everywhere, presenting them as something natural in human existence. The modernism arose as a reaction to this position, arguing that it was nationalism the origin of nations and both were outcomes of modernity, not something natural or ever existent in human history; this paradigm found that the development of a common language was crucial to shape the artificial – imagined, invented, constructed – communities that are known as nations and take the form of current nation-states. Primordialism, a critique on the modernists' denial of any pre-existing elements of cohesion within nations, contended that there are some inherent qualities, some *natural attachments* – biological or cultural – in the individuals who belong to a nation; this view put on the table the idea of ethnicity as a link among the members of such communities. Finally, ethno-symbolism appeared stressing the relevance of myths, traditions and symbols – some taken from older-than-nations groups called *ethnies* - in the constitution of nations, nationalism and national identities and the emotional responses of people toward these. From these trends, perennialism and primordialism have been surpassed by the developments of modernism and ethno-symbolism, respectively.[7]

The modernist approach, while now highly criticized, put the basis for the current developments on the theory. Benedict Anderson, in his classic book on the topic - *Imagined communities* (1991) - considered nation and nationalism as 'cultural artifacts'. Anderson's major contribution lies on his definition of nation, understood as the modern nation-state; he said a nation was an *imagined*, political, limited and sovereign community. Although Anderson noted that most communities are imagined, he said that the peculiarity of the nation is found not in its falseness or genuineness – referring specifically to the position of Ernest Gellner which will be presented later - but in the way in which such community is thought to be bonded. According to his theory, the members of a nation do not know most of the other fellow-members, but they still *imagine* that they all belong to the same 'horizontal comradeship' for the sake of *sharing a culture*. Following a Marxian-influenced historical analysis, Anderson put the development of 'print-capitalism' and other circumstances brought by capitalism as the keys that facilitated the standardization of languages and the dissemination of a secular culture that gave place to a national consciousness, replacing the

[7] Smith (1998; 2001) does a comprehensive analysis of these views.

imagined communities that were before centered on religion or on dynastic realms. Updating Anderson's arguments for present-day nation-states, it could be said that the spread of narratives of imagined ties – a shared culture - through media becomes a crucial aspect in the successful establishment of the imagery of the nation.

Ernest Gellner, on the other hand, although also arguing the fictional nature of nations, their origin in modernity and the importance of language for their establishment, did not completely agree with Anderson; he considered the industrialization process as the critical moment in which there was a *need* for a culturally homogeneous society. In Gellner's theory, the capitalism system required workers to be mobile, constantly trained and motivated to work hard; the migration to cities had created a mass of people with little in common and a difficulty to communicate not only in person but also by impersonal means, so it was essential to standardize the language and give people a common identity. For these effects, the *educational system* functioned to create a *common past, language* and *culture* and to consolidate nationalisms, but its cost and magnitude were such that only states could control it. Then, the states became the holders of the legitimate culture; and, the acquaintance of it became a person's "most precious possession, his real entrance-card to full citizenship and human dignity, to social participation" (Gellner, 1987, p. 16); such shared culture was to be the medium of identification that nationalist movements would exalt in order to appeal to people and make them believe that nations and states belonged together and that both were needed. In this sense, nationalism had the function that religions had had historically in pre-modern societies: instead of the worship of religious symbols, national culture took the place of unifying factor and, thus, of worship element.

Gellner strongly stated that nationalisms created nations and that the proclamations of them being something natural were nothing but myths. He accepted that some nationalisms took pre-existing cultures and turned them into nations, but argued that they were, nonetheless, *invented* and a contingency. The critique that Anderson did on this respect was that by using such term, Gellner was implying that nationalism and nations were false while *true communities* existed. Indeed, Gellner was very critical to the construction of nationalisms; however, his arguments were not so much towards deploring nationalisms for being invented, but on accusing their dual nature. Nationalism – Gellner (1983, p. 124) said

– "suffers from pervasive false consciousness. Its myths invert reality: it claims to protect an old folk society while helping to build up an anonymous mass society." To this aim, nationalism makes people forget episodes of the past and create a false memory made up of selected imageries. Here appears an element that is worth of attention in Gellner's (1983, p. 127) theory - the relation between media and nationalism in our time:

> The media do not transmit an idea which happens to have been fed into them […] it is the media themselves, the pervasiveness and importance of abstract, centralized, standardized, one to many communication, which itself automatically engenders the core idea of nationalism, quite irrespective of what in particular is being put into the specific messages transmitted. The most important and persistent message is generated by the medium itself, by the role which such media have acquired in modern life. That core message is that the language and style of the transmissions is important, that only he who can understand them, or can acquire such comprehension, is included in a moral and economic community, and that he who does not and cannot, is excluded.

Following this trend, other theorist who also talked about nations, nation-states and nationalisms as invented and double-faced, while noticing the importance of a selected memory was Eric Hobsbawm (2000a, p. 13), who said that "the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of nation […] is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized." In the study of nation-related phenomena, he pointed out, invented traditions are critical, as they are used to *fix* somehow 'unspecified' and 'vague' values and norms of behavior that – nonetheless - are emotionally and symbolically charged to link the individual to a specific society. He also called the attention on mass-produced invented traditions like football competitions and other types of ritualized mass gatherings that have been used for official purposes to provide "a medium for national identification and factitious community" (Hobsbawm, 2000b, p. 300).

On the other hand, Anthony D. Smith - one of the main critics of modernism and the main reference in the ethno-symbolist paradigm - condemns the modernists for their underestimation of the ethnic roots of nations and the sentiments that they produce in people, although agrees with them on the relevance of symbolic resources and the differentiation between elites and masses in the process of formation of nation-states. For Smith, nations have a double historicity: one related to the specific historical context that made them appear and another dependent on the memories and traditions shared by their people. He says that in nations two ideal types of pre-modern ethnic groups can be found shaping the kind of

national identity and nationalisms that prevail in them. One is the lateral and extensive bureaucratic incorporation in which the upper social strata - composed by aristocracy, clerical and scribal sectors - extends in certain territories and, gradually, their culture penetrates down the social scale creating a more 'civic' national identity in which territory is at the core of the nationalist feelings. The other is the vertical and intensive urban-based incorporation, which has wealthy factions as rulers and builds the nation through 'vernacular' movements, building a national identity by taking the indigenous history, languages and cultures. Both types, however, require the appearance of an ideological movement – nationalism – to transform those communities into nation-states. Smith (2009, p. 61) defines nationalism as the ideology – and subsequent movement - directed "to attain and maintain autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members believe it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'." Through a careful selection of traditions, symbols, memories and national myths, elites expect to echo the needs of different segments of population, so they can produce a national identity that generates strong loyalties and affections among people towards the nation (Smith, 1991).

As can be seen, defining nations has been a topic of debate for decades, but from the theories above, it is possible to recover some essential traits: a nation implies a group of people who share a national identity, this is, a sense of belonging based on ethnic, cultural and/or territorial elements. This identity is implanted or reinforced in people's minds through an ideology promoted by elites that seek to form or maintain a nation. Such ideology is called nationalism, although some refer to it as patriotism; as will be discussed below, the distinction seems to be more conceptual than practical.

THE FEELINGS OF THE NATION: NATIONALISM, PATRIOTISM AND CIVIL RELIGION

In the current era of 'globalization', a trend appeared in the social sciences arguing that nation-states, nationalisms and national identity are losing relevance among the discourses and politics of multiculturalism. These analysts reject grand theories and move away from the historic analysis of the origin of those phenomena to focus on the way in which contemporary communities – usually bringing together the study of national, ethnic and racial

elements - respond to the processes of fragmentation in nation-states due to 'globalization'.[8] Some even talk about a 'post-national' era in which nation-states will lose all relevance.[9] To this, Smith (2007, p. 27) responds that "[u]nder the impact of culturally diverse waves of immigrants, national identities are being redefined and reshaped," but they are not disappearing. National identities are deeply embodied in contemporary societies as they continue to be a dominant criterion of identification among individuals in society, while also give them emotional attachments, values and beliefs to get through life (Billig, 1995; Kelman, 1997). For such reasons, it is understandable that Delanty (1996, p. 3) had said that "nationalism no longer appeals to ideology but to identity."

National identity is a multi-dimensional notion that implies all the facets of the individual's relationship towards his nation - from national consciousness to nation-related emotion – and, as a collective phenomenon, the system of values, beliefs and expectations that is transmitted to the members of the nation (Blank, Schmidt, & Westle, 2001; Kelman, 1997). There is little doubt that in contemporary nation-states, leaders need to keep the national identity of individuals alive and the ideological system behind it renewed according to the needs of the state. This is done unceasingly through educational systems – which inculcate the national myths, language, values and memories - and through processes of cultural and banal nationalism – to maintain and reinforce the national identification of individuals and their sentiments towards the nation, so they can keep the society united.

Cultural nationalism makes itself present at moments when the national identity of people is perceived as weak or threatened; in this case, intellectuals become the ideological leaders that provide intelligentsia[10] and the rest of society with an upgraded set of ideas and principles regarding the uniqueness of their national identity based on history and culture, in order to strengthen the attachment of people towards the nation-state (Yoshino, 2005). On

[8] See Balibar (1991), Bhabha (1990).
[9] See Appadurai (1996) or the conclusion of Hobsbawm (1992), who, while being a modernist, expressed his thoughts on the prospects of nation and nationalism. For critical essays on the trend of 'post-national' ideas, see Delanty (2011), Young, *et al.* (2007). Bauman (1996; 2004), Giddens (1987; 1991), Hall (1996), Niezen (2004), Wallerstein (1991) also offer important ideas on the place of nations, nationalisms and national identity in the contemporary context.
[10] Intellectuals are understood here as part of the intelligentsia, but being them the actual proponents of ideas, while intelligentsia would include all the educated sector of a society.

the other hand, Michael Billig (1995) argues that in contemporary nation-states people are exposed to a recurrent *flagging* of everything national – a constant reminder of their belonginess to one nation in a world of them, stimulating memory and forgetting simultaneously, and implanting habits and beliefs in people's minds, making them appear as being part of the natural order. Billig uses the notion of flagging to refer to the constant display of all symbols that condense nationhood – from actual flags, national emblems and the written name of the nation, to maps, everyday words, phrases, etc. As regular flags, he says, those symbols can be *waved* and seek a conscious response from people – from a respectful salute to deep emotions; or they can appear *unwaved*, just as part of the 'landscape'. The unwaved flags, nonetheless, are as important as the waved ones, because their pervasiveness reinforce in people the existence of the nation "mindlessly, rather than mindfully" (p. 38). This process of constant, unmindful, and casual flagging of symbols of nationhood in the everyday social and cultural practices and through media, is banal nationalism.

Because both of these processes are focused on the reproduction of a national sentiment and consciousness through culture and do not seek political actions *per se*, may be assumed as 'patriotic' campaigns. The relation between patriotism and nationalism is undeniable; as Kelman (1997, p. 167) indicates, "leaders of nation-states or nationalist movements utilize patriotic sentiments that exist within the population, or try to create such sentiments to the extent that they do not already exist, to instill nationalist ideology in the population;" this is, nationalism always relies on patriotism "as the source of the population's trust in and support for the state" (Kelman, 1997, p. 165).

As it can be seen, patriotism and nationalism not only refer to ideologies regarding the nation, they also denote sentiments and expressions of the national identity. By many, they are two poles in a continuum of nation-related consciousness and sentiments of individuals; the first being a positive and 'rational' attachment towards one's land and people expressing itself as love and loyalty, the second as an irrational, blind and dangerous support to the nation that usually takes the form of exclusion and repulsion of everything and everyone foreign (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Bauman Z. , 2004; Habermas, 1997; Kelman, 1997).

There have been different authors who have tried to demonstrate this differentiation. Through specific study cases, some have analyzed the correlation between the type of attachment to one's country and the thoughts about self-sacrifice and going to war for the nation's interests; however, the results have been less than conclusive in terms of how these sentiments actually drive people to be aggressive or receptive towards foreign ideas and individuals (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Blank, Schmidt, & Westle, 2001; Druckman, 1994; Latcheva, 2010). As Billig (1995, p. 103) argues, although theoretically it is not difficult to draw a line between the two affects, in practice, both sentiments have the potential to "call to national anger." Also, there has been a tendency for leaders to justify their actions and ideological campaigns as 'patriotic', while accusing those of other nation-states as 'nationalist', while they use patriotism as excuse to receive support for offensive actions towards those who are said to be against the nation.

In this regard, another relevant notion comes in hand, that of civil religion. It was developed from the theory of Durkheim (1964) about the need in modern societies of secular systems to take the place that had belong to supernatural religions as focus of worship to unify society, because those traditional faiths were losing their power of cohesion.[11] Durkheim recognized that modern societies were able to establish themselves as sacred through the sentiment of patriotism and the rituals of nationalism; by these, the homeland was turned into a god that moved masses into common aims. Building on these ideas, Bellah (1970) argued that a civil religion was a set of beliefs, rituals and symbols that were made sacred and institutionalized in a society by means of a national sentiment and self-understanding that involved the moral and political context of the time it appeared, acting as a unifying force towards actions; because of this, it had a transcendental function of relating the nation's present to its past and future (Hammond, 1976). Thus, the beliefs, symbols, and cultural practices related to the nation-state – which constitute the national identity – have to be promoted enough to become institutionalized –what Billig (1995) would call *naturalized* - in order to direct society to the objectives of the state. To this aim, the leaders feed the

[11] Many authors consider that the first one to use the term was Rousseau in his The Social Contract (Bellah, 1970; Hammond, 1976; Santiago, 2009).

patriotic sentiment and the ideology imbedded in national identity by means of nationalism processes – cultural or banal.

In contemporary nation-states, media are perhaps the most powerful tools elites have to achieve this. But, no content can attain something by just presenting a message; in order for people to receive the message, they need to be attracted to the content and then, still remains to be seen how people make sense of it. Hence, media idols - who have become pervasive in contemporary societies – can be seen as a relevant element in the process of propagation of a national ideology. In the following section, I present a theoretical and conceptual frame built from cultural studies, media studies and celebrity studies, which will allow me to analyze the sample phenomena I chose to study the situation of Japanese media discourse on the national identity.

TALKING BANAL: DISCLOSING THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MEDIA IDOLS

The culture produced inside the cultural industries has had a bad reputation among some schools of social sciences (i.e. Frankfurt School); among non-academics – and even though most people consume some form of it - it is also frequently regarded as fake, foolish, idiotizing and *banal*. Nonetheless, the relevance of media culture in contemporary societies cannot be ignored. The influential power that some of the products born in this terrain have, has made them key elements in the strategies of governments to relate with other nations and also, as it will be discussed here, in the *mediation* with their own societies. As Fiske (2005) said, despite the fact that this kind of culture conveys the ideology of the dominant sectors of society, it cannot become truly popular unless it shows elements that audiences recognize and accepts to build their own identities. However, as Kellner (2009) refutes, one should be careful not to overestimate the capacity of resistance that audiences have towards the media offered messages; people can resist the preferred readings to some degree, but media culture - more usually than not - induces them to accept the dominant ideologies by presenting them consistently through many forms.

Media personalities, celebrities, *tarento* - as they are known in Japan – or media idols – as I call them - are part of the images that circulate through media and are consumed in contemporary societies in such a fervent way that they are arguably one of the most powerful

tools by which people make sense of the world (Marshall, 1997). The celebrity is a text located in the 'meta-reality' – a midpoint between reality and fiction built by media intertextuality (Lukács, 2010) – where the social process of the intersection of the celebrity with other texts and with the socially situated reader activates the discourse of what he/she represents. The expansion of media in societies has made media idols a widespread symbol or totem of the practices and ideologies of the society that produces them; and, because their symbolism is rebuilt incessantly by producer elites and audience, they are an updated representation of the power structures and ideologies that are being dominant.

In this dissertation, one of the aims is to elucidate how the Japanese elites have attempted to spread a discourse on the national identity among the contemporary Japanese society by the use of some media idols as representations of an *ideal* or archetypical identity and what is the content of the discourse that involves it. To this end, I find pertinent the theoretical articulations of Barthes (1991) about the myth as a *naturalizer* of the social, the cultural, the ideological and the historical in a society. He proposed that any cultural representation could function as support to what he called mythical speech, or a message that transforms history into nature:

> *In the eyes of the myth-consumer,* the intention […] of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason. (p. 128)

This is the ideological process that allows the dominant discourse to establish itself as part of the *common sense* in a society and supports the ideas of the ruling groups. In this process, the shared cultural codes of the readers and the historical moment of the reading are central for the interpretation. This theoretical frame, nevertheless, must be completed. As Marshall (1997) said, even when no cultural sign is ever completely naturalized, there are moments in which there seems to be an agreement derived from the hegemony found in a society.

According to Gramsci (2009), the hegemony implies a high degree of consensus at the level of coherent values and everyday consciousness. This hegemonic state is achieved because the leading sectors keep conflict at bay by *negotiating* with the rest of society through

ideologically safe escapes, which are organized by 'organic intellectuals' – or ideological leaders. The same role is played by the ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) – among them media – through the process of *interpellation* in Louis Althusser's (2009) constructions of ideology. *Interpellation*, he argued, is the practice by which people, be means of the use of the products or practices – texts –offered by the ISAs, are turned into subjects who find themselves mirrored in specific forms of thought or behavior. It is important to keep in mind that this process should not be seen as infallible; Slavoj Zizek says that it works only when the individual recognizes himself in the texts being offered to him (Storey, 2005).

Thus, it is possible to argue that celebrities are one of the ideological escapes that some elites – government, media, cultural industries, corporations – use to *interpellate* people and negotiate with society, trying to establish hegemonic social and cultural values; but, they will only attain that role if people recognize themselves in the ideology represented by the media idols. This is why Marshall (1997, p. 65) says that the power that a media personality has in a society derives from the audience, because celebrities "represent subject positions that audiences can adopt or adapt in their formation of social identities. [… They are] an embodiment of a discursive battleground on the norms of individuality and personality within a culture."

Hence, the presence and power of some media idols - and their contextualized leading discourse – are the result of the constant negotiation among the different agents involved in their circulation: those corresponding to the ideological leaders and those corresponding to the audience. Among the numerous personalities that are offered in media, every individual relates to some and rejects many others; and because of this individual selection, the power of a celebrity depends on how well his/her discourse is received by a large portion of the audience.

There is one more element relevant to the power and the acceptance of a media personality: the emotional reactions or sensibilities that he/she is able to extract from the audiences. People's acceptance or rejection of a celebrity rarely is an entirely rational process about the agreement or rejection of his/her ideological representation; people just may *feel* attracted or repelled by one and, consequently, accept or reject the whole symbolic package.

This emotive reaction is transformed into an *affective power* that impacts how well the text of a media idol circulates (Grossberg, 2001; Marshall, 1997). The impact of the affect is mostly unpredictable, but it is powerful; a celebrity that causes a positive affection may be able to influence people's actions or thoughts in a significant way, but if pushed too far, that affect can become hatred and result in a repulsion of everything that he or she represents.[12] To encourage a positive affective power, producers play constantly with the balance of the binaries of ordinary-extraordinary, idealization-familiarity, characterization-realism that are at the base of any media idol's symbolic construction (Aoyagi, 2005; Langer, 2006; Lukács, 2010). The analysis about the affect in the relation of audiences with celebrities will not be developed in here, nonetheless, it is important to recognize it as one of the elements that mediates in the negotiation of an ideological discourse represented by a media personality and that has little to do with the message itself.

Finally, I consider relevant the notions of Hall's (1980) about *dominant/preferred*, *negotiated* and *oppositional codes* that are used by people to decode a text and that imply the correspondence – or lack of it – between the intended and the interpreted meaning. Hall (1997a) also says that the preferred meaning's natural or imminent appearance is built by the intertextuality – the accumulation of meanings across different texts that refer to one another – of the whole repertoire of imagery that is represented at one particular historical moment.

Therefore, in order to obtain the dominant meanings that people who are *interpelled* – regular audience - may extract and potentially adopt from the discourses embedded in a media idol, it is essential to consider the historical circumstances and the whole discursive formation that involve the text. The socioeconomic, political and historical context of Japan will be analyzed in the first chapter, before exploring the specific conditions of Japanese media culture and beginning to analyze the sample phenomena.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 presents the historic context of Japanese nationalist movements and the construction of the national identity discourses, since Japan's inclusion into the world system

[12] For a discussion on this other type of feeling that some audiences have towards cultural texts, see Gray (2003), Hills (2003).

as a modern nation until the end of the twentieth century. The hegemonic discourse on Japanese identity has maintained some essential traits across time, however, the tone of the discourse has shifted from positive to negative, from pride to shame, according to the circumstances Japan has faced in the national and international context. At the beginning of the twentieth first century, Japan had troubles keeping its place as economic power, while also suffered the weakening of social ties. The popularity of Japanese popular culture internationally opened the door for the government to apply cultural policies to help solve the nation's economic issues, but the social ones remained generally overlooked until 2011, when a natural disaster turned the focus to the reinforcement of the national identity by means of a patriotic discourse embedded in banal contents.

In the second and third chapters, a sample of these contents is analyzed in order to find how Japanese power institutions began to use popular media texts to promote a discourse on national representation and what does the discourse says about Japanese identity. In chapter 2, the case of a popular male idol group that was sanctioned as *the national idol group* by the government is explored. The dominant discourses inserted in this phenomenon are related to their national representativeness and their ideal masculinity. In chapter 3, another case is evaluated, that of the national football teams. Although the field is different from that of the pop idol group, it is found that the dominant discourses are congruent. The members of the male national team are represented in media as ideal ambassadors of the nation for their will to fight for Japan, their hard work and their traditional manhood. On the other hand, the media discourse on the female national team follows a double standard: the female players are good ambassadors of Japan because they were able to put the name of the nation in the highest place on their field, but, as Japanese women they are a joke, because they do not fit the national female ideal.

Chapter 4 revises the incongruences that the dominant discourse on *Japaneseness* presents regarding the limited definition of what is considered Japanese and the implications it has for the relation of Japanese with non-Japanese. Since the application of the cultural policies for the promotion of Japan outside, the elite-produced discourse highlighted the openness of Japan to receive people from around the world *as tourists;* however, this contrasts with the closeness Japan has maintained regarding the acceptance of immigrants

and the discrimination non-Japanese residents suffer in their daily lives. This is arguably due to the way in which the dominant discourse on the national identity has been naturalized in society, excluding everyone who does not comply with it.

In the conclusion, the idea of a discursive regime on *Japaneseness* is discussed. The elite-produced discourse on Japan and Japanese people appears to be already naturalized in society, acting as a regime of truth on the national identity. Because the current political and international context of Japan is less than stable, the patriotic feelings that are being promoted by banal texts may be used by elites to obtain society's support on controversial actions in the name of the nation.

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

the twentieth century of Oguma (2002), and the analysis of Japanese cultural nationalism of Befu (2001), Suzuki (2005) and Yoshino (2005).

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.

[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,[17] 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).[18]

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

[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 *Japaneseness* that was constructed during this nationalist period. Debates on the topic were common among intellectuals and the different theories that appeared picked up some regional cultural practices and ideas from below, popularizing them as national elements; these influenced official policies and common people all over Japan, through press, radio and popular movements.

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).[19]

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 *Japaneseness* and, consequently, influenced national 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

[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.

[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.[21]

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

[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*[22] 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.[23] 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,

[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 valuated, 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

[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.[25]

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).[26] 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).[27] 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.[28]

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

[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 governement 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 governement 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 suceptible 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 preassured the governement 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 infraestructure 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 incomformity 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).[30] Okinawans also protested against the presence of American troops in the islands and the administrative control that the foreigners had (Toriyama, 2003).[31]

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*,[32] 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*

[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.[33] 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

[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.[34]

The genetic determinism promoted by the *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.[35]

Once established the premise of national ethnic homogeneity, *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 *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.

[34] See Oguma (2002).

[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), *giri* (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 (*tatemae*) 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.[36]

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.

[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 efficency 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 undoubtly 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.

1.3 THE 'NEW' AND THE 'PETIT': RENEWED FORMS OF NATIONALISM AT THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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 restructuration 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]

[39] For details on the evolution of the US Military base in Okinawa issue, see Nelson (2012), Toriyama (2003), Uechi (2012).

[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.[41]

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.[42] In 1995, some conservative university professors and a popular *mangaka*[43] 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

[41] For an analysis focused on the Yasukuni issue, see Okuyama (2009), Shibuichi (2005), Tanamoto (2001).
[42] The Ministry of Education merged with the Science and Technology Agency in 2001, becoming the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.
[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.[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*[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.

[44] For an analysis on the Takeshima/Dokdo dispute, see Dyke (2006). For an analysis on the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute, see Koo (2009).
[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,[46] 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 politic 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,

English speaking world. Journalists in Japan had been also writing about the impressive impact that some Japanese media culture products were having in the United States, see Kinto (1999).

[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.[49] 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, [50] equivalent to Cool Japan, was the growing phenomenon that was taking media products from South Korea to the rest of Asia.[51]

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,

[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 triggered an impressive increase in the popularity of the group and the sales of multiple compilation releases (Recording Industry Association of Japan, 2011). 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.[54] 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

[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 Agency[55] (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.*

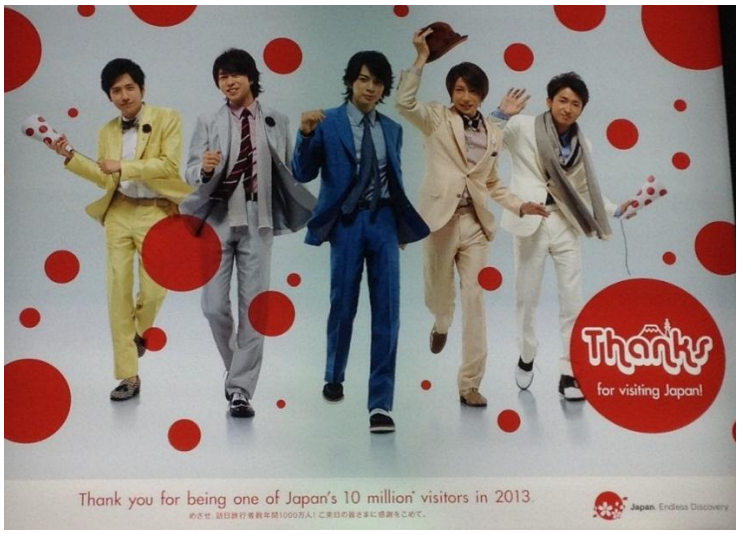

Image 1. Poster of *Japan. Endless Discovery* campaign aimed at the promotion of national and international tourism to Japan. Source: Picture taken by the author on December 29, 2013.

A few days later, the JTA announced that it would be joining forces with the Tokyo International Airport[57] to promote the domestic tourism (Kankōchō, 2010c). By September of the same year, Japan Airlines (JAL),[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).

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 *Nippon no Arashi* (The Arashi of Japan)[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

[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.
[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.
[59] *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)[61]

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

[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.

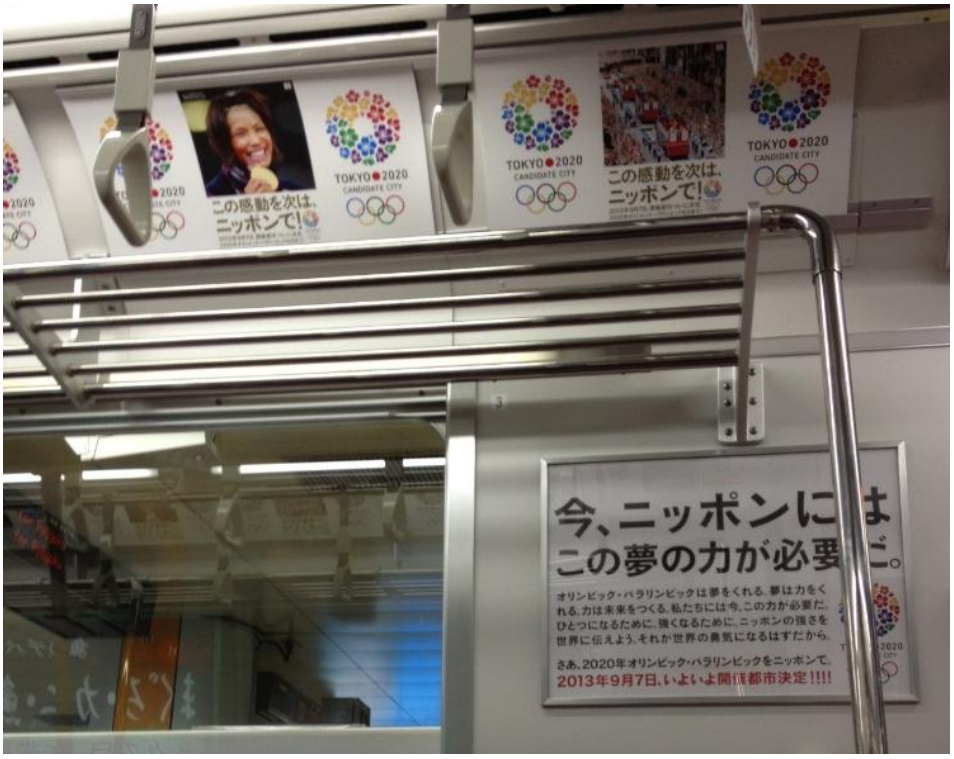

Image 2. Posters of Tokyo bidding campaign for 2020 Olympic Games. Source: Picture by the author.

"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

[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

[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*[64] 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',[65] 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.[66]

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

[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.

2 A STORM HITS JAPAN: THE NATIONAL IN THE BANAL THRONE

> *The establishment of normalcy (i.e. what is accepted as 'normal') through social– and stereo- types is one aspect of the habit of ruling groups to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology. So right is this world view for the ruling groups that they make it appear (as it* does *appear to them) as 'natural' and 'inevitable' – and for everyone – and, in so far as they succeed, they establish their hegemony.* - Richard Dyer (quoted in Hall, 1997a, p. 259)

In the previous chapter I presented the context in which a discourse about the *traditional* and *unique* qualities of Japanese society – echoing the *nihonjinron* – became part of official policies for the promotion of Japanese culture, inside and outside the country, directed to reinforce the national imagery for economic and soft power aims and which, after the earthquake of 2011, has become ubiquitous in media. Among the cultural phenomena that began receiving intense media coverage and became ambassadors – officially or unofficially - of this campaign, I have already mentioned the idol group Arashi.

The objective of this chapter is to locate this sample phenomena in Japanese media to find how its media power evolved during the last years in the context of the policies of cultural promotion and, then, since the national crisis of 2011; also, to elucidate how media, corporations, organizations and government began to make use of their images and popularity to promote a discourse of national representation and what are the main lines of this discourse. Building on the theoretical frame presented in the introductory section to study celebrities as potential sources of social representation and relying on notions used in cultural and media studies, I propose a *preferred reading* of the media representations – particularly with respect to the flagging of the *Japaneseness* - of the idol group Arashi that has been receiving the title of *national representative* and whose intensive media coverage corresponds to the strengthening of the policies for the promotion of national culture, particularly after 2011. However, before entering to the analysis of the Arashi text, I find relevant to provide a contextualization of the Japanese *tarento* system, which is the birth place of Japanese powerful media personalities found in the banal contents of interest.

2.1 JAPANESE TARENTO SYSTEM

Although outside Japan products such as *anime* (Japanese animation), *manga* (Japanese comic books) and video games are indeed popular and they are seen as representatives of the

popular culture of the country, they can hardly be considered a hegemonic ideological influence *inside* Japanese society, as they represent subcultures that stand against the idea of a homogenized, unified and communal Japanese culture (Iida, 2002; Morely & Robins, 2002). Also, granting that they are an economically important sector of Japanese media industry, the market is extremely differentiated according to genres and topics; there are thousands of titles that are distributed among a variety of categories – for girls, for boys, for adults, for teenagers, about sports, about food, about drinking, about robots, about History, etc. - which means that each title is consumed by very delimited sectors of people – some of which are undoubtedly subcultures – so just a few stories or characters become extensively known among society, and these are usually children-oriented (Nakamura, 2004; Brenner, 2007).

I am not trying to say subcultures are not relevant in the negotiation of ideologies, but to call the attention on wider reaching phenomena that may be more useful for elites to try to propagate their preferred ones among society. Japanese leading media corporations seem to prefer producing contents that appeal to more comprehensive sectors of consumers and rely on a high intertextuality created by the mobility of celebrities among different productions and activities; these personalities constitute the *tarento* system. The *tarento* are the everyday faces filling all media in Japan and communicating with Japanese people through the daily television shows, the posters on the trains, the billboards on the streets, the music listened on the way, the labels on the products of the supermarket, and so on. This overexposure in the daily life of Japanese is what makes *tarento* so potentially influential and crucial for the propagation of an ideological discourse.

In Japan, the celebrity system has developed some particularities in the production of the domestic media personas that impact their symbolic and ideological constructions and the potential ways in which audience make sense of them, as well as the grade of intensity in which people relate to them. After the end of the World War II, Japanese media established itself without much difference from its North American counterpart, even importing many of the contents produced in the United States. However, as the country placed itself as an international leader in the economic and technological arenas, its media acquired a clear independence, creating and producing more of its own contents and, eventually, foreign products were relegated (Atkins, 2000; Gossmann, 2000; Iwabuchi, 2002; Marx, 2012). In

the 1980s, when Japanese society was in the middle of the bubble economy, a native system of celebrities - the *tarento* – raised in prominence in television, gradually expanding its dominance to all media and absorbing personalities from very diverse fields (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012; Lukács, 2010).

Tarento derives from the English word 'talent'[67] and it is one of the most used terms in Japanese media, but it is also one of the most difficult to delimit. Lukács (2010) says that the *tarento* are multifunctional *image commodities* and *all-powerful currencies* that are particular to the Japanese televisual culture; Galbraith and Karlin (2012) define them as *celebrity performers* who, by means of their ability to attract and maintain the attention of audiences, are the core of television discourse. Indeed, *tarento* acts as an umbrella category that includes individuals continuously active on television, but not limited to it precisely because of their *multi-functionality*. A *tarento* can potentially fill any need for any media production; in fact, they and their management agencies must try to diversify their activities as much as possible because "[t]arento are produced and produce value in the process of their circulation" (Lukács, 2010, p. 47) and the multi-field performers are preferred than the specialized ones in the whole entertainment system (Marx, 2012).

Although in the Japanese media argot there is a tendency to use other terms - actor, comedian, idol, and so on - as if they were parallel to the *tarento*, I find that the specificity to call a person in one way or another at a particular moment is more related to the recognition of status or the activity that the person is performing in a specific context. Also, every time is more common for general *tarento* – those who are just, rephrasing Boorstin (1992), famous for being famous - to make their 'debut' as actors, singers or any other genre inside the media. Because of this, it is not uncommon to hear the name of the same celebrity referred at times as actor, then as singer, and other times just as *tarento*. However, for the daily audiences the difference in the labels used helps them to focus the attention on particular elements of the whole symbolism that involves a celebrity in the highly intertextual Japanese media context.

[67] Although the term was taken from the English, in Japanese it does not have the original connotation; on the contrary, many critics and scholars coincide that tarento are characterized by their *lack* of talent. Also, as it has been naturalized in the Japanese language through the katakana writing system, the term is used without changes for feminine, masculine, singular and plural - although a specifically pluralized *tarentotachi* can be heard from time to time.

Therefore, even if in the media discourse there is a relaxation on the use of *tarento* as a genre at the same level as others, I consider that, from an analytical point of view, it is the most general category that embraces many genres that constitute the Japanese media landscape: *aidoru* (idol), *joyū/haiyū* (actress/actor), *owarai geinin* (comedian), *kashu* (singer), *anaunsā* (announcer), *kyasutā* (anchor), *moderu* (model), *hyōronka* (critic or 'expert'), *seiyū* (voice actor or actress) and *senshu* (athlete). Although most celebrities have a core activity, those who are able to win some popularity, easily cross genres; also, every time more fields can be included because the system appropriates them in order to exploit the popular images to the extreme. This is facilitated by the *self-referentiality* that characterizes Japanese media and by the practice of presenting *tarento* news – entertainment/tabloid – as hard, socially relevant news (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012).

Thus, the multifaceted and mobile characteristic of the *tarento* - the high circulation of their images and texts - creates "an intertextual web of meanings that link forms and contents together to produce new meanings. […] To understand Japanese television,[68] the audience must draw on a vast cultural knowledge about celebrity" (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012, p. 10). In her study about the Japanese television of the 1990s, Lukács (2010) found that this intertextuality is highly regarded by audiences because allows them to join a meta-reality that makes them feel part of a community. People are compelled to have an intensive and regular exposure to the media to acquire the required knowledge about the celebrities to understand the different contents and also to feel included in that meta-reality.

This intensive and extensive exposure to media and *tarento* promotes in audience a sense of familiarity and intimacy with them. In this way, *tarento* are presented as if their private and public personas concur (Aoyagi, 2005; Lukács, 2010). This does not mean, however, that they cannot show gaps in their personality, but that those different features are supposed to be present both in their public and private lives. It does not mean either that in Japan there is no interest in knowing all the minor details of the private life of the *tarento*, but contrary to the *paparazzi* culture of other countries in which the celebrities are followed to catch the private moments that they try so hard to protect – genuinely or as a publicity

[68] I would say media in general, but many scholars put the stress on television for its relevance as core of the media in Japan.

game - the *tarento* and their agencies try to be themselves the ones that disclose fragments of their 'privacy' (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012).

Building on these ideas, two main objectives for this self-disclosure can be ventured: image control and image construction. The first seems evident given the customary press conferences or press statements releases that *tarento* or their agencies summon or provide when they are having any 'relevant' change in their private lives - marriage, divorce, pregnancies, graduations, sickness - or when some risky information has been leaked about them.[69] This seems to be a crucial marketing tool to keep the control of their non-controversial and non-disruptive images as much as possible – as a socially proper image is vital to keep a successful career in the Japanese entertainment.[70]

The second can be thought as inherent to the *tarento* production: in the symbolic construction of the *tarento* as an image commodity, in order to feed the imagination of the audience, there is a constant teasing through a '*honne*[71]-giving' practice. Among the many activities of the *tarento,* the interviews in the media are based on a '*honne-ni-semaru'*[72] (approaching to the truthful thoughts) discourse, in which the topics are mostly about *urabanashi* (inside stories), the *tarento*'s opinions on life issues – family, friends, work struggles, love ideals - and his/her personal life. Much of the information that media present as *honne* may appear irrelevant to the casual viewer, but for the regular audience, particularly for fans, those details are arguably high-quality supplies to build their fantasies, to put together the pieces of the puzzle to complete the whole picture of the *tarento*'s life and personality, and even to keep audience satisfied enough as to respect the small part of the *tarento*'s private life that the media do not cover.[73] In terms of symbolic construction, this

[69] There are tabloids and paparazzi in Japan, and there are many *tarento* who have their 'secrets' continuously exposed, but there is also a high collaboration among the media corporations and the most powerful *tarento* agencies to keep information controlled, which allows the popular *tarento* to stay relatively better protected from scandal than their equivalents in countries as the United States. See West (2006) for a complete analysis on the media coverage and management of the private spheres of the celebrities in Japan and the United States.
[70] If a *tarento*, particularly a popular one, has made a transgression and wants to keep his career, it is customary that he publicly apologizes to the audiences and to the directly affected by his offense, and then remains outside the media for some time - even years - as a punishment. See Marx (2012) and West (2006).
[71] A notion used to refer to the real or truthful opinions and/or intentions of someone.
[72] I call it this way because is the repetitive line that these type of interviews use in their narrative when presenting such content.
[73] Except for some obsessive fans, most *tarento* do not have to struggle with ordinary people stalking them. In the case of the male idols that I have been researching, I have found that waiting outside locations or studios is a common and accepted fan practice, as it is considered part of the *tarento*'s public activities and a chance for

honne-giving seems to allow the *tarento* to appear as very ordinary people, with the same type of struggles, dreams and values that any other Japanese, at the same time that builds around them a *sugao/sunao* (honest) aura, which is extremely appreciated by the audience.

Therefore, it is evident that the *tarento* agencies put a lot of effort in choosing the type of productions that their *tarento* appear in, the type of information that it is published about them, and the activities and people they relate to in their private lives, all to guarantee the congruence of their images and texts while trying to keep the intimate bond and the affect that people feel towards them, which facilitates the acceptance of the discourses they represent.

In this way, the *tarento* as category have led Japanese media since the 1990s, when they became the key in the producers' response to the stratification of the market: by endorsing lifestyles and attitudes that were identified through particular commodities, the *tarento* helped in the creation of communities of *individuals*, contrasting with the idea of a *mass* consumer society prevailing until then (Lukács, 2010). Thus, if before it has been argued that, in contemporary developed societies, celebrities are part of the ideological safe escapes that leaders in a state use to negotiate with people, the *tarento*, through their created sense of intimacy and affective connection with audience, are also essential to mediate between the ideas and objectives of elites and society.

The media power and the dominant discourses implanted in popular celebrities during specific periods may denote hegemonic stages in which an extensive consensus has been achieved regarding the values and ideologies that they represent. Nevertheless, within such symbolism, certain myths can be detected; the undeniable active role of the audiences in the building of the popular texts does not deny the possibility of some discourses being naturalized through them by means of that actively produced popularity.

Yet, it is obvious that not all *tarento* have the same level of presence in media nor the ability to get the interest of the audiences or generate in people a positive affective bond; not all *tarento* constitute a major influence in society because not all have the same media power.

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fans to show their support and commitment. However, most fans would not venture to invade the idol's private life – for example, following them to their houses - as this is considered a break of the 'fan code'. There are *okakke* fans – stalkers – but they are usually not accepted by the rest of the fan community as 'truthful' supporters.

Since the role of *tarento* in the economic system is so important, the *tarento power* is relevant and acknowledged by companies, media and audiences and has been operationalized into a quarterly ranking that identifies who - among more than a thousand active *tarento* - has the highest level of influence in Japanese society around the year, as well as the core audience of each of them. The *tarento* power reflects the power of attraction – desire of the audiences to see, hear, and know more about a *tarento* – and the grade of popularity – how well a *tarento*'s face and name is identified among different age and gender sectors of society.[74]

Considering the ideas already debated about the celebrities' role in a society, the dominant characteristics of the *tarento* system and the composition of the *tarento* power index, it is possible to suggest that the higher the power of a *tarento*, the greater his/her social influence beyond the mere propagation of the ideology of consumerism: the discourses constructed around a *tarento* who has a high power in media can be regarded also as a highly accurate sample of the social and cultural processes that are becoming relevant at a particular moment in Japanese society. And, in the contemporary context, some idols have become the *tarento par excellence*. Although the category has existed since the late 1960s, their symbolic qualities and place in Japanese media have evolved from representing mainly the tastes of teenagers (Aoyagi, 2005) to be the center of the *tarento* system altogether, mainly because of their appeal to large audiences regardless of sex and age (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012; Mandujano Salazar, 2009).

2.2 JAPANESE MALE IDOLS AND THE DUAL MASCULINITY POWER

The origins of the idol industry in Japan can be traced back to the late 1960s, but it was in the 1970s when the phenomenon took force in the national entertainment by means of television shows that were specifically designed to create idols – i.e. *Star Tanjō* (NTV).[75] In this first phase that lasted until the early 1980s, idols were young singers; however, by the end of the decade of 1980, when the *tarento* became the central category of Japanese media,

[74] The *Talent Power Ranking* is produced since 2008 by Architect Co. Ltd., a marketing company, and it is sold in detail to the entities that need to decide on the best *tarento* to relate to their products. However, the general top ranking is published in entertainment magazines, in web sites, or referred in television to let know the audiences who are the most powerful tarento and, potentially, reinforce their status. This ranking is other of the elements in the intertextual construction of the tarento. See the official site: http://www.talentsearch.jp/

[75] When presenting titles of television shows, the broadcaster shorten name will appear inside parenthesis. The full name can be found at the beginning of the document in the section of Abbreviations.

idols began to cross genres in the entertainment, installing themselves as an important group in the national celebrity system.[76] Although the activities of the idols expanded, their basic symbolism remained and became distinguishable from that of other *tarento*: the idols have, since their birth, represented the qualities of youth or, as Galbraith and Karlin (2012) put it, "[t]hey are popular, and project themselves as clean, healthy, and energetic" (p. 5). While most idols are actually young and can hardly survive as such after they age, some of the most successful of past times are still active in media and are still considered idols, so - more than the age - the relevant issue is that they keep expressing the youthful characteristics of the genre.

Another essential symbolic quality related to the idols is their approachability; they represent familiarity and images that are attainable; they are not extremely outstanding in any regard – beauty, talent, wealth. On the contrary, they are chosen by producer agencies to be average looking and average talented, and, then, they are prepared to appear just above ordinary in media (Aoyagi, 2005; Darling-Wolf, 2004b; Sakai, 2003). This is reflected by the word *kawaii* (roughly translated as 'cute' or 'charming') that is ever-present in the narratives about idols – male or female. Referring to people,[77] the term implies someone who displays a physical appearance and a social behavior that is "sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced" (Kinsella, 1995, p. 220) and, by consequence, inspires the protective or loving feelings of people (Aoyagi, 2000, pp. 312-313). Also, *kawaii* is seen as a somewhat feminine quality, not meaning that is only reserved for female; the issue has to do more with the sense of weakness and amae related to the term. These symbolic elements are embedded in all Japanese idols so they can "attract people and perform as lifestyle role models (…) [informing] their viewers about appearances and personal qualities that are considered socially appropriate and trendy" (Aoyagi, 2005, p. 3).

In the same sense, their permanent *availability* towards fans is crucial. The availability has to do with the idols not getting involved romantically with anyone – not openly, at least – so the imaginary that fans build can be kept intact. For female idols and

[76] For studies presenting detailed analysis of this first idol eras, see Aoyagi (2005), Sakai (2003).
[77] *Kawaii* is an adjective reserved not only to humans or living things, it can be applied to anything, but some of the connotation changes accordingly.

actresses, many agencies have a 'love ban' rule, which prohibits their *tarento* to have romantic relationships. In the case of male idols from Johnny's Jimusho, which will be presented below, there is not an openly established rule, but it is implicit; the agency only allows its *tarento* to publicly acknowledge a legal relationship – marriage – and even after releasing the statement about this, the details of their relationships are kept hidden as much as possible.[78]

Talking about the female idols of the 1980s, Aoyagi (2005, p. 218) noted that they offered their male fans what real-life women could not: "forever accepting, obedient female personalities." I find that this is one of the functions of male idols as well: they represent romantic partners for many fans – female and fans with same sex tendencies; but, evidently, this is not the only type of interest that audiences have in them, although it is a common element found in devoted fans.

The symbolic similarities among the hundreds of idols in Japan through the five decades of their existence stop here. The most important distinction in the industry has to do with gender. As an initial market strategy, the female idols are designed to attract male audiences and the male idols to appeal to female fans; progressively and depending on the ability of the producer agency, the media, and the idols themselves, their symbolic construction can be amplified to target both female and male markets of diverse characteristics. The inclusion of these elements in the images of the idols is a direct responsibility of the *jimusho* (lit. office) or talent agencies that produce them. In Japan, the *jimusho* are the entities that scout potential *tarento*, prepare them for the activities that are expected to perform in media, promote them, control their image and coordinate all their activities; in general, the idols are employees of these agencies and depend on them to maintain their careers (Aoyagi, 2005; Marx, 2012).[79]

[78] It is relatively easier to hear these married male idols sharing some anecdotes related to their children than saying something about their wives.

[79] Although a few *tarento* have been able to make a career on their own, the structure of the media and the entertainment industry makes it very difficult. Idols, particularly, are more dependent on their agencies than singers, for example, who are the most commonly freelance *tarento* in Japan. For an analysis on the *jimusho* and their role in the Japanese entertainment industry, see Marx (2012).

Among the multiple *jimusho* existent, one of the most influential in the entertainment industry has been Johnny & Associates - better known as Johnny's Jimusho – which has specialized in producing male idols. Its history goes back to the beginning of the idol phenomenon in Japan in the 1960s and, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the category of the *tarento* took over the media, it established as one of the main providers of top male personalities, turning the name of the agency into a brand (Darling-Wolf, 2004b; Mandujano Salazar, 2009; Marx, 2012). Nowadays, the Johnny's - label to refer to all the *tarento* of this agency – appear every day in Japanese media and their presence and power is linked to the production process that the agency has achieved through the decades.

The production of new idols by Johnny's Jimusho are usually linked to the already existent ones and women are, undeniably, the initial greater consumers of Johnny's media and also the main promoters of the expansion of their impact to other social segments. Most of the idols of the agency have enrolled because their mothers, sisters, or other female acquaintances have influenced them into do it. Idols promoted by Johnny's and Associates usually originate from written applications provided by children, teenagers or some other contacts. After a first revision of these, the agents of Johnny's Jimusho select some prospects to see in person; in this interview, the young men are asked to dance and present themselves to a camera. Eventually, some are accepted into the trainee group and, gradually, they are introduced in media as support for the already established idols. At this stage, the agency begins to mold their image and evaluate their abilities, effort and popularity with audience. Then, the regular pattern is for the agency to form groups from five to ten members and debut them officially as idols, something that is marked by the release of a music single or album. From then on, Johnny's idols continue to expand their activities as much as the agency can negotiate with media and sponsors, according to their existing *tarento* power and their potential to increase it – that is, depending on how well they are being received by audience.[80]

Analyzing this production process, the Johnny's media representations of the 2000's onwards, and the audience's responses to them, it becomes evident that a *Johnny's style manhood* has been established in Japan in the form of a model of masculinity that these idols

[80] I analyzed this process of production of Johnny's idols in a Master thesis. See Mandujano Salazar (2009) – source in Spanish.

embody consistently and that can be linked to the term *janiizukei* used lately by media and audience to refer to men who show similar features with them.[81] In this, the typical youthfulness of the idols as an innovative model of masculinity at a shallow level can be identified; but, in the whole narratives of their media presence, traditional elements of behavior and sociability regarded as characteristic of the traditional model of the *salaryman* are also present.

The youthful and innovative elements are obvious even to random audience. The Johnny's image follows regular patterns not only of fashion, but also of hair-styling, body types and face features. These idols – regardless of them being twelve or forty years-old – are identified by their stylish haircuts, slender bodies, pale and almost hairless skin, and clean and juvenile faces;[82] they are also widely known for their colorful attires in concerts and musical shows and their acrobatic and athletic ability displayed in typical Johnny's dance routines. These elements can be considered as part of the representation of a contemporary and progressive Japanese male model.

Darling-Wolf (2004b) discussed the masculinity construction regarding the most popular Johnny's band of the 1990s – SMAP - and found that the gender symbolism of the members of that group was hybrid in many senses: they represented male beauty, but they were also androgynous and were commonly portrayed in cross-gender imageries; they seemed to represent a more sensitive, less sexist type of man, challenging the stereotypes of the Japanese men in the West represented by the *salaryman*, but they were also showed in situations that perpetuated the dominant model of masculinity in Japan; and they continuously mixed racial representations, creating a cultural environment that surpassed the Japanese boundaries.

In the representations of Johnny's idols debuted and developed since the change of century, I also find some mixed characteristics, but I do not consider that they stand as

[81] It could be fashion wise (*janiizukei fashon)*, regarding to face features (*janiizukei no kao*), or in general (janiizukei).

[82] Sometimes, they cut or dye in an extreme shade their hair, tan their skin or let their beards grow, mostly for some role in a drama or movie. This type of exceptional situations regularly gets the attention of media and fans, who discuss in blogs and other social media about it, as it is considered out of normal.

androgynous characters for their society, as it is the first thought of Western casual observers. They are portrayed as *attractive*, but this quality is clearly defined in the context of manhood, as it is expressed by the words *bidan/bidanshi/bishounen,*[83] *kakko-ii,* and *ikemen,* which are always accompanying the references of them in media and among audiences. These words denote the qualities of being good looking or handsome: the first set is applied only to men who are regarded as having beautiful physical – basically facial – features; *kakko-ii* is a more general term to indicate someone who is 'cool' or stylish,[84] and it is used for looks and for attitudes; and *ikemen* designates men who are attractive regarding the total impression that derives from their presence, and not necessarily - or not only - stressing their physical attributes.[85]

In media productions that are specific for Johnny's idols – i.e. variety shows - they are frequently requested to talk or represent *ideal* situations with a fictional female partner – dates, anniversaries, proposals, and so on – clearly trying to please their fans. It is evident that their answers may not be concurrent with their actual thoughts and attitudes, but this is not a problem as long as it gives the fans material to build their fantasies. In this type of media content, the idols embody what Darling-Wolf (2004b, p. 361) describes as "a new generation of men conscious of the significant changes gender roles underwent in the latter part of the twentieth century."

On the other hand, their attitudes and social interactions displayed outside that specific context of those ideal talks are reminiscent of the traditional *salaryman* model – which also is considered as characteristic of the vertical and group-oriented Japanese society depicted by the *nihonjinron*. This model implies that, in order to be a respectable Japanese man, he has to be loyal and devoted to his group – i.e. the company or organization for which

[83] Handsome man/handsome young man/handsome boy.

[84] This word is a general adjective used the same for men, women, animals or things. However, when used to refer to a person, *kakko ii* is related to a somehow masculine quality; in contrast, *kawaii,* as it has been said is considered more a feminine one. So, even if both words are gender-neutral, the connotation is to highlight a masculine or feminine trait in a person.

[85] In Japanese media, the physical attractiveness of men is generally depicted as a feature for idols, leading actors, models and only a few other *tarento*. Being acknowledged as possessing such quality gives them a higher status in the media narratives, particularly in a context in which other *tarento* with an image constructed on the basis of their lack of physical attractiveness are involved. By large, comedians are this type of *tarento* who have images built as the antithesis of beauty – with some exceptions. In the context of interacting with idols – or any 'attractive' man - the dynamic is usually for these comedians to be praising the other men and treating them with a kind of 'reverence'.

they work - and participate in it willingly and enthusiastically, placing the group's interests over his own; he has to be competent – something considered as involving talent and hard work – and show this aptitude since the moment he requests acceptance into the group – normally by approving exams and winning a place against other candidates – and thereafter during his daily activities by displaying continuous effort for the sake of it; finally, his hard-work, abilities and loyalty should always have as major goal the wellness of the nation (Vogel, 1971).

As it has been said, Johnny's idols have to show their competence to be accepted by the agency and they should never let decline their effort and commitment to this and their group; once they are part of an official idol group, the members are expected to be fully committed to it, assuming all the personal costs of hard schedules, lack of privacy, lack of interpersonal relationships outside the working group, all for the promotion and good image of the group and the agency. When someone shows to be more interested in his own interests than the group's by breaking the strict rules of the agency, he is usually punished, relegated for some time and, commonly, he loses popularity, being unable to regain his place.[86]

Finally, they are regularly involved in *national* projects, element that can be thought as closely related to the multi-field projection that the agency promotes for its idols: in order to develop a broader audience, the agency tries to involve them in events of national interest, such as the annual telethon *24-hours TV* (NTV), the coverage of international sports competitions - Olympic games, Football World Cups - and the annual musical shows held by the major media corporations – *Best Artist* (NTV), *Kōhaku Uta Gassen* (NHK), *FNS Kayōsai* (Fuji TV), *Music Station Super Live* (TV Asahi).

Considering that the business of Johnny's Jimusho depends on appealing to increasingly broader social sectors – not only female fans or teenagers – it is possible to argue that the agency has tried to build a model of masculinity to be comprehensively pleasing: eye-catching, fresh and amusing targeting women and young men, but that also strengthens the dominant Japanese model by representing men who are diligent, workaholic and group-

[86] There have been some cases in which an idol is found smoking or drinking as an under-age, or involved in gossip with women, all actions involving the breaking of Johnny's rules. These men have been suspended of their media activities for months or even years; they have lost their places in their groups, and have even been degraded to the apprentice status; they also have had to apologize publicly for the shame and difficulties that they caused to their group, the agency and the fans. A few others have taken 'breaks' to pursue personal goals.

oriented, making personal sacrifices for their groups, their company – Johnny's Jimusho – and their fans, something that makes them more acceptable to mature male audiences and traditionalist social sectors.

Thus, Johnny's idols are multi-field *tarento* who expand their careers according to the acceptance they are able to get from wide-ranging audiences. They are found as top ranking singers, dancers, lyrists and composers, anchors in variety shows, sports and news programs, actors in television, movies and theater, fiction writers and essayists, sculptors and painters, models in fashion magazines, and endorsers of numerous products. Their media potential and their appeal relying on a mixed representation of masculinity – a stylish image rooted in traditional values - have allowed them to have significantly long lasting careers,[87] something unusual for female counterparts who depend more on their childish images to remain in the market.[88] In this way, the most successful Johnny's idols have been able to place themselves as entertainers for *everyone*, as *national idols*. The matter in question: Arashi.

2.3 THE RISE OF THE NATIONAL IDOLS

Between the years 2008 and 2009, in the context of the policies of national cultural promotion and the growing popularity of the Korean Wave in Japan, the Japanese media began to call Arashi - a male idol group that was escalating in the *tarento* power list - national idol.[89] Increasingly, the group and its members were related to national campaigns that involved more than the advertising of products or services: they began to endorse *Japaneseness.*

Arashi – literally 'storm' - is a five-member idol group that made its official debut in 1999. The members – Ohno Satoshi, Sakurai Sho, Aiba Masaki, Ninomiya Kazunari and Matsumoto Jun – entered the trainee group between 1994 and 1996 as teenagers, moment in which they began to be exposed in the media.[90] The activities of Arashi expanded the first

[87] Currently, some Johnny's idols are close to the 50 years of age and their careers have lasted for more than three decades; they are still considered idols and their images continue to be built around their *attractiveness*.
[88] For discussions on the characteristics of the female idols regarding their childish image, see Aoyagi (2005) and Galbraith & Karlin (2012).
[89] *Kokuminteki aidoru.*
[90] They were all born between 1980 and 1983, and began their careers in Johnny's Jimusho at 12 and 13 years-old. Their profile can be reviewed in the web page of the agency: http://www.johnnys-net.jp/page?id=profile&artist=10

five years since its debut through numerous musical releases, concert tours, presentations in music and variety television shows, participation of the members as actors in television dramas, movies and stages, regular appearance in idol magazines, endorsement of different products, and the hosting of their own television and radio shows. This considerable media presence established it as a successful, but still standard Johnny's idol group with an audience limited to certain social sectors; however, between 2004 and 2008, expectations started to change. Performers needed to be able to reach beyond a usually limited and predictable life span as a popular group, they had to evolve, moving out of perceived social sectors, appealing to a greater share of the population and the market.

In 2004, Arashi was designated as the main personality of the charity program *24-hour TV*, a popular annual event of the media corporation NTV that is regarded as having a national impact and that relies on *tarento* to act as ambassadors of the cause and get the attention of audience during the 24-hours live broadcast.[91] As the show is directed to all public, Arashi was able to show a socially conscious and more mature image not only to regular followers, but also to people who did not know them. The same year, Aiba Masaki entered as host in a variety show of the family-slot of NTV targeted mainly to children – *Tensai! Shimura Dōbutsuen.*[92] Between 2005 and 2007, Arashi was given a regular corner in a family-oriented variety program of another broadcasting corporation – *mago mago Arashi* (Fuji TV) - where the members visited regular families and spent a whole day with them taking the role of grandchildren to older couples,[93] or of child-minders and cookers to couples with children.

In 2006, Sakurai Sho became regular anchor in a weekday night news program – *News Zero* (NTV) – breaking completely with the stereotype of idol and presenting himself to mature social sectors. Then, Ninomiya Kazunari won one of the main roles of the Hollywood production *Letters from Iwo Jima,*[94] making national media acclaim his performance for embodying the feelings of Japanese people and touch the world in a movie that represented the Japanese perspective of one of the last battles the *nation* fought during

[91] See http://www.ntv.co.jp/24h/contents/english.html
[92] The show is still on air at the time of this analysis.
[93] From here comes the name of the show: *mago* means grandchild.
[94] Directed by Clint Eastwood (2006). It ended in the top 10 of the yearly box office in Japanese movie theaters (http://boxofficemojo.com/intl/japan/yearly/?yr=2006&p=.htm).

the Pacific War. Also, Arashi made its first tour outside Japan, visiting South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, and participating in the Asia Song Festival,[95] circumstances that Japanese media covered enthusiastically, stressing the popularity of Arashi in the continent.[96]

Likewise, the participation of the members as leading actors in successful fictional productions - such as *Hana yori dango* (TBS) and *Yamada Taro Monogatari* (TBS)[97] – that were even seen by East-Asian fans, and the debut of Ohno Satoshi as *geijutsuka* (artist)[98] in 2008, when he opened an exhibition in Tokyo of his sculptures and illustrations, also expanded the scope of the group among population.

Analyzing the narratives of the vast media contents of this period related to Arashi, it can be advanced a reading on the representations that tried to associate with the group and its members. Arashi, as all Johnny's idols, represented epitomes of male attractiveness and young masculinity, while also promoting the dominant model of Japanese manhood: a *salaryman* model in an *ikemen* disguise; or, a *kakko-ii salaryman* model. But there were also distinguishable discourses around each of the members that can be interpreted as attempts to gain the support of people besides the regular fan base composed by young/adult women and teenager men.

[95] An event organized by the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange and supported by the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism as part of the South Korean government efforts to locate this country as the cultural leader in Asia. See http://www.asf.or.kr/english/

[96] Contrary to the strategies of Korean artists in the Japanese market, the members of Arashi only learned how to introduce themselves in the local languages and sang a couple of representative songs of the group in Korean, Chinese and Thai, but most of the interaction with fans and the material performed in the concerts were in Japanese. This was also remarked by them and the Japanese media continuously: their happy surprise when they noticed that many Asian fans were learning Japanese because of them.

[97] Lukács (2010, p. 214) says that since the second half of the 1990s, a rating of 15 points, which represents the 15 percent of the population, defines a hit program and more than 20 points means "mega-hit status." In Matsumoto Jun's *Hana Yori Dango* series (TBS, 2005; 2007) the average ratings were of 19.80 and 21.70, while Ninomiya Kazunari and Sakurai Sho's *Yamada Taro Monogatari* (TBS, 2007) had an average rating of 15.20 (http://www.videor.co.jp). Thus, they can easily being considered hit shows. Also, Matsumoto Jun's film sequel of *Hana yori Dango* (Toho, 2008) was the second place in that year's box office (http://boxofficemojo.com/intl/japan/yearly/?yr=2008&p=.htm).

[98] The term *geijutsuka* refers to people who produce some artistic piece (painters, illustrators, sculptors, photographers). This term is different from *geinōjin* – performer - which is used as a general reference for actors, singers, etc., very close to *tarento;* sometimes the English word *artist – ātisuto* - is used in a similar way than *geinōjin.* Ohno Satoshi had been already known for his hobby as illustrator, sculptor and painter.

Aiba was portrayed as kind, always optimistic and funny– close to a *boke kyarā*.[99] Ohno represented the *artist* with multiple talents, the 'free spirit' or *maipēsu* (my pace)[100] - someone who followed his own rhythm. Because of the contents they were involved in their media representations, these two seem to have been targeting children and older people. Ninomiya became identified for his sharp mind, his musical talent, his somehow *otaku*[101] character and his preference to make friends with older people. He, Aiba and Ohno were represented as the most 'ordinary' among the five, arguably making people feel comfortable and very familiar to them. Sakurai - a graduate from one of the most prestigious private universities in the country[102] - was portrayed as well-raised, intellectual, leader, and multidimensional.[103] When Sakurai became newscaster, he began to be portrayed as ambassador of his generation in serious national interest topics and a link between different interests and social sectors: he declared in multiple occasions his aim of reaching the segments not usually involved in the political, economic and social debates - women and youths; on the other hand, he also took the popular culture to adult men, the core audience of news programs. Finally, Matsumoto was represented as the most committed, hard-working and social of all, which contrasted with his very 'exotic' and fashionable appearance.

These different representations seem to have actually expanded the audience for Arashi, as can be observed in the statistics shown by the annual TV concert *Best Artist* (NTV) that presents the most popular singers selected by the audience through an open voting system.

[99] It is common to hear some *tarento* – comedians and sometimes others too – being characterized according to two roles: the *boke* - funny/silly one - and the *tsukkomi* - the smart one that picks on the *boke.* These roles are taken from the Japanese comedy culture of the *manzai.* See Stocker (2002).
[100] This term refers to a type of personality that is normally seen as exposing more *amae* and, as long as these people are loyal and hard-working when they need to, it does not contradict the virtues of Japaneseness. It should not be seen as the individualistic attitude that is so condemned by Japanese tradition.
[101] *Otaku* in Japan, in this context, refers to people obsessed with videogames, *anime*, *manga,* and mostly antisocial attitudes.
[102] In Japan, getting a degree from a prominent university is regarded as one of the main indicators of potential success and social status; Sakurai was the first idol to get a university degree – in Economics - from Keio University, something that made him suitable to become newscaster – the intellectual elite in Japanese media.
[103] In this period, he developed a mixed image: when he was in the role of anchor, he was very serious and put together, but when he was in the role of idol, he softened his image acting sometimes as *boke.*

Image 3. ***Ichi oku sansenmannin ga erabu Best Artist 2003*. Distribution of the votes for Arashi. The graphic on the left shows the distribution by age and gender red for women and blue for men - of the voters, and the graphic on the right shows the general age scattering. As it can be seen, the popularity of Arashi among the different age groups of women is high, though a little less among women older than 50 years old. Source: NTV. Images extracted by the author from the open broadcasting in Japanese television.**

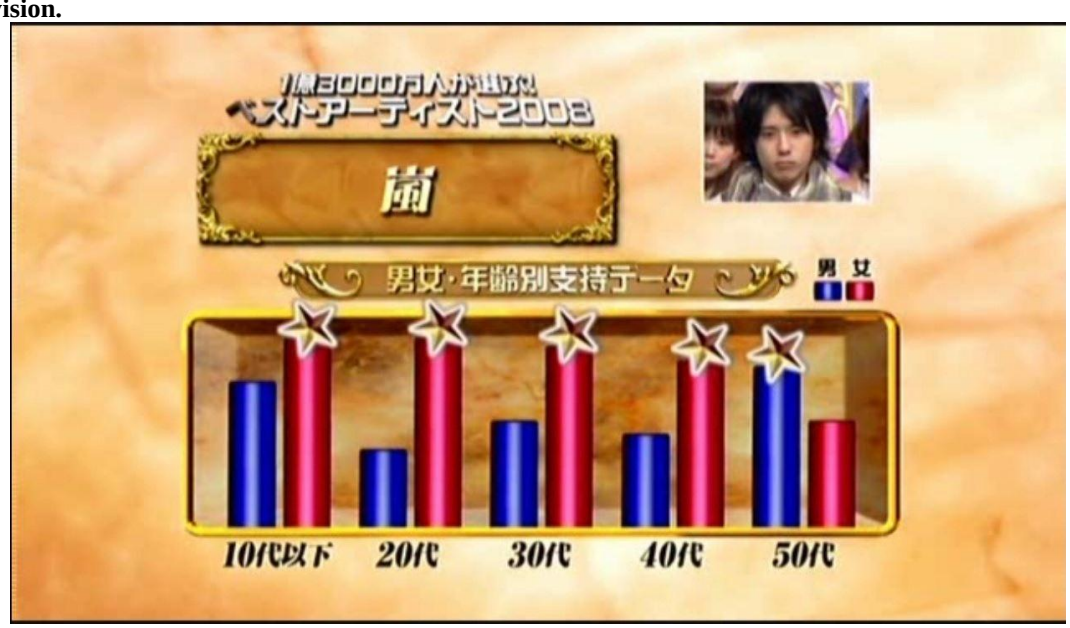

Image 4. *Ichi oku sansenmannin ga erabu Best Artist 2008*. In this graphic it is noticeable the increasing support of male groups towards Arashi – particularly the younger and older ones - and the high support sustained among the female sectors. Source: NTV. Images extracted by the author from the open broadcasting in Japanese television.

By the second half of 2008, Arashi was again named the main personality of the *24-hour TV* event. The popularity of the group was so intense at the moment that they finished their annual national tour and began a second Asian tour with a concert held at the largest venue of Japan – the *Kasumigaoka National Stadium* – in front of 70 thousand fans.[104]

All this media presence added new layers of symbolism to the representation of Arashi and the five members and made them accessible to audiences not regularly interested in Johnny's idols; these commonly reluctant sectors of the society not only began to recognize their faces and names, but also, caught in the intertextuality game of Japanese media, could potentially become interested in their whole body of work, as they were presented as family-oriented *tarento*, with harmonizing personalities for all tastes: some intellectual, some artistic, some affectionate, some stoic, but all hard-working, approachable and very Japanese.

At the end of the year 2008, Arashi was at the top of the music sales rankings (Recording Industry Association of Japan, 2009), the group's supporters were apparently more evenly distributed among men and women of different age clusters – as shown by the previous images - and the media had begun to call Arashi *the national idol group.* During 2009, this label was increasingly used in media when referring to Arashi and the five members. Their activities that year, in the context of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of their debut, were even more notable than the previous, helping them mark different records in the national music industry (Recording Industry Association of Japan, 2010). Then, in 2010, their *national representativeness* became formally acknowledged, when they became the 'Ambassadors of Tourism Promotion' designated by the MLIT and their regular advertising campaigns were linked to that official title as *face of Japan*. It is undeniable that Arashi became a national media phenomenon backed by the government with such designation and, at the same time, this increased even more the presence of the group or the members in the whole Japanese cultural arena, pushing even more their media power.[105]

Analyzing the specific context in which Arashi acquired its national label, one thing is evident: this development came at a moment when Japanese elites were coping with the

[104] The use of this stadium for concerts had been restricted in different ways and it was continuously said in media that only the top Japanese singers could get permission for using it. Before Arashi, only two other groups had held concerts there: a duet called *Dreams come true* and *SMAP*, a senior group of Johnny's Jimusho.
[105] Fact easily perceptible by the evolution of the rankings of Architect Co. Ltd. (2008-2013).

menace of Korean counterparts actively seeking to strengthen their soft power and advance in the Asian markets by means of the Korean Wave and, more importantly, dangerously challenging the Japanese cultural productions in the national market. By 2008, the Korean idol quintet Tohoshinki's popularity among Japanese female audience was steadily growing. Around the same period, the music market in Japan was changing and the selling of albums and singles in general contracted. Although the names of Johnny's idols were gradually gaining terrain in the musical arena against 'full-time' singers and musicians, Tohoshinki was positioning itself as a true threat in the Japanese market and was enjoying high popularity in other East Asian countries. It was at this moment when Arashi did the second Asia tour and media name it *the* national idol group.[106]

Nonetheless, this cannot be seen just as a result of the recent popularity of the group and the foreign competition. The five members of Arashi were embodying something else than typical idols by expanding their activities into other fields and also by becoming representatives of their society in different platforms, but mostly towards the same Japanese, something that obviously Korean idols could not do. No longer teenagers, but then in their late 20s, they were presenting a mixed image to appeal broader audiences: they were still the idols and the entertainers, but they were also young adults interested in the same issues than the rest of the society. In their media representations, they began getting involved in *serious* productions and expressing their opinions about *serious* topics, while also working their usual idol-like symbolism aimed at the building of fan's fantasies.

After being named national idols, Arashi achieved more popularity and perhaps more respect among the entire society because "the more recognition the performers attain, the more seriously they are viewed by the audience" (Aoyagi, 2005, p. 163). Since that moment, the representations of Arashi and its members inside Japan were stimulated on the mix of discourses of them as idols and as national representatives. In their serious or official assignments - those related to issues of evident social impact - their qualities as Japanese representatives were the ones highlighted, while having as basis Arashi's attractiveness and ability to get a wide attention from inside and outside Japan. On the other hand, in their daily

[106] The effects of the growing power of Korean competition in Japanese music industry regarding Johnny's strategy, particularly Arashi, is analyzed in another study. See Mandujano Salazar (2009).

tasks as idols, the media emphasized their idol symbolism - their approachability and ordinariness, the friendship among the members, their physical attractiveness, and their mixed masculinity personification – implicitly suggesting that such features were *national ideals* given the status of the group as national idol.

Arashi members were represented as admirable young men because, despite their fame and popularity, they were still approachable, kept their ordinary personalities, were still close friends, and, of course, they were still the epitome of Japanese masculinity. For example, in the cover story of men-oriented magazine *GQ Japan* of June of 2010, the heading recites: "The day the national idols become real good men. Today, the five-member group Arashi has become the representative of the era" (Tatsuta, 2010). In fact, the same magazine designated three of the five members 'Man of the year' in the period 2008-2011,[107] and has featured all of them in different numbers. This is just one of many examples on how Japanese media has been linking the discourses of masculinity and national representation in the same text when referring to Arashi.

Bringing back the ideas of Billig (1995), it can be argued that Japanese media began flagging in the representations of Arashi the qualities considered part of the national identity by a dominant ideology that stressed the role of men in society and some personality features as the stoicism, loyalty, devotion to the work and the group, and the like; sometimes waving the flags of nationhood – i.e. in the serious and official activities that the group performs in its role as *face of Japan* – and others just showing unwaved ones – i.e. the case of *GQ Japan* - which, nonetheless, have relevance for the naturalization of these ideas.

A new level of this flagging of a discourse on the nationhood in Arashi's media representations is discernible after March 11th of 2011. The natural disaster that had devastated the northeast part of Japan signified also the threat of a major general crisis, as expressed by the Cool Japan Advisory Council when called to all ministries and Japanese people to work together to achieve a quick rebuild of the country in terms of infrastructure and national spirit (Cool Japan Advisory Council , 2011).

[107] Matsumoto Jun in 2008, Sakurai Sho in 2009, and Ohno Satoshi in 2011.

The members of Arashi, in their roles as national idols and ambassadors of Japan, rapidly took a leading part in domestic media efforts to lessen the survivors' tragedies and focus the society on keeping optimism and working through the strengthening of the country. From that moment, media has been covering the multiple activities they have been carrying on to help the affected zone, cleaning, talking to victims, cheering Japanese in general and committing themselves to keep working to support Japan by giving free concerts in the affected areas and performing in other parts of the country specifically as fundraisers and crusades to maintain people aware of the needs and challenges of the victims. The many advertising campaigns that they have endorsed since that time have also been filled with such messages and it seems that many companies have turned to Arashi to promote their products and services in order to be able to use that national discourse.

For instance, less than a month after the earthquake, Arashi performed in a special concert called *Let's connect thru the songs* (*Uta de tsunagō*) (NHK, April 8, 2011), where the members' message was that they believed in the strength of Japan. Also in April, the national broadcasting of a special commercial spot from a company of mobile phones showed the members praising the qualities of Japanese people as "gentle, hardworking and a bit shy," and then followed by the same discourse of the book *The Arashi of Japan* about them wanting to know more about the country and connect with their people (AU KDDI, April 2011). In June 30, *The Arashi of Japan*, previously given by the JTA to schools, was published for its selling around the country to raise funds for the victims of the earthquake (Oricon Style, 2011). Then, in July, the special video *Message from Japan* produced by the JTA was broadcasted in the Japan National Tourism Organization website[108] and in big screens on 133 countries; the video presented the five members of Arashi expressing their gratitude for the support that Japan was receiving from around the world, but it was also aimed at showing that the country was ready to continue receiving people and offering its culture (Kankōchō, 2011).

[108] http://www.jnto.go.jp/ (video no longer available)

Also since 2011, Arashi's inedited song *furusato* (homeland),[109] which was presented by the group as part of its participation as Master of Ceremony of the *Kōhaku Uta Gassen* (NHK) 2010,[110] has been promoted by media as a kind of anthem of national bonding and national pride. Analyzing the lyrics, it is evident that it expresses the discourse aimed at strengthening of national identity through the flagging of Japanese allegedly traditional personality qualities, aesthetic sense and imagery:

> In the sky that approaches the twilight, I found the clouds of the train;
> I feel like going back to the town of those dear scents.
>
> The times of earnest pile up, the people that spin in my memories,
> the smiles of everyone are now besides me.
>
> The people that I want to meet are there, they are waiting with open kindness;
> the colors of the mountains, the wind and the sea, the one place where I can be myself.
>
> There is a song I cannot forget, that I sing to myself while tying hands;
> the colors of the mountains, the wind and the sea, this is my homeland.
>
> In the sky with sunrise colors one star twinkles,
> a small light shines, the valor boosts.
>
> If I searched the seeds of tomorrow in the middle of nonchalant days,
> the mirror of the beginning resounds now for your sake.
>
> Because there are rainy days, the rainbow appears;
> because we overtake the pain, we become stronger;
> the continuing road, the map of the dream, everything is in my hearth.
>
> I want to keep forever the memories of the friend that helped me and I helped;
> the continuing road, the map of the dream, that is my homeland;
> it is my motherland; this is our homeland.

[109] Translation based on the lyrics from the performance of Arashi during the *Kōhaku Uta Gassen* (NHK, December 31, 2013).

[110] This concert has been held annually since 1951 by the public broadcaster NHK, as part of the special shows of the celebrations of New Year. Currently, it is a live transmission of four and a half hours that goes through the last hours of the year. It is regarded as one of the most important media events and shows, normally having the highest annual ratings (see Video Research website: http://www.videor.co.jp). Artists to perform are chosen by a committee of NHK and are announced in a ceremony some weeks before. The selection is supposed to reflect the most popular artists in a national sense; for such reason, all media – including the private corporations – report on the event. The format of the show is a musical competition between the red team and the white team – the red is formed by female artists or groups with female leading singers and the white is of male artists or groups. Another important selection is the one of masters of ceremonies, who act also as captains of each team, and are awarded to *tarento* who were relevant that year – also one female and one male. After all artists have performed, the public and a committee of other invited *tarento* or public personalities vote to select the winning team. Then, the flag of victory is presented to the master of ceremonies representing the winning team. See http://www1.nhk.or.jp/kouhaku/history/

In 2013, Arashi was once again main personality of the *24-hour TV*, this time expressly having as topic: "Japan…? The shape of this country." During the public designation of the group, the members explained they intended to think and make people think about their nation and themselves as Japanese. The CM of the event showed the idols in different situations arguably depicting typical Japanese behavior.

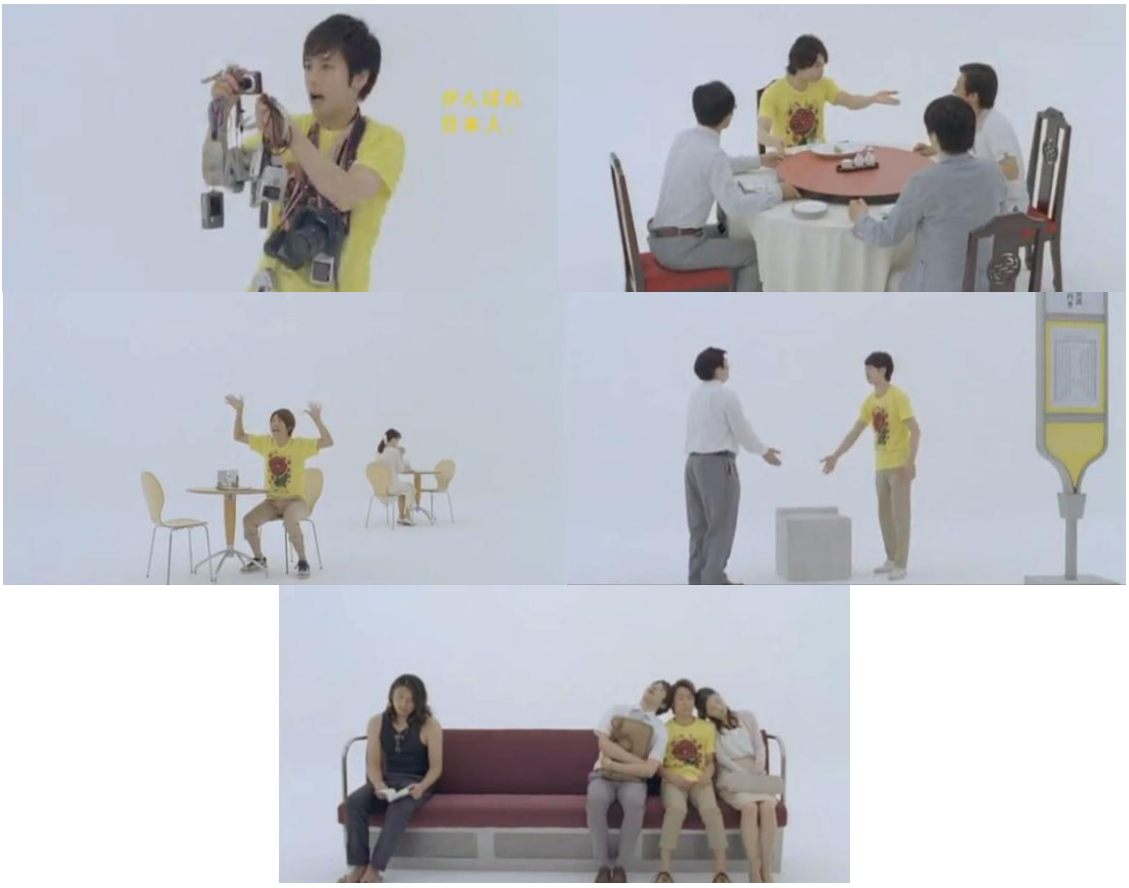

Image 4. August, 2013. CM for the *24-hour Television* event. Source: NTV. Images extracted by the author from the open broadcasting in Japanese television.

Along with the images, a voice described the behavior, reinforcing the national spirit with the words "Japanese people, give your best. For the sake of Japanese." Scenario 1: "Japanese cannot say no and always help others; even if they are not grateful, we help them. That is our true self." Scenario 2: "Japanese are thoughtful. We think that consideration to others is the energy that moves the world." Scenario 3: "Japanese apologize a lot, but what is wrong with that? Good people are good people, let's be proud!" Scenario 4: "Japanese compromise; before oneself, we think about the other. Life is not about gains and setbacks,

nor about winners and losers." Scenario 5: "Japanese are softhearted; we look for balance here and there; because we are a little weak of will, our spirits get tired."[111]

In this way, after March 11 of 2011, the image or name of Arashi has become easily found in media productions that clearly state as objective to show the beauty, uniqueness or importance of Japanese environment, culture and society, openly flagging a discourse on *Japaneseness*; some are directly related to the support of the affected area and aiming to the rebuild of the national sentiment[112] – waved flags - and others are just promoted as regular variety shows or special documentaries that are supposed to be mere entertainment[113] – unwaved flags. Also, the media productions that require them to go overseas have diminished, increasing considerably their travels inside the country to promote all the 'unknown national treasures'. The few productions that have taken them to foreign countries seem to have a two-fold aim: to promote Japan in those places, but also to show the national audience that their country is well-regarded in the world.

Aoyagi (2005, p. 35) says that:

> In contemporary Japanese popular culture and mass society, successful idols […] are considered charismatic because they demonstrate the transformation from an ordinary young person to an extraordinary figure that influences the public. In Japan, charisma encompasses a person's abilities to face challenges, overcome struggles, and accomplish dreams against all odds. It also includes the person's ability to surpass the limits of tradition and attain a new meaning in life that can inspire other members of the society.

Then, after exploring the case of Arashi, it is possible to argue that these *tarento* have achieved a charismatic stance in Japan after a long process of maturation in media that

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[111] Scenario 1. *Nihonjin ga kotowaranai. No to ienaibun, dōryoku suru. Tatoe, kansha sarenakutemo, hito no tame. Sore ga watashitachi no honnō nanoda. Ganbare nihonjin. Nihonjin no tame ni.* Scenario 2. *Nihonjin wa enryō, sono omoiyari ga rensachii, kyō no sekai wo mawasu energii ni naru to omotte iru. Ganbare nihonjin. Nihonjin no tame ni.* Scenario 3. *Nihonjin wa yoku ayamaru. Sore no doko ga warui? Ii hito wa ii. Mune wa harō. Ganbare nihonjin. Nihonjin no tame ni.* Scenario 4. *Nihonjin wa yuzuriau. Jibun yori, aite wa saki ni omou. Ikiru koto wa sontoku dewanai, kachimake demonai. Ganbare nihonjin. Nihonjin no tame ni.* Scenario 5. *Nihonjin wa ohitoyoshida. Kocchi ni mo, acchi ni mo, sō yatte, yo no naka no barānsu wo totte iru. Ki ga yokai kara koso, ki ga tsukareru no da. Ganbare nihonjin. Nihonjin no tame ni.*

[112] Television programs as: *Uta de tsunagō* (NHK, April 8, 2011), *Ima koso ni iru hitobito. Inochi no genba* (NHK 2011), *Ongaku no Chikara* (NTV, 2012), *Minna no chikara* (NTV, 2012), *VS Arashi* (Fuji TV, December 8, 2011). Special corners in TV programs: *Kōhaku Uta Gassen* (NHK, 2011; 2012), *24 jikan TV* (NTV, 2012; 2013), *News Zero* (NTV, 2011; 2012; 2013), and so on.

[113] *Arashi no asu ni kakeru tabi* (NHK, 2011; 2012; 2013), *24 jikan TV* (2012, 2013), *Aiba Manabu* (TV Asahi, 2013), *Ima kono kao ga sugoi* (TBS, 2013), *Ninosan* (NTV, 2013). And commercial spots: *Naïve* (2012, 2013), *Lawson Iwate onigiri* (2013), *JAL* (2011, 2012, 2013), *Pocky* (2011, 2012, 2013), *JCB* (2012, 2013), etc.

transformed them in front of audience from regular teenage idols to accomplished men that showed their commitment with their society, not only by performing their jobs with all the effort and dedication that any other non-entertainment job would require, but also by using their talents to put the name of Japan in a good place and by influencing their own people to get more involved with their culture. Their media representations have been flagging the Japanese identity through a focus on the pride they express when presenting something that puts their country as unique or as part of the world's elite. At the same time, their own symbolism as *national ambassadors* and *faces of Japan* towards the exterior, but mostly inside their own society, is reinforced the more they involve in such type of discourse.

In 2012, the magazine *Nikkei Entertainment* published an article (Kimura, 2012) on the significance of Arashi's transformation from national idols into Japanese ambassadors; it remarked their strategy of 'becoming global by staying in Japan'. In the interview, the members expressed they considered more important to get to know more about their own country to *strengthen* it than going outside.

The media promotion of Japan through Arashi is evident also for Japanese, but it is not necessarily perceived as *nationalistic*. According to the opinions of Japanese people I talked to during my field work, they noticed the fact that the group was being constantly called 'national' or 'face of Japan'. However, as they developed more on the topic, they exteriorized the same reasoning that was promoted implicitly in the media discourse: Arashi was called national because it was popular inside and outside Japan and because the members had an image that represented the 'Japanese traditional values'; at the same time, since they were the national idols, they were associated to Japan in many media contents.

The general opinion of people regarding those 'national values' represented by Arashi, turned out to be the same that I found to be the preferred reading media promotes: peaceful, respectful, creative, hardworking, friendly, good at team work and involved with their society. They also talked about emotional responses produced in them while seeing Arashi, which were considered virtues of Japanese, in words of a thirty seven years old office lady: "I think that Arashi gives Japanese people energy. We notice how much effort and courage they put

in their activities and we also feel like persevering and giving our best. Japanese like people who persevere."[114]

It appears as if audience notice the constant national flags in Arashi's representations, but they assume them as natural because the group *is* the national idol, because it *is* the face of Japan; or, in another way, they consider that Arashi has become national idol because it *represents* some of the national values. This perception could be considered as a myth functioning to establish the national ideology of the Japanese elites as common sense through a strategy of banal nationalism; but, arguably, this process only works because Japanese audience deliberately decide to support the group.

Examining this under the theoretical background that was presented regarding celebrities' social role, it is possible to state that Japanese audience – not all, but a relevant part of it, considering that the media power of Arashi has been at the top since their designation as national idols - support the group for one of two reasons: because they agree with the discourses attached to it or because they have a positive affect towards the group that is stronger than any disagreement with their messages and, then, it can be expected that such divergence tends to disappear facilitated by such emotional connection.

In any case, this suggests that an important portion of Japanese people approve to a good extent the ideologies regarding the national and the gender constructions represented by Arashi. If several sectors of people did not agree with what Arashi represents, then they would not consume the many contents and products related to the group and soon the media and corporations would stop using the image and messages related to it, because, at the end of the day, the first and most important aim of these elites is the economic profit they get from the use of certain representations. In this sense, the government just follows the market tendencies to use the most influential media images and names for ideological purposes.

The case of Arashi allows to follow the subtle and well-coordinated cooperation among Japanese government, business, media and cultural producers to generate a wide-ranging flagging of certain elements related to the national identity, a trend particularly

[114] The verb used is *ganbaru*, which implies be tenacious, be persistent, giving the best, refusing to give up.

evident since 2010 and increasingly ideological after the earthquake crisis. Many other *tarento* have also been used in this campaign, but with different discursive focuses.

For instance, the female counterpart of Arashi - the group AKB48 – has been enjoying a wide success in the Japanese entertainment industry since around 2010 - and done fairly well in some parts of East Asia; these facts also gained the group the label of 'national' in media. After the disaster of 2011, the members of AKB48 were also very active in charity activities for the victims of the earthquake and media reported on all of them. On December 14th, 2013, the group was presented as 'representative of the Japanese *pop* culture' and performed in the banquet offered by Prime Minister Abe to the leaders of the Southeast Asian countries attending the ASEAN-Japan Summit (Sankei Digital, 2013). Since then, the images of the group and its members have been related to the Cool Japan phenomena mostly to the exterior, representing the economic possibilities of promotion of Japanese media culture.

Although I find that this group has particular characteristics that make it less relevant for the national identity discourse inside the country, there are still some Japanese female features that media endorse through them and, indirectly, reinforce Japanese traditional masculinity.

As the name of the group indicates, the members of AKB48 were 48 at the beginning; as it became successful, the number has skyrocketed. However, just some of the hundreds of girls that belong to the project are fairly known. The members' age range goes from teenagers to women in their twenties. The producer agency has established a rotation scheme to choose the girls who would appear in promotional activities during a period; this is done according to a voting system among fans – mostly male. Also, as the members get older, regardless of their popularity, they leave the group. In media, they announce these decisions as their own; nevertheless, when they leave, they hardly enjoy the media power they had as members of it, making it very difficult for them to compete with women who have developed their tarento career mainly as actresses or singers. In Japanese tarento system, those who are considered mainly actors and actresses have a very high status, as their personalities are very carefully shaped by their promotion agencies – similar to the kind of management done by Johnny's Jimusho. In the case of female idols, however, the concepts of the groups are the ones

carefully constructed, but the exchangeability of the individual members, makes it difficult for most of them to succeed after they leave the group.[115]

Even though AKB48 as a concept is very successful and popular, certainly representative of Japanese media culture, the continuous change of the girls makes it difficult for Japanese audience to grasp the essence of their individual personalities and retrieve elements of their own identity as Japanese. Nonetheless, there are still some very relevant discourses that – through the whole concept of the group – flag ideas about what elites propose as Japanese women ideals and flaws.

The media narratives regarding AKB48 stimulate the idealization of a sexualized childish female image, while also implying that the public worth of a woman is lost as she matures, thus implying she should retrieve herself to the private role of wife and mother. In his analysis of the group as image commodities, Galbraith (2012, p. 199) identifies that the members of AKB48 are turned into images of production and consumption, symbolically oscillating "between an unreachable ideal (the pure) and infinitely available material (the sexual)." Indeed, they are represented as an ideal woman archetype of doll-like, petite, childish girls whose lives are on the hands of the male producer and the thousands of male fans. Lacking individuality and being exchangeable, the value of these women, as media portray them, is on their youthful submissive sexual appeal; they are presented merely as images of desire – as Galbraith says – but the person behind the image barely matters. Albeit they are successful idols, their success - their place as front members in the public activities of the group - is explicitly related to their ability to appeal to male fans and the male producer.

Both, Arashi and AKB48 represent dual gender discourses: Arashi embodies the traditional Japanese male in contemporary fashion, while AKB48 symbolizes sexualized childish femininity. However, the media power of Arashi members has been built over much defined types of personality that have been strengthening through the years in order to appeal to different sectors of the society beyond young female fans, whereas AKB48 members' media attraction derives from their lack of individuality and, thus, replicability – if one

[115] Individual female idols of the 1980s were indeed able to achieve success after their idol career, but in the contemporary cases, the rule is for them to eventually disappear among the thousands of stock *tarento*, only a few exceptions – those who were the top stars of their groups - are achieving a fairly good place in the *tarento* system.

member goes out, ten more can take her place without any difference. Thus, AKB48, towards Japanese society, reinforces the traditional ideas of a traditional paternalist society by endorsing the notion that ideal women are those who do not rise their individuality and who are at the service of male.

Therefore, the dominance of Arashi and AKB48 in contemporary Japanese media - resultant from the active support of people - and their containing of a ubiquitous flagging of a national discourse along with that of a dual masculinity and dual femininity could be indicative of a moment of consensus between elites and society to focus on the reinforcement of the national identity that is closely related to issues regarding the social/national roles of men and women.

In the next chapter, another sample of media phenomena, from another *banal* type of contents, will be analyzed. It is important to keep in mind the case presented here in order to support the reading. The intertextuality found among Japanese media is the key to grasp the dominant discourses promoted by elites to society.

3 NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES TURNED INTO MEDIA IDOLS

[Stereotyping] is a particular type of power – a hegemonic and discursive form of power, which operates as much through culture, the production of knowledge, imagery and representation, as through other means. Moreover, it is circular: it implicates the 'subjects' of power as well as those who are 'subjected to it'- Hall *(1997a, p. 236)*

Among the powerful *tarento* found in Japanese media there are some high profile athletes who have been absorbed into the whole entertainment business. Nevertheless, media sports and their protagonists are on their own very useful grounds for the contention of ideologies regarding identities, power and so forth.

Jhally (1989, p. 73) has said that in capitalist societies:

> Sports certainly offer a mapping of the world, a way of understanding the social relations within which we live our lives, but, unlike other media messages […], sports also involve us in other ways. There are passions involved, emotional entanglements with the events that we witness […] They are part (for many people, heretofore largely male) of how social identity is formed.

Indeed, sports are a crucial part of the cultural landscape, their implications in the construction of identities is notable and the emotional elements are undeniable. However, all these characteristics are not exclusive of sports; actually, they are remarkably similar to the previously discussed celebrity arena, predominantly regarding the topics of interest in this dissertation.

In this chapter, I will reconstruct the situations in which football[116] climbed in the preferences of Japanese audience, to then propose a preferred reading of the representations of the native star players, arguing that they have been transformed into media idols with a very close symbolism to that of the members of Arashi and how all this has impacted the propagation of discourses on the nation.

3.1 SPORTS AND THEIR SOCIAL RELEVANCE

In contemporary societies, sports are social products containing social meanings (Horne, Tomlinson, & Whannel, 2005); they are closely related to issues of the formation of values

[116] I will use 'football' and 'soccer' alternatively; but referring to the Japanese case, I will prioritize the use of soccer, because in Japanese media and common speech, *sakkā* - native pronunciation of 'soccer' - is the most used term.

and identities, and they are also terrains for struggles of political and economic power (Wenner, 1989); media sports are both a reflection and a producer of "ideas about nationality, class, race, gender, age and disability […] therefore presents a rich seam of material from which to investigate and understand our social, cultural, economic and political lives" (Boyle & Haynes, 2009, p. 9).

In the current state of extremely institutionalized, internationalized, commodified and mediated sports, the professional practice of most of them has become a motor for social mobility (Horne, Tomlinson, & Whannel, 2005), allowing successful athletes to access to higher strata. Nonetheless, the *symbolism* related to the practice of sports according to an original belonging to certain social fractions continues in most of them; for example, tennis, golf and equitation remain to be closely associated to representations of high class, while boxing is mostly linked to athletes of a lower class origin. On the other hand, the most popular media sports – like football or baseball – have evolved to conceal many of the evocations to particular social classes, so they can be widely appealing in both practice and consumption; in these cases, the social strata references can be found related to specific teams, players or types of supporters rather than to the sport itself.

In terms of gender, the development of most media sports has been dominated by narratives of manhood and, even when women have gained some terrain, the "gendered status is fiercely and cunningly defended within the institutional structures" (Horne, Tomlinson, & Whannel, 2005, p. 109). This means that not only in the practice of such sports, but also in their consumption, the narratives and practices in all stages of the world of sports have been mostly masculinized. For instance, although it is undeniable that women are a growing part of the audience of football, most of the commercial ads that one finds during the media coverage of a game are clearly directed to men as the main audience, even when the products promoted are gender-neutral – electronics, drinks, food, cars, etc.[117] Likewise, among the announcers or reporters of the sport programs there is a majority of men; they are sometimes accompanied by women who are sexualized and hardly regarded as sport specialists. There

[117] Of course, these commercials also convey the message that men – not women - are the ones who should buy cars and plasma televisions, or drink beer and eat hamburgers.

is an evident intention to show that men are the only ones who can understand and debate about sports.[118]

Likewise, this hegemonic masculinization of sports has marginalized, at different moments and in different areas, 'alternative masculinities' related to sexual preferences, body types, ethnicities or nationalities (Whannel, 2005b). Sports have propagated ideas about a 'natural' athletic ability of some ethnicities and the lack of it of some others in certain fields, ideas that have become highly accepted and repeated. Nevertheless, the same internationalization of sports has gradually challenged these stereotypes by showing people of some groups prospering in fields that were before seen as dominated by others.

Even more relevant for the particular aims of this study, global media sports have also intrinsic discourses about national identities and nationalism that are so obvious and repetitive that they become *natural*. In the coverage of sports, media persistently represent and express national differences and, in those symbolic constructions, the "audiences are characteristically positioned as patriotic partisan subjects. National belonging-ness is inscribed in the discursive practices that seek to mobilise national identities as part of the way in which our attention is engaged with a narrative hermeneutic" (Horne, Tomlinson, & Whannel, 2005, p. 165). And the mega-events of sports – World Cups, Olympics, continental or international championships, and the like - around which revolve most of the efforts and hopes of athletes, audience, media and sponsors, create what Rowe (1999) would call 'orgies of commodified nationalism'.[119]

This is strikingly evident in the case of football which, given its high internationalization and organizational structure dependent on supranational entities – i.e. the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and the different regional confederations - deals with the national issue on a regular basis. Not only at the level of the audience or in the context of mega-events, but also at the level of the athletes and in the

[118] Here, I am talking about general tendencies, not particular cases. Although exemptions surely exist, the globalized sports-business makes these trends even more common, despite the advancements of gender equity in some places.

[119] His exact words: "global media mega sports events like the Olympics […] and the football World Cup […], have become orgies of both nationalism and commodification ('commodified nationalism', perhaps)" (Rowe, 1999, p. 23).

domestic professional leagues, the issue of nationality is crucial and continuously talked about: players with double citizenship must choose one for their FIFA affiliation, so they can only play for the chosen national team and be considered in that way for their club's domestic-international configuration, something that becomes an endless controversial and emotional topic in media and among audience regarding his 'right' to *represent* this or that country. The national identity is also constantly mixed with racial/ethnic elements; 'racism' is a known problem existing in football at all levels - not only in the practice of the sport, but also and mainly with audience. These situations cross the border of sports and put in display the social context in which they appear.

Nevertheless, as much as sports are fields of constant nationalistic struggles, they also have the potential of playing a role in the cultural diplomacy – or, the so called *sports-diplomacy* - and of serving as tools of the soft power of a country. As some say, sports can be particularly helpful in "the 'low' political agenda – campaigns for sustainable development, worldwide literacy, or human security" (Murray, 2011, p. 22). But also, the hosting of international sporting events gives states a chance to show the world their capabilities, to create communication channels with governments or organizations even when political relations are severed, and to support or change the stereotypes about their countries and people. To be able to achieve this, the participation and behavior of national athletes and society in the context of such events are critical, and so it becomes essential the cooperation of all sectors to show congruence in their standings.[120]

Other significant feature of sports is that, in the same way than music or performing arts, sports enter into the capitalist game and become industries, driven by the economic gains to be extracted from them: the sport as a practice, the competitions as events, and the athletes as bodies and images, everything is commodified. And so, like all cultural commodities, sports and athletes rely on being attractive for a substantial conglomerate of people, so that

[120] If the cooperation is not achieved, the opposite occurs, exposing the faults of a state. Currently, the case of Brazil is the most relevant. Brazil won the right to host the 2013 Confederations Cup, the 2014 FIFA World Cup, and the 2016 Olympics. Right when the world was praising Brazil for its apparent economic and social development, the 2013 Confederations Cup put on display the very serious social troubles and fallacies of the supposed miracle; many riots and popular displays have been using the attention that the football events are attracting to Brazil to denounce the corruptions of the government and the disapproval to the politics' decisions.

such attraction power can be commercialized to and by media, sponsors and advertisers, all of which are interested in the positive influence that such transaction can get for their products.

Nowadays, sports and their protagonists are one more aspect of media banal culture. Similar to celebrities, athletes become commodities that are valued not only for their concrete abilities in the particular field of their specialty, but also for their potential as image commodities; they negotiate their monetary value through agents; the most popular and/or successful players are called *stars* and *idols*, implying the worship they receive from people and their media status derived from such adoration; teams and players have casual, regular and obsessive fans. Athletes and teams produce positive or negative affections in their followers and those affections cross the specific field of sports to involve into a meta-reality that is encouraged by the high intertextuality relating them with other media fields.

In all these ways, sports – particularly those that are practiced worldwide and become part of the regular cultural and media environment - play a substantial role in the production of ideologies at local, national and international levels. As Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes (2009, p. 107) say: "Mediated sport is saturated with ideas, values, images and discourses which at times reflect, construct, naturalize, legitimize, challenge and even reconstitute attitudes which permeate wider society."

In Japan, for a long time, the main media sport was baseball, keeping football in a peripheral position in the preferences of Japanese (Manzenreiter & Horne, 2002); however, by the twenty-first century the situation has changed and, in the context of the external and internal political and economic pressures, the institutional efforts to promote this sport, the need to reinforce the national identity, and the parallel development of a *national idol culture*, analyzed in the previous chapter, football and its national stars have obtained a dominant presence in national media.

3.2 FOOTBALL BECOMING PART OF POPULAR CULTURE IN JAPAN

The history of football in Japan began in 1873 when British Lieutenant-Commander Archibald L. Douglas, who was instructor at the Imperial Japanese Navy Academy, taught his cadets how to play. However, the sport did not spread and the most important competition a national representation had for some decades was in the Olympic Games of Berlin 1936; later, the Olympic participations had to be interrupted during the years the country was at war and at the rebuilding period. The Japanese football remained underdeveloped until the establishment of the amateur national league in 1965. After a bronze medal in the Olympics of Mexico 1968, the efforts of the Japan Football Association (JFA) at institutional levels were focused on spreading the interest on the game by having some minor international competitions in Japan and working on developing the national leagues (Japan Football Association, 2011). In 1989, a female semi-professional league was established; in 1992, the men's national team won its first championship in the Asian Cup held in Hiroshima; in 1993, the male professional J. League was inaugurated; in 1996, Japan was selected to host the 2002 FIFA World Cup along South Korea (Japan Football Association, 2012b); and, during the decade of 1990, some Japanese players began to enjoy a relative success outside the country – i.e. Miura Kazuyoshi and Nakata Hidetoshi who played in the Italian Serie A.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the sport began to gain acceptance supported on the general promotion that media was doing to promoted it – mostly the male professional version - as global and post-modern, contrasting with baseball's 'local' image (Horne & Bleakley, 2002b). As Jonathan Watts (1998) says, the J.League, as a new product being introduced to Japan, was impacting the cultural development through consumption; football opened a new cultural arena where new role models were to appear that represented 'a new Japanese identity' mixing traditional elements with new ways of socialization and self-expression: in Japanese soccer, players bowed to each other before and after the game, they also bowed to the people in the stadium, and the fair play was overemphasized; but also a player could become an object of national pride by leaving the country and playing outside,[121] fans and players could be more expressive – in terms of personal style and also in

[121] Watts (1998) says that before the football star Miura Kazuyoshi went to play to Italy, Japanese baseball players were regarded as traitors to the nation if they left the national league in order to play for a foreign team,

terms of emotions – and women were a welcomed part of the audience. During this period, the popularity of football grew particularly among young generations, perhaps facilitated by its featuring in popular manga and anime that contained expressions of the Japanese soccer hopes.[122]

As it can be seen in Table 1, since 1989 football began appearing in the top places of professions that boys wanted to insert to,[123] and gradually gained a greater share, topping the list for four consecutive years from 1993 - when the J.League was inaugurated - to 1996 - when the bidding of Japan for the World Cup was accepted. After that, the 'soccer fever' slowed down among youngsters, but becoming a football player continued to be among the most popular answers with other peaks that will be discussed later. It is also to this generation to which the current Japanese soccer *idols* belong and who have expressed to have been influenced by the popularity of the sport in the 1990s. (Hasebe, 2011; Uchida, 2011; Yoshida M. , 2012).

but, after Miura, this reaction changed and the fact that a Japanese athlete went to foreign lands – the top of their field - was something to be proud of.

[122] The most prominent example is *Captain Tsubasa* created by Takahashi Yoichi, which is the story of young Japanese soccer players with dreams of international success. The original manga was printed from 1981 to 1988 in the Weekly Shōnen Jump, one of the most consumed manga books directed to the young male sector. After the success of the printed version, the anime series was broadcasted by TV Tokyo between 1983 and 1986. Because of the popularity of the title among young audiences and in the context of the establishment of the J.League, a second generation of the manga was published between 1994 and 1997. From then on, the series would continue supporting different situations of the real national football, like the 2002 and 2006 World Cups (Takahashi Y. , 2003; TV Tokyo, 2013).

[123] Dai-ichi Life, a life insurance company, has been doing a yearly survey among Japanese children of elementary school about what they want to become when they grow up. The sample of children is taken from all Japan and the answers are processed distinguishing gender. Football player appear in every top-10 list for boys since 1989; it does not appear in the lists for girls for any of the available years (Dai-ichi Life, 2013).

Table 1. Dai-ichi Life yearly survey to elementary school boys about what they want to become, top three professions (1989-2012)						
Year	**Football player**		**Baseball player**		**Researcher, professor**	
	Place	%	Place	%	Place	%
1989	4	4.8	1	15.1	7	3.1
1990	4	5.0	1	19.4	10	2.3
1991	3	5.7	1	17.4	n.a.	
1992	2	6.9	1	13.4	n.a.	
1993	1	10.5	8	4.1	2	7.3
1994	1	23.7	2	8.5	6	3.7
1995	1	20.0	2	12.5	n.a.	
1996	1	12.7	2	12.7	6	3.8
1997	2	9.0	1	10.6	9	3.1
1998	5	6.0	4	6.0	2	7.9
1999	2	11.4	1	11.9	7	3.8
2000	2	8.2	1	15.5	3	6.1
2001	2	11.0	1	21.0	8	2.7
2002	2	9.1	3	8.5	1	9.6
2003	1	15.8	2	12.7	8	3.2
2004	2	10.7	1	10.7	3	5.4
2005	2	15.1	1	16.3	3	4.3
2006	2	10.2	1	12.0	3	5.1
2007	3	6.0	1	11.8	2	8.5
2008	2	11.1	1	17.0	3	5.6
2009	2	12.2	1	16.3	4	5.0
2010	1	16.7	2	14.0	3	5.9
2011	1	14.8	2	9.8	3	5.3
2012	1	11.7	4	5.8	2	6.1

Source: Done by the author with data from Dai-ichi Life (2013)

In 2002, the co-hosting by Japan of the FIFA World Cup along South Korea gave a boost to the standing of football in the country among general audience. The campaign for the bidding was not easy and the event was not intended to be done jointly with South Korea; on the contrary, the bids had been a race for power between the two countries' political and economic elites: while South Korea tried to gain political power and its campaign used strong ideological elements – the World Cup as promoter for peace in the Korean peninsula and the

discredit of Japan for its imperialist era – Japan, in the mid of a recession, was more interested in securing its economic and technological stance in the region and show to the world that the country was still the leader of Asia, so its committee "emphasise[d] the sporting and technological, and not the political nature of its bid" (Butler, 2002, p. 46).

However, at the last moment, both committees decided to join forces to obtain the hosting of the 2002 FIFA World Cup for Asia, something that was received with mixed emotions by elites and population in both countries (Butler, 2002; Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002). Nevertheless, as Roche (2000) notes, to be successful, this type of 'mega-events' depend on the social contracts among organizers, media, local citizens, politicians, sponsors and advertisers. Already immersed in the monumental effort of hosting such massive event, Japanese governmental, commercial and media circles, for their political and economic interests, had to make efforts to persuade people of the importance of football for the country. To encourage such social contract and give a good international impression, the organizers relied on a discourse inspired in sport diplomacy: football began to be promoted as the intermediary between Japan and Korea to finally rebuild relations and procure a further cultural exchange, and as an opportunity to show the world the Japanese kindness and the safety of the country in the epoch that the international community was fearing more terrorist acts after September 11, 2001 (Japan Football Association, 2012a).

But, as much as sport diplomacy discourse celebrates sports as bringing people and nations together, it is contradicted by the undeniable nationalist and even racist ones that are inserted in media coverage of the same practices (Manzenreiter & Horne, 2002). Also, for media, the use of these contradictory discourses that are implied in international sporting competitions have an economic benefit, as they inspire the national and competitive sentiments of audience framed by the supposedly friendly and impartial values of sports.

In the case of Japanese soccer, the audience for the J.League had declined after the initial *boom*; however, for the male national team contents it was still very high, even compared to other popular sports (Shimizu, 2002). The high ratings obtained by the television coverage of the 2002 World Cup - promoted by the mixed media discourse of harmony and nationalism - reflects the positive reaction the national team produced among Japanese

people.[124] By acting as a "public display of national achievements, and as a showcase of individual and collective excellence" (Manzenreiter & Horne, 2002, p. 2), the event seemed to have awaken Japanese awareness of football as the best field to contend the imageries of national-international power relations – the countries involved were more and the international relevance was bigger than for any other particular sport.

The following years, the fervor for the sport caused by hosting the World Cup gave another boost to its popularity among children (see Table 1) and a genuine interest in the men's national team and its stars seems to have propagated through the 2006 Germany World Cup and the 2010 South Africa World Cup. In this tendency, it is clear the influence of another social sector that was strategically targeted by media, sponsor corporations and the JFA: women, defying the common belief of football being a sport mostly for the enjoyment of male fans.[125] According to the Japanese rating reports[126] for the matches of the national team in both events, it is evident that a difference between the female and the male sector exists, but the share of women of all ages that followed the national team in its televised games was significant.

Table 2. Rating for Japan national team's matches in the 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cups (by gender and age range)

Gender and age range	2006	2010
Boys and girls 4-12 years old	10.2	11.1
Boys and girls 13-19 years old	25.0	25.4
Men 20-34 years old	30.2	33.7
Women 20-34 years old	26.3	25.2
Men 35-49 years old	34.4	38.9
Women 35-49 years old	31.3	30.1
Men 50 years and older	27.4	30.5
Women 50 years and older	23.0	22.3

Source: Done by the author with data from Video Research (2010b)**.**

[124] According to the ratings of the matches of Japan, from 43.1 to 66.1 percent of the population were following the games of the national team, plus those who went to watch the matches to the stadiums (Video Research, 2010b).

[125] See the discussion of Manzenreiter & Horne (2002) in the section "Whose people's game?"

[126] They correspond to the Kanto region (the area that includes Tokyo), which represents about one third of the total population of Japan, according to the 2010 census data (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2013).

Manzenreiter and Horne (2002, p. 22) argue that Japanese male football players were intentionally turned – by the sectors of soccer promoters - "into a commodity for a young and wealthy female audience [that was] in the position to define dominant concepts of masculinity and to impose role models on their male contemporaries." This should be seen, undoubtedly, as an extension of the male idol culture where Japanese women as consumers had also been assertively showing their own tastes in the construction of contemporary male ideals.

In this way, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the men's national football team became a media power in Japan. Any international sport competition in which a Japanese representative team has been involved is evidently of national interest, but the anticipation produced by the football major and Olympic teams during the last years has shown to be superior than supposedly more popular sports such baseball (Video Research, 2010b).

According to the rating reports of 2009 (Video Research, 2010a), among the television broadcasts with the ten highest average ratings, six were sport competitions:[127] the highest rating was a 43.1 percent of the total audience for a world boxing championship between two Japanese, then there were four matches between Japan and South Korea in different stages of the World Baseball Classic tournament which reached between 33.6 and 40.1 percent of audience, finally, the free routine in the national female figure skating championship got 28.9 percent. That year, the most important international football competition for the men's national team was the Asian qualification round for the 2010 World Cup; the viewership for the last match of Japan reached a 24.4 percent, entering the top 30 list of highest ratings. However, in 2010, twelve of those programs were matches involving the national representative team in the World Cup and friendly games preliminary to this. Even more remarkable is that the top five corresponded to some of these with audiences ranging from 43.0 to 57.3 per cent of the total population – surpassing the ratings of the 2009 top sport competitions (Video Research, 2011). Also, since this year, the category of soccer player regained the first place among the dream professions for Japanese boys (Table 1).

[127] The rest included the previously mentioned annual musical show of NHK, *Kōhaku Uta Gassen*, in the second and fifth place with ratings of 40.8 and 37.1; the also referred 24-hour TV event in the eighth place with 31.1 points; and the ninth best was a news program with 30.4.

In 2011, just like the case of Arashi, the media presence and apparent popularity of the national football teams and, particularly, of some of their stars, were reinforced along with the use of a discourse on their national representation. This can be related to three main situations: the triumph of the men's national team in the Asian Cup in January, the active media response of the team after the 2011 earthquake, and the winning of the Women's FIFA World Cup of 2011 by Japan's female team. The Asian Cup was won by the male team after defeating South Korea in the semifinals and Australia in the final game; these two matches reached the 4th and 5th places among the television programs with the highest rating of 2011 and were the most viewed sport-related programs of the year (Video Research, 2012). Almost immediately after the natural and subsequent nuclear disasters, the players, most of them who were playing for European teams at that time, began sending messages and doing charity activities – outside and inside Japan - to help the victims, something that was broadly covered by all Japanese media. Then, in July, the women's national team conquered the world title, achievement that was so warmly received by Japanese people that then Prime Minister Kan Naoto granted the whole team the *People's Honor Award;* the press release from the Cabinet stated that the reason behind the award was the hope and passion that the players had triggered in Japanese citizens after the tragedy, by showing an earnest attitude and a courage to fight the difficulties and conquer remarkable results (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2011).

By the second semester of 2011, the beverage company Kirin, one of the majors of its kind in Japan, released a campaign that mixed the images of Japanese male and female football national squads with nation related messages. These appealed to the male team's conquer of the Asia Cup, the female team's triumph on the World Cup, and the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami: "We run." "We bonded." "We believed." "Together." "The moment when the feelings of everybody became one." "We are not alone." "You'll never walk alone." "We won't forget the year 2011." "Kirin beer along with the Japanese Football team support the restoration of the disaster zone of Japan."

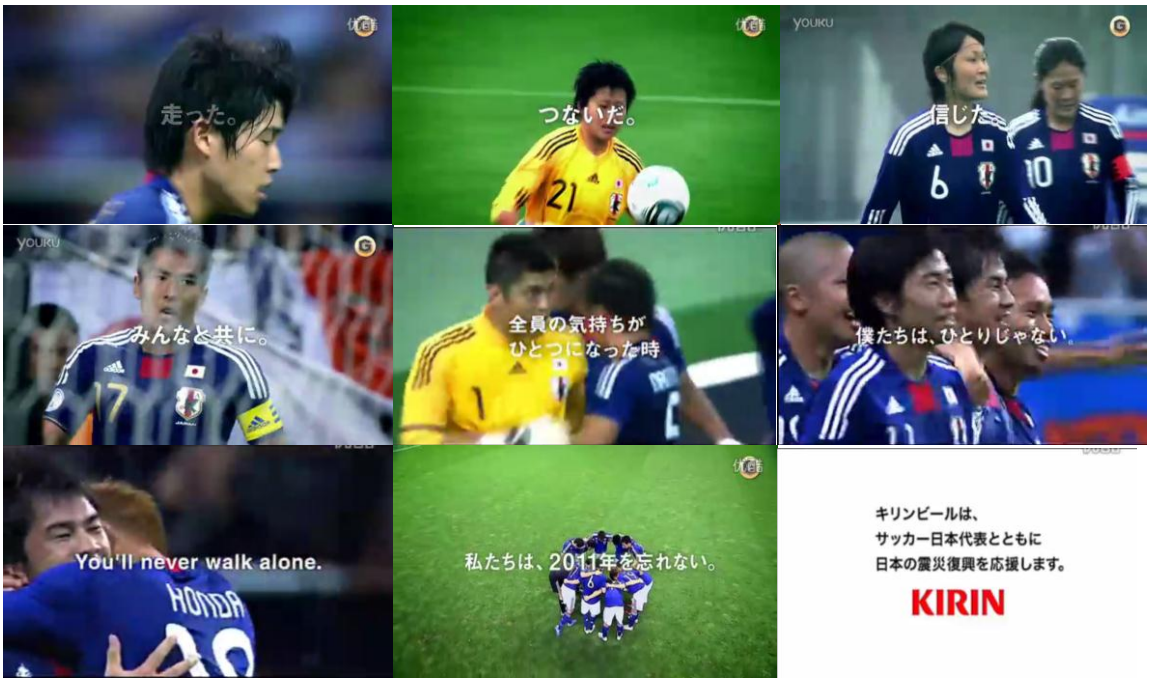

Image 6. Kirin Beer Commercial Spot (CM) 2011. Source: Kirin Holdings. Images extracted by the author from the open broadcasting in Japanese television.

Even without such outstanding international achievements, the men's national team continued to be more widely followed than the women's team. Evidently, female football does not constitute a national or international economic force as its male counterpart does (Manzenreiter & Horne, 2002); male football competitions are year-round events and the general interest is considerably stable, so the impact and profitability for sponsors, media, and organizations is greatly higher. In the Japanese case, even if the female stars are regarded by many people with positive affection for their achievements for the nation, their images lost media power after a short period of time and they have not been promoted as much in other areas of the *tarento* system – except as sporadic guests in variety shows. In contrast, the regular players of the men's national team are actively shown in Japanese media: they are followed constantly to keep the Japanese audience up with their full schedule of club and national team activities; when no particular tournament is being played, their friendly matches of preparation receive full coverage; they have become regular guests in variety shows and news programs. In short, they have been transformed completely into *tarento*, expanding their media presence to contents that surpass the football or sports broadcasts.

The media and sponsor corporations have been keenly promoting the national football stars among general society using strategies and a symbolic construction very close to those of Johnny's idols. By 2014, at the time of this analysis, the five major commercial television corporations – Fuji TV, NTV, TBS, TV Asahi, and TV Tokyo - have regular shows dedicated exclusively to football, with content covering mainly the lives and developments of Japanese internationals[128] – many of them stars of the national team - then the national male and female leagues and, marginally, the non-Japanese related international football news.[129] These programs are a hybrid between sports and variety shows: they use the *honne-ni-semaru* approach to present Japanese players in a very personal and affable way. Also, particularly around the time of international competitions or during the off-season of the Japanese internationals, many of the sports, variety and news programs present them in interviews and live appearances. In these occasions, they make a general comment about their performance or expectations in their clubs and the national team, and then the conversation deviates to *honne*-talk, *urabanashi*, private life episodes involving other national players, or the popular idol-format interviews in which the so-called *ikemen* players are questioned about their ideal type of women, family, and so on.

Printed media has supported and profited with the increased quantity of football magazines that have appeared in the last years.[130] Following the Japanese practices, the publications about football are not just that, they are further specialized: some are about international football in general, some cover just the J. League, others are exclusively about the players of the national team, there is also one about female soccer, and even others resemble the format of male idol magazines aimed to female fans, which focus on presenting pictures and personal data of male Japanese players and interviews about their daily life, their ideal girlfriends, etc.

Beyond the involvement of sponsors through the supporting of media productions related to football and the teams themselves, there are specific advertising campaigns in

[128] Those playing in foreign leagues.

[129] http://www.tv-asahi.co.jp/; http://www.fujitv.co.jp/; http://www.tbs.co.jp/; http://www.ntv.co.jp/; http://www.tv-tokyo.co.jp

[130] During field work, I counted thirteen football magazines with regular periodic releases – three weekly, three monthly, three bimonthly, and the rest with publications two and three times a week. In addition, there were some special publications about individual players and official magazines released by clubs.

which the companies use the image of specific players – the most popular of the national team. From beverages to toiletries, from electronics to mobile phone services, from sportswear to high-end brand handbags, and from cars to English learning programs, many products and services are now endorsed by Japanese football players, making them images continuously present in the daily lives of people, just like any other popular male idol.

These media strategies, the continuous participation of the men's national team in different international competitions, the achievements of the women's national representation, and the notable transfer of male national players to top European leagues, have made of football a newly found passion for Japanese people and have influenced the assimilation of the elite of the national soccer in the *tarento* system. Their roles as Japanese ambassadors in the football world and their carefully created and strongly promoted media images have transformed them not only in football idols, but also in powerful media images, in *national idols.* Through them, Japanese media and other power elites have been able to flag dominant ideologies about nation, gender and international affairs among Japanese people.

3.3 Proudly representing Japan: Union and fight in the name of the homeland

Considering the context that has been discussed to this point, it is evident that Japanese state and domestic elites have been trying to find ways to strengthen the national sentiment among population in order to recover the dynamism of the economy and solve the different social and political troubles that have been disturbing the country, particularly during the last two decades. However, these measures have to be carefully managed because of the scars the ultra-nationalist era left in Japanese people and in Asian neighbors. For such reason, media banal culture appear as ideal terrain to flag the nationalist discourses by making them less threatening for the regular audience.

Horne & Manzenreiter (2006, p. 15) argue that "[d]ifferent states use sport for different non-sport ends – economic development and social development, nation building and signaling ('branding the nation') and to assist in economic and political liberalization […]," and that these aims will depend on the situation that the state and its people are facing. They also remark that even in the contemporary sports arena that appears to be highly 'globalized', the state is the one that creates the framework for partnerships among agents

involved in the production of the sport to operate; it is also the state the one that provides many of the needed resources for such production to be possible, retaining an important power in the production of ideologies inserted in the process. These ideological uses can be perceived in the seemingly widespread campaign to promote the Japanese football team and its national idol players.

The most evident is the one related to a national pride freely expressed; a way to express patriotic feelings in a stigma-free arena. In the modern international field, the three most representative symbols of a country's identity and sovereignty have been the national flag, the national anthem and the national emblem. As Hobsbawm (2000a, p. 11) said: "they command instantaneous respect and loyalty [and…] reflect the entire background, thought and culture of a nation." However, in this sense, Japan stood in limbo for more than five decades – since the defeat in the Pacific War - without having an *official* national flag or anthem. The Hinomaru (Japanese flag) and the Kimigayo (anthem) have been cause of internal turbulence for their association with the military past of the country. Although used in different situations, they were only formally designated as *national* on August 9, 1999, when the Law Concerning the National Flag and National Anthem was enacted by the Diet. Nevertheless, many individuals and groups have resisted their use, particularly in schools where these symbols have begun to be specifically promoted as part of a campaign to nurture the respect and love for Japan that is considered part of the *neo*-nationalism (Hongo, 2007; Itoh, 2001).

Amid this context where the use of the national symbols in civic events and public places is immersed in controversy, international football settings have been promoted as a less problematic ground for people, media and other elite groups to make an active, evident and prideful use of them, literally *waving the national flags*, but disguising the *nationalist* insinuations with an acceptable *patriotic* veil. Football gives a chance to people to go to the stadiums and proudly wave the Hinomaru and sing the Kimigayo along with the players because the situation *calls* for such demonstration of national support; at the same time, sponsors, government and media can endorse the expression of those sentiments under the assumption that they are not evoking a *dangerous* nationalistic passion, but only encouraging an enthusiastic manifestation of the sense of belonging and a *healthy* fighting spirit in the context of a sport battle, framed in and contended by the 'fair play' philosophy of football -

although, in practice, the passion related to the sport has been the detonator of nationalist and racist sentiments around the world.

Although Billig (1995) notes that sports actually provide symbolic models of war and Shimizu Satoshi (2002) argues that, in the case of the Japanese football team's participation in the FIFA World Cup of 1998, media played an active role in reproducing nationalist attitudes, Manzenreiter and Horne (2002) warn about going to the other extreme and overestimate the nation related hostility behind football followers. Thus, it is necessary to examine the current football related media contents in the contemporary context of Japan to evaluate the dominant messages inserted in them, as well as the flagging of the nation in those messages, and assess their potential to interpellate Japanese audience.

For instance, in the television program *Cool Japan Football* (Fuji TV), the campaign of Cool Japan aimed at the promotion of the soft power of the country via the cultural diplomacy is explicitly referred – a waving flag - in the title, while the content of the show revolves about the debate of the elements of Japanese soccer that are worth of national pride and international recognition – players who are successful outside Japan, athletic characteristics that distinguish Japanese players from others, structural and technic features that have been developed as part of a Japanese style, and so forth.

First, in the video that opens the show the symbolism and the flagging of national elements is very eloquent: it mixes the faces of the stars of the national female and male teams, images of Japanese football fans waving many Hinomaru and banners with the name of Japan, scenes of the national teams scoring goals or celebrating a victory against other teams not visible, and images of a family of widely popular kabuki actors in traditional attires and performing kabuki[131] movements while a song meaningfully called *War*[132] sounds in the background.

[131] The kabuki is a type of performance originated in the seventeenth century that has survived today as an all-male form of theater acting (Shochiku, 2010).
[132] Frankie Goes to Hollywood. (2000). *Bang!* Tokyo: ZTT Records.

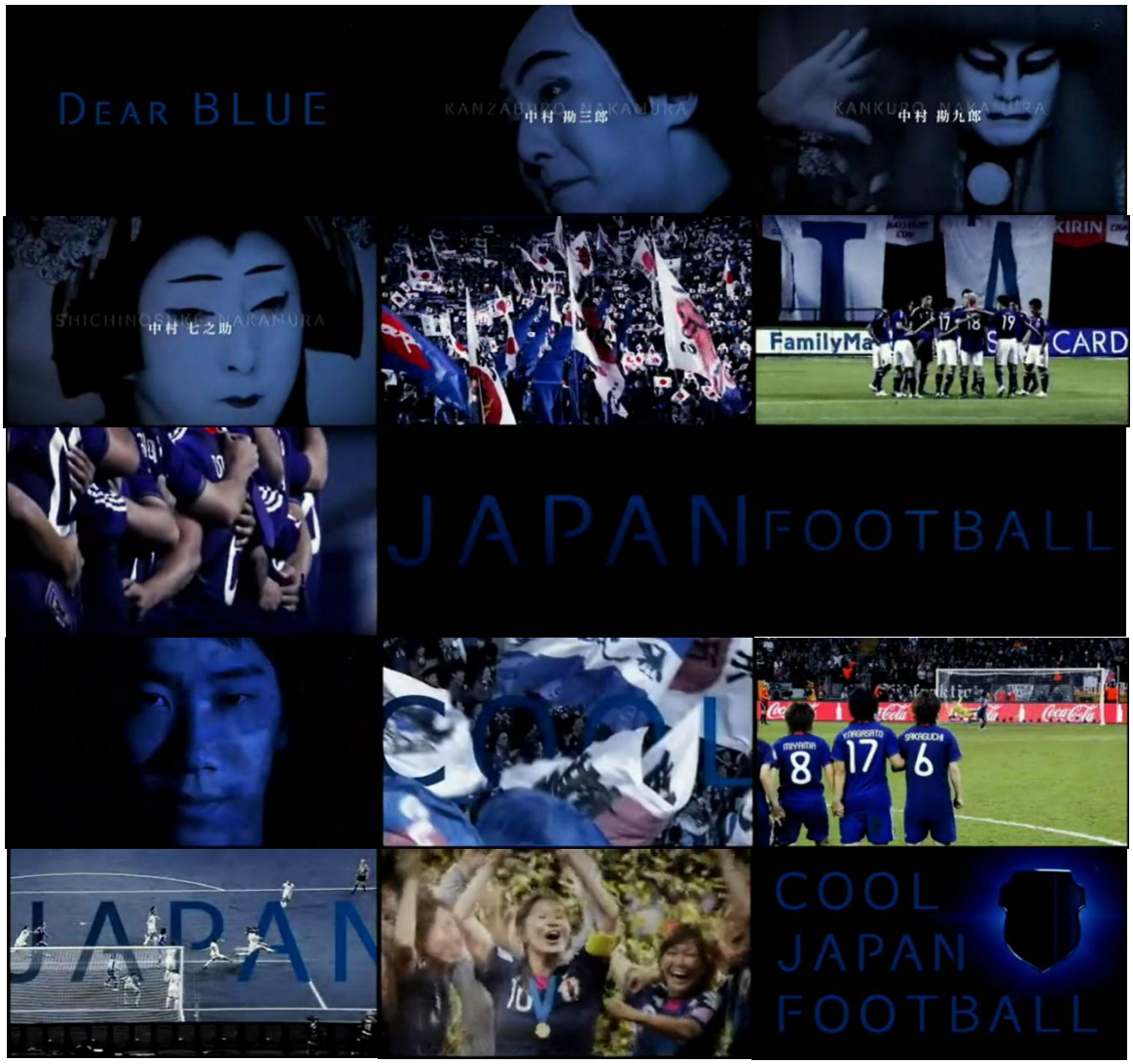

Image 7. Opening of the program *Cool Japan Football*. Source: Fuji TV. Images extracted by the author from the open broadcasting in Japanese television.

The lyrics of the song are about condemning war and the part used in this introductory video recites: "War, what it is good for? Absolutely nothing. […] War has shattered many young men's dreams. Lord, there's just got to be a better way. War, good God, what it is good for?" These words, mixed with the described images, evoke the idea that football may be the 'better way' the song asks for, an alternative to war that instead of 'shattering men's dreams' could create new ones. However, just as Manzenreiter and Horne (2002, p. 18) say, the meta-language behind media sports is "capable of expressing two contradictory messages: unity and difference […] the ideology of international peace and harmony [… and] prejudicial stereotypes, particularly if national pride and the display of achievement are at

stake." In this way, the one-minute video expresses that anti-war message relating it to football, but at the same time the imagery is that of a battle, of national warriors winning against the world – including the kabuki dance of a samurai character. Even the word used in Japanese language to refer to a sporting match is *sen*, which is exactly the same term for battle and war.

On the other hand, the inclusion of the Nakamura family is also very significant because the three kabuki actors appearing are broadly popular, not only among fans of the Japanese traditional theatre. Nakamura Kanzaburō, the father was a promoter of updating kabuki to make it part of the *contemporary* Japanese culture and take it to broader audiences not only in Japan, but also overseas (Fuji TV, 2013). Because of this, he and his sons have been involved in regular media productions – this is, besides kabuki and the traditional Japanese arts - and are closely related to popular *tarento* as Arashi. In this sense, their participation in the opening of this program that promotes Japanese football as one of the elements of a *cool* national culture, reinforces the intertextuality of the many campaigns that are taking place to promote Japanese culture and pride at different levels.

The format of the show is also representative of the ways in which media is building a representation that is intended to fortify the *patriotic* sentiment in relation to the international recognition. This program presents interviews with international football stars – players, coaches, executives - commenting about the admirable features of Japanese soccer; then, the anchors proudly converse about such acknowledgement and the possibilities of Japan to become a big name in the world of football. Members of the national team are also interviewed about what they consider to be strengths of Japanese in the sport and what they think that should be improved. In these discussions it is noteworthy that they generalize in terms of ethnicity, assuming the homogeneity of Japanese and linking cultural and physical attributes to a notion of *race*: "The Japanese are very skilled with the ball when there is no pressure;" "the Japanese have the ability to be good lateral defenders even in Europe;" "the high speed of Japanese is of top level;" "the diligence of Japanese is a strong point."[133]

This tendency to speak of the merits or flaws of Japanese players as if they were inherited in Japanese biological and psychological constitution is perceptible in the general

[133] Comments by the captain of the national team, Hasebe Makoto, in the episode aired on May 20, 2012.

discourse of media and players; not casually, it is also part of the national branding that is being promoted through Arashi and other phenomena, inside and outside the country. Union is one of those national features that are inserted to appear natural in the media narratives about the national teams; the union of the team, obviously, but also the union of all Japan aiming at many explicit and implicit goals.

The images below have an obvious message about the importance of the group *in* Japan and *for* Japan. For example, a campaign by Mizuho Bank (Image 8, left) with the male national team reads: "Become one and advance to the world." In the smaller text, it praises the team for their hard continuous practice and effort to polish their individual abilities aiming for the group's best interests. In another campaign of an international brand of sportswear (Image 8, right), the message is "Japan's solidarity." "Turn the dream into strength.[134] In the image below, the domestic campaign released by the JFA to promote the support for the Samurai Blue during their participation in the 2014 FIFA World Cup: "Dream and believe. Dream to achieve. Courage to achieve."

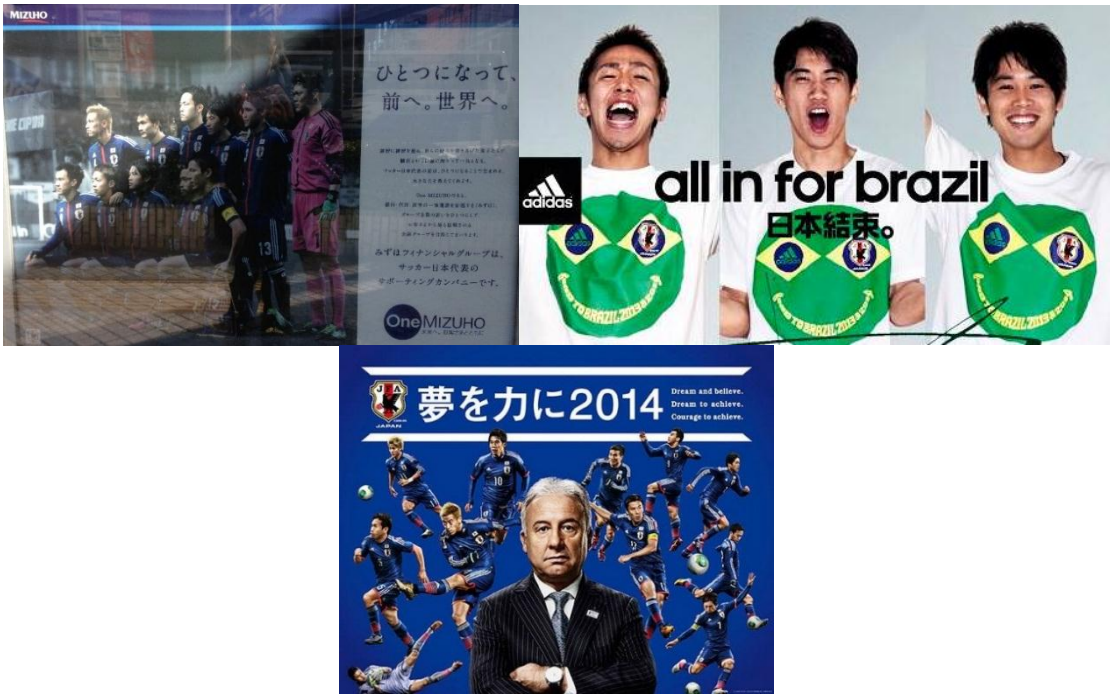

Image 8. Campaigns with Samurai Blue. Above left: December 2013. Outside a branch of Mizuho Bank in Tokyo. Source: Picture taken by the author. Above right: June 2013. National players in Adidas campaign to celebrate Japan's qualification. Source: Adidas free pamphlet. Below: Campaign to support the Japanese National Team. Source: Japan Football Association Web Page.

[134] This is the catch phrase written in Japanese: *Yume wo chikara ni.*

The evident reading of all the narratives about union imply the call for the nation to become one and support the national team in its aim to achieve a good performance in the World Cup, which would allow Japan to gain international respect. But, the whole discourse also aims to remind Japanese people of the groupism that is supposed to be at the core of their society and how much the solidarity in the chase of national goals - over individual interests - is required to conquer that respect on other fields.

Among the national idol players, those who are playing for European clubs – mostly men - have also been attached to the media discourse about the responsibility of any Japanese to be ambassador of the national essence in foreign lands. For instance, in a special music program of the public broadcaster NHK,[135] three of the media favorites of the male national team - who play in Belgium and Germany - were presented talking for one hour about different topics, one of which was entitled "The pride of being Japanese."[136]

They talked about the difficulties they faced by living alone in Europe and how the fact of living in a completely different culture made them always be confronted with the fact of being Japanese. The captain of the national team, Hasebe Makoto, highlighted that, although it was not exactly a responsibility, he was very careful on how he acted as he felt that it was important for those who go out the country to remember they are Japanese and they are building the image of Japan and Japanese people through their own behavior. The other two agreed, saying it was in daily life communication with people of other countries in their teams when they actually felt like ambassadors of Japan.

The broadcasted conversation also covered the issue of racism. Hasebe said: "Jokes are hard, don't you think? They tell you very naturally that you have small eyes or things like that. I don't know if it's ok to tell them something. Those are jokes without malice, but I decided that I had to tell them clearly that saying such things is discrimination." On that topic, the goalkeeper Kawashima Eiji talked about some episodes that caused a lot of uproar in Japanese media: in August of 2011, months after the earthquake caused Fukushima's nuclear plant leakage, Kawashima was playing with his team in Belgium when supporters of the rival

[135] *Music Portrait*, aired on September 21, 2013.
[136] *Nihonjin to shite no hokori.*

team began yelling: “Kawashima! Fukushima!” He said that he felt very bad, however he was glad that after the game, his teammates apologized for the behavior of their compatriots.

On another similar episode, in October of 2012, after a friendly game when Kawashima was able to keep his goal unbeaten against a French club, a French television show exhibited a modified picture of Kawashima with four arms and the host said it was all due to the “Fukushima effect.”[137] In the Japanese news program *News Zero* (NTV)[138] (Image 9), Kawashima said that he felt that those people who joked with such topics did not understand that the victims had suffered and continued to suffer for something that was not their fault, and they were still trying to move on and give their bests in such circumstances, so he was not ashamed, but feeling bad for the mock they did on Japanese people. The narrator and commentators of *News Zero* praised Kawashima’s firm convictions to keep fighting for his goals, even if he found obstacles and had to face setbacks, something very Japanese.

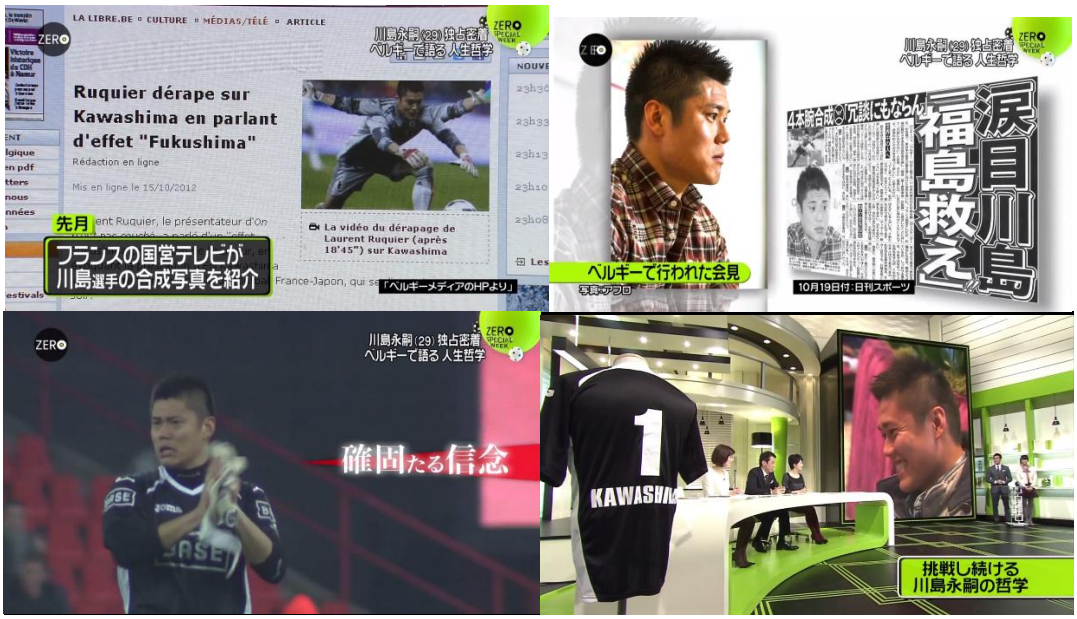

Image 9. ***News Zero.*** **Source: NTV. Images taken by the author from the open broadcasting in Japanese television.**

Through narratives like this, Japanese media has been building the discourse on national pride and evidently flagging some virtues of the national identity. Nevertheless, this

[137] See an English report on the issue: Himmer (2012).
[138] On air November 6, 2012.

discourse is only completed when the most subtle messages - the unwaved flags – of other discourses attached to these national idols are considered.

3.4 Portraying archetypes of Japanese men and women

Another distinguishable feature of the media contents related to the national football teams, particularly during the last years, is the mix of national identity/pride discourses with a strong reference to gender - mainly to a model of Japanese masculinity. Among the many categories for national representations in Japanese football,[139] the major teams are the ones that have distinctive names which remarkably use traditional references to Japanese femininity and masculinity symbolism: Nadeshiko Japan for the women's representation and Samurai Blue - formally used since 2009 - for the men's team.

Analyzing the components of the names, one feature that is worth of attention is the fact that the second part is expressed in English and, thus, it is written in katakana[140] or in the Latin alphabet; these words have an evident connotation for local and foreign audiences: 'Japan' – because it is a national team – and 'Blue' – for the color of the main uniform. The use of English terms Japanized by their expression in katakana or along with Japanese words is common; however, in these cases, the inclusion of English terms in the names that are to be used among the national audience reinforces the sense of the teams being representatives of the country in the international arena.

On the other hand, the first words in the names have a thicker meaning, flagging elements of idealized gender representations. To begin with, even though they are both native words, 'samurai' is widely known outside Japan, but '*nadeshiko'* is not; this could be one reason why their preferred written form in media differs: the first is commonly written with romaji or katakana[141] while the second is written with hiragana.[142] These words can be expected to be more widely suggestive to Japanese than to foreigners, who may associate 'samurai' with the legendary warriors – an appropriate image for a team in the sports

[139] See the Official Web Site of the JFA at http://www.jfa.or.jp/national_team/index.html
[140] A syllabary mostly used to transcript terms of foreign origin.
[141] This writing form also marks a difference with that of the national baseball team, which is called Samurai Japan and uses samurai written with the corresponding kanji – the logographic characters adopted from Chinese language.
[142] The most widely used Japanese syllabary for native terms.

battlefield - but would hardly catch the deeper gender connotations that both words have unless they are familiarized with Japanese culture and history.

'*Nadeshiko*' is the abbreviation of '*Yamato nadeshiko',* a term that the *Kenkyūsha's New Japanese-English Dictionary* (Kabushikigaisha Kenkyusha, 2004) defines as "a Japanese woman (with all the traditional graces); an ideal Japanese woman." Through the years, the term has been used in many narratives inside novels, manga, anime, dramas, movies, and so on, to refer to someone who embodies the features considered traditionally ideal for Japanese women such modesty, gentleness, gracefulness and a strong spirit; sometimes, it has also been used to highlight the gap between such ideal femininity and some of the contemporary Japanese women who are considered to be self-centered and excessively assertive – in other words, overly *Westernized* (Ashikari, 2003; Darling-Wolf, 2004a).

On the other hand, 'samurai' is the term referring to the members of the warrior class that dominated and governed *de facto* the Japanese Empire between the twelfth and the nineteenth centuries. They were men and women, but the men were the leaders of the society and women, perhaps even more than in any other of the social sectors of those times, were mostly limited to the administration of the household. Tonomura (1990, p. 623) says that a samurai woman was subjected to a "sexual asymmetry that implied progressive subordination to, and protection by, the powerful male, his ideology, and his institutions;" it was in this class that the patriarchal principles began the later country-wide structure of gender domination. In contemporary Japan, samurai have survived as a symbol of male dominance and of the Japanese powerful warriors who are worth of inspiring pride, contrary to the mixed feelings that the twentieth century military forces are related to.

Although the names imply archetypes of Japanese femininity and masculine warriorship and leadership, the media representations of the teams follow different patterns. In the case of the Samurai Blue, there is a consistency on the images portrayed of the players and the symbolism of the name; this promotion has been so successful that some of the stars of the team have become media idols. However, the female team is represented as embodying the opposite of what is heavily promoted everywhere else - by the same media, corporations and state – as Japanese femininity; it appears as if, in order to make acceptable the success of these Japanese women in a field that is considered dominated by men, media is taking their femininity away.

One outstanding example is an episode of the television program *New Junk Sports* (Fuji TV)[143] that presented seven members of Nadeshiko Japan – at that moment recently crowned world champions and recognized with the *People's Honor Award*. The show had the format of a variety program focused on athletes; this means that it was not about sports, but about athletes as *tarento:* they were not there to talk much about their accomplishments in the sports field, but to give entertaining information about them as individuals through *urabanashi* and *honne ni semaru* questions. The show was led by a male comedian accompanied by a female announcer. It is important to say that female announcers in Japanese media are presented as models of 'classic' femininity: not too outstanding as idols, actresses or professional models, but closer to an up-to-date *Yamato nadeshiko* type, flagging the qualities that are considered desirable in women - modesty, gracefulness, gentleness, and in a supporter role to men.

The first issue that catch the attention on the way that program was portraying Nadeshiko players was their attires. Six of them appeared dressed in outfits comparable to those seen in male *tarento* – jeans, blazers, sweaters, boots and sport shoes. Only one was wearing clothes similar to those shown in female fashion magazines – women's blouse, boots and shorts. In general, their image contrasted with that of the announcer, who was wearing typical female attire and hairstyle (Image 10). As soon as the conversation began, other elements in the narrative of the program increased the sense of Nadeshiko players representing a contradiction: *non-female* women. The same players accused the one dressed in female clothes of trying too hard to be cute.[144] Then, most of the topics revolved around less than feminine episodes of the players. One said about another: "She is the 'Kimutaku' of Nadeshiko." Kimutaku is the nickname of the star member of SMAP – previously mentioned as the top male idol group of the 1990s – who was considered the male 'sex symbol' of Japan for many years.[145] After that, the female announcer asked the player who made that comment: "Don't people also tell you that you are very manly?"[146] She responded saying that once she had been mistaken for a man. One more player shared her own episode

[143] On air November 12, 2011.
[144] The term was *kawaii*.
[145] See Darling-Wolf (2004b) for an analysis about SMAP and the sexual image of the members.
[146] The word used was *otokomae*, meaning manly or handsome.

of someone assuming she was her sister's husband. Finally, another female athlete commented that she had gone drinking with the star of Nadeshiko who, in order to catch the last train, had "run way too fast, impossible for a *normal* girl."

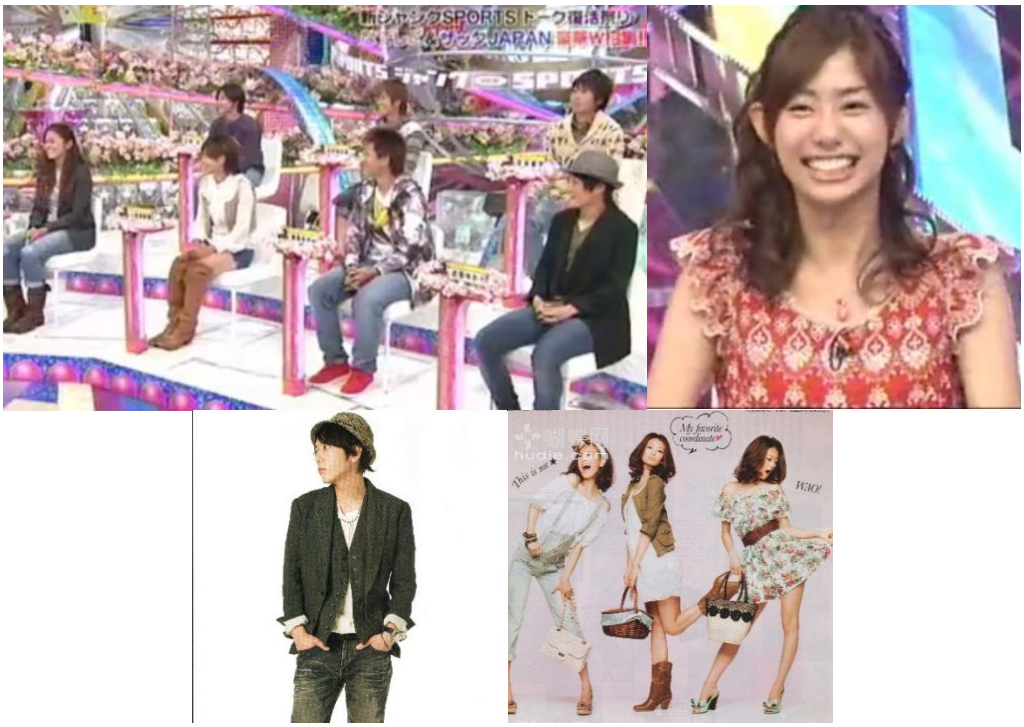

Image 10. Nadeshiko Japan's fashion. Above: *New Junk Sports*, Nadeshiko Japan (left) and the announcer (right). Below: Japanese male and female fashion. Source: Fuji TV, Fineboys, Ray.

This denial to represent the female football players as *normal Japanese women* is observed all over media and sponsored by the same JFA: the formal uniform that members wear when travel or when they present for official events or conferences is masculinized. As the Image 11 shows, the attires are much closer to those of the male anchors than those of the female newscaster whose formal clothes are, nonetheless, feminine: skirt, a women's blouse and high heels.

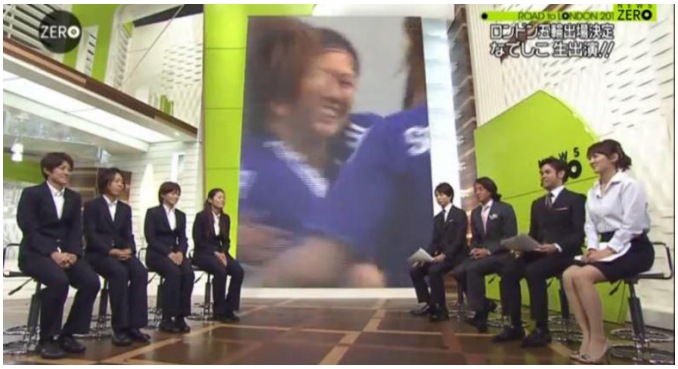

Image 11. Nadeshiko in *News Zero*. On air September 12, 2011. Source: NTV. Images taken by the author from the open broadcasting in Japanese television.

I am not arguing that clothes are a determining factor for the construction of gender identities, neither trying to defend that women *must* wear what fashion industry and media sell to perpetuate the link between certain pieces or colors of clothing and femininity. My point here is to illustrate that, in a country where thousands of fashion magazines are sold every day and media in general is constantly trying to *dictate* women what to wear and how to present themselves to embody particular types of womanhood (Assman, 2003; Darling-Wolf, 2004a; Tanaka K. , 1998), it is very meaningful that these athletes, who represent their nation in the sports arena under a name that evokes an ideal of national femininity, are shown in media just as the opposite to what the same media endorse as feminine. Another attribute that has been historically related to Japanese female beauty is white skin (Ashikari, 2003) and, evidently, playing football means being exposed to the sun for long periods of time, so all members of Nadeshiko Japan have darker skin than the Japanese fair skinned *ideal;* thus, it becomes one more element that is presented as inconsistent in their gender representation.

Most of them are made fun of in variety shows for being single, implicitly accusing their lack of femininity for it. It can be argued that, from the point of view of elites, this situation poses a threat for national stability: if these *national ambassadors* are praised for remain single and childless and focus first on their professional success, they are actually contributing to the many problems Japan is facing because of the decline in birth rates; they are definitely not a good example of what a Japanese woman must do, according to the dominant discourse. In contrast, those female athletes who follow the social ideal - retire in their twenties or early thirties to get married and have children – are shown as feminine and admirable when they sporadically appear in media.

In this way, the contradictory symbolism embedded in the media representations of Nadeshiko Japan restricts their influence in society as role models; the images of these national ambassadors circulate representing successful and strong athletes, but also non-feminine and non-desirable women, almost as if there was a negative relation among those features: success and strength with womanhood. Even more, the discourse flags the idea that *the nation is not to be represented by strong women* who do not comply with the feminine Japanese archetype.

In contrast, the Samurai Blue players are portrayed as *very Japanese* men - either as a variation of the traditional *salaryman* archetype or similar to the model of masculinity of the male idols. These two tendencies in the images of the Samurai Blue are particularly noticeable after the 2010 World Cup, which marked a generational change in the team bringing to the frontline new national stars and - perhaps not coincidentally - is the same period in which the projects of national cultural promotion inside the country and other male personalities – as Arashi – gained relevance in Japan.

The Samurai Blue team has been nurtured by a group of players who are consistently summoned to be part of the team. About half of them are married with children and keep a relatively low profile outside the football related activities or campaigns. They are depicted as hardworking men, devoted to their teams and families, and willing to 'fight' for the honor of their country in the football field. They are shown as relatively standard Japanese men, behaving and having values close to those of any *salaryman*. The sports programs interview them before and after the matches and Japanese football fans write about their performances in football blogs, but they are seldom presented in general content media or as part of commercial or social campaigns unless they involve the whole team. Nevertheless, their public images are consistent with the symbolism of the samurai and the fairly traditional Japanese manhood.

On the other hand, there are some other members of the national team who have been able to appeal to more general audiences by being incorporated to the *tarento* system, widening their media activities and appearing constantly in fashion magazines, music and variety shows, news programs, charity events, and so forth. They have as common features to be the ones who remain single, play for European teams, are part of the starting team in most matches of Japan, have a similar image to that of male idols, and have a personality that attracts public interest. These players, besides their representation as Japanese contemporary *warriors,* have been particularly supported by media, sponsor corporations and other entities to build an image of Japanese *ikemen*: *kakko-ii*, stylish, experienced men who are attractive for women and respected by men. In order to support this construction, media constantly shows women saying that these football players are the ideal son, the ideal son-in-law, or the ideal husband; male *tarento* also praise them for their achievements, popularity and *kakkoyosa* (the quality of being *kakko-ii*).

These features that can be related to an updated image of Japanese masculinity are mixed with more traditionally Japanese personality traits. Even though their current lives are obviously different to those of the average Japanese people, they are constantly shown living such *different* life abroad in a way that protects and reinforces their *Japaneseness* – as in the show analysed in the previous section. They are presented as being highly dedicated and stoic regarding their job, following a vertical structure closer to that of a family among the fellow players, expressing their respect for their parents and their desire to have a traditional family – some explicitly declaring to be interested only in Japanese women. Their public images are much protected and carefully managed, staying away from scandalous news and getting involved in socially conscious projects. They are also persistently shown stating the pride and love they feel for Japan and talking about what they considered to be the features of the Japanese spirit.

It is evident that the discourses of nationhood and *Japaneseness* along with those of the attractiveness of *traditional* masculinity – and, consequently, the support for the traditional gender roles - are being flagged together in Japanese media through popular culture phenomena as the male idols and the football players. The affective bonds that they inspire in broad audiences have made them suitable for the attachment of discourses on national identity and gender. Also, the national reputation of the players regarding the international context is one of the most obvious elements aimed at the elevation of the national pride. Particularly after 3.11, the flagging of their Japanese qualities and their achievements and defeats in the world context have been used to emphasize the Japanese *unique* traits.

Albeit these ideological elements on the national identity, pride, and *disguised* traditional masculinity and femininity archetypes are embedded in the representations of these media idols, the fact that they are the ones who carry the message arguably makes it appear as something *natural* for Japanese audiences – and, thus, produce a higher potential of naturalization of the messages. Likewise, because the support of people is the reason behind their media power, it appears as if Japanese society has selected them as ambassadors, concealing the faces of the bureaucratic, media and economic leaders - as well as their aims in such ideological constructions – and indicating a potential hegemonic stage on the role of

men as the center of the nation and the relevance of the reinforcement of *traditionally* praised attitudes and values regarding gender and ethnic differentiation.

4 THE TWO-FOLDED DISCOURSE ON JAPAN

People in Japan have themselves been preoccupied, and sometimes obsessed, with defining and preserving something called 'Japanese-ness.' This has been the case at least from the nineteenth century through the present [...] Many aspects of so-called Japanese tradition, it turns out, were invented as myths of the modern era. On some occasions 'Japanese traditions' were seen as obstacles to progress; at other times they were put forth as a model to the world. - Andrew Gordon (2003, p. xiii)

The analysis to this point has revealed a widespread discourse on *Japaneseness*, which appears to be *patriotic* and is being promoted by elites in media. Its evident aim is to evoke in Japanese people the *unique* qualities and traditional social ties they are supposed to have in order to use such national spirit to lessen the different crisis Japan is facing. This kind of ideological promotion may appear harmless and even positive by itself; however, it has been said that this happened amid the manifestation of a *neo*-nationalism trend in the power sectors. It has been argued, as well, that in a less obvious but reiterated flagging, traditional gender roles that keep women in a submissive social position are present in this campaign. Other controversial features regarding the discursive formations that are being contended in Japan about the nation are the myth of Japanese homogeneous society and the derived double face discourse on internationalization. In this section, I will debate over these issues based on the analysis of a broad range of media texts – not exclusively those related to the sample phenomena - and my own experiences, observations and interactions during field work in Japan.

4.1 A HETEROGENEOUS JAPAN LIVING THE MYTH OF A HOMOGENEOUS SOCIETY

It has been said that according to the *nihonjinron*, Japan is a homogenous society. Even though there are noticeable Korean, Chinese, Brazilian *Nikkei* (Japanese descendent) and other diasporas permanently residing in Japan – and thousands of long-term residents from all over the world who come and go - the myth of the Japanese homogeneous society appears to have been naturalized. As Burgess (2012) argues, even if in academic circles there has been an awakening consciousness of this multicultural Japanese landscape, the idea of homogeneous Japan is still a key element in the construction of national identity and social reality inside the country. In media also, although the presence of *non-Japanese* has increased considerably during the last decade, the dominant discourse remains the same precisely

because they are *not* treated or presented as Japanese, but as *gaijin* or *half* - meaning foreigners and 'hybrids' of Japanese and non-Japanese.

In real life is the same. A Japanese *salaryman* may talk about the latest national sport news everyday with Kim-*san*, the owner of the Korean restaurant who was born and raised in Osaka and has never left Japan, but still consider him a Korean; a Japanese housewife may see Maria-*chan*, the girl who works at the supermarket, who was born and raised in Tokyo, whose father is Peruvian and her mother Japanese, and still not think of her as Japanese as herself; the Japanese faculty director of a university may discuss everyday about the best teaching-learning techniques with Smith-*sensei*, the England-born social sciences professor who speaks perfect Japanese, has been living in Japan for more than twenty years, is married to a Japanese woman and has 'half-Japanese' children, and still think of him as a foreigner who does not understand Japanese culture. This is how the myth of homogeneity has been naturalized and works in contemporary Japan, refuting to acknowledge as part of the society those people who are not *purely* and *completely* Japanese.

Gaikokujin – lit. 'person from a foreign country' – is the proper word to refer to foreigners in the Japanese language; however, *gaijin* – lit. 'outsider' – is the most commonly used by Japanese when they speak informally and think no foreigner is listening or understanding. *Baka gaijin* – 'stupid outsider' – is also a common expression that can be heard when a foreigner does something that is considered to break Japanese etiquette – even if Japanese break it too. In this category are included all those residents who do not fit in the Japanese archetype, who have to face discrimination at different levels every day.

Although foreigners in general are "excluded from full participation in Japanese society simply by virtue of their foreignness" (Befu, 2001, p. 76), White people do not usually suffer the same kind of discrimination than those belonging to other *racial* groups. As Russell (1991) correctly argues, this is mostly due to the fact that Japanese *racial* and ethnic stereotypes are an extension of Western ethnocentrism. The discourse of the *nihonjinron* established a type of *racial*/ethnic/national hierarchy in which Japanese were below White Westerners belonging to the powerful nations admired by Japan, but everyone else were assumed to be below Japanese.

There is no doubt that Black people – regardless of their nationality - are the ones who suffer the most obvious discrimination in Japanese territory; in trains, on the street, at public spaces in general, when a Black person approaches, some Japanese stare with curiosity, others make their children move away, some others just go. Certainly, this is not the reaction of everyone, but, as Ngoro (2004) and Russell (1991) argue, the average Japanese citizen has built his/her ideas about Black people from Japanese media representations, which are at the best condescending and exoticize them, and at the worst consider them as inept and dangerous. In media entertainment contents, just a few Black *tarento* appear; from these, only some are identified as regular comedians. These *tarento* usually exploit their bigger physiques – in contrast to most Japanese – and act childishly or foolishly to create a *boke*[147] character that people can make fun of; although Japanese comedy typically has *boke* characters, the Black comedians are a different kind of *boke*, as they build their silly images on the Black stereotypes that Japanese have, perpetuating them. On the other hand, most of the very few Black *tarento* are faceless and nameless, they appear from time to time as unidentified and exchangeable bodyguards or merely as part of the background setting at shows to put the *international* – better said *exotic* - touch. In other type of media contents, the references to Black people are marginal and have been heavily related to the declarations of Japanese right-wing politicians, who have called them primitive, uncivilized and having inferior genes than White people (Ngoro, 2004).

On the other side of the spectrum are the ethnic Koreans, the major community of non-Japanese in Japan. The geographical, ethnic and cultural proximity Koreans have with Japanese people is counterbalanced by the historical weight, the unceasing diplomatic conflicts among the countries, and the stubbornness of the dominant discourses of both parties to recognize the similarities between the two groups. Although many of the permanent resident Koreans have been born and raised in Japan and may be from a third or fourth generation living there, they are still not considered Japanese, but *Zainichi* – literally 'living in Japan' – a term that refers to those Koreans who belong to families that arrived during the colonial era. *Zainichi*'s legal status in Japan is complicated, as many may retain their Korean nationality while holding a special permanent resident status permit and others have acquired

[147] Funny, silly.

the Japanese citizenship by naturalization. Whichever the case, the majority remain in the close circle of the *Zainichi*, going to Korean schools and marrying within the community; this is, living in Japan, but not being part of Japanese society.[148]

Chinese and other East and Southeast Asian groups - as Vietnamese, Singaporeans, and Philippines - are similar cases of diasporas that share many traits with Japanese that could ease the integration of their people to Japanese society, but instead keep themselves in very close communities that remain disconnected from the national community. This situation has many roots and it does not depend only on discrimination, but also on the strong ties that those communities have and their own desire to preserve their own culture.[149] The relevant point for this discussion is that these people live and are part of the Japanese context, but the dominant domestic discourse keeps ignoring them, cutting them off from what is sanctioned as Japanese.

As a major foreign presence in the country, Korean and Chinese have a considerable representation in media; nevertheless, they are specifically symbolized as such, highlighting stereotypes that work to strengthen the denial of these communities as part of Japanese society. Both ethnic groups are represented as noisy, rude and troublesome, characteristics that contrast with the promoted ideal of Japanese quietness, cordiality and avoidance of conflict.

Korean image improved considerably among some sectors of Japanese society – mainly middle-aged and young women – due to the Korean Wave phenomenon (Ogawa, 2010). Nonetheless, these sectors, although economically powerful, have proved to lack the social power to push an actual change in the dominant discourse about Korean people – those living in Korea or those residing in Japan. In Japanese media there was a limited, but considerable improvement in the representations of both Korea and Korean people through entertainment contents, but as soon as the Wave lost strength around the year 2011, derived from the support that Japanese culture received from all elites, those improved images were relegated and the typical ones were reinstalled. After the passion for everything Korean

[148] For more on Korean communities in Japan, see Chapman (2004; 2006), Ryang & Lie (2009).
[149] See Han (2008), Lie (2001).

decreased in Japan, the critiques to the Korean *pop* acts and Korean society appeared in media. In variety shows, it has become a common topic to discuss the artificiality of Korean idols and the average Korean women, who base their beauty in countless aesthetic surgeries to attain absolutely different appearances than those naturally Korean;[150] in talk shows, *hyōronka* regularly accuse Korean cultural producers of copying American models, saying that in the aim to be recognized by Americans, Korean artists are forgetting they are Asian. In this sense, Japanese media seems to discredit Korean cultural policies as treacherous to Asia at the same time that emphasize Japanese are the rightful representatives of the region.

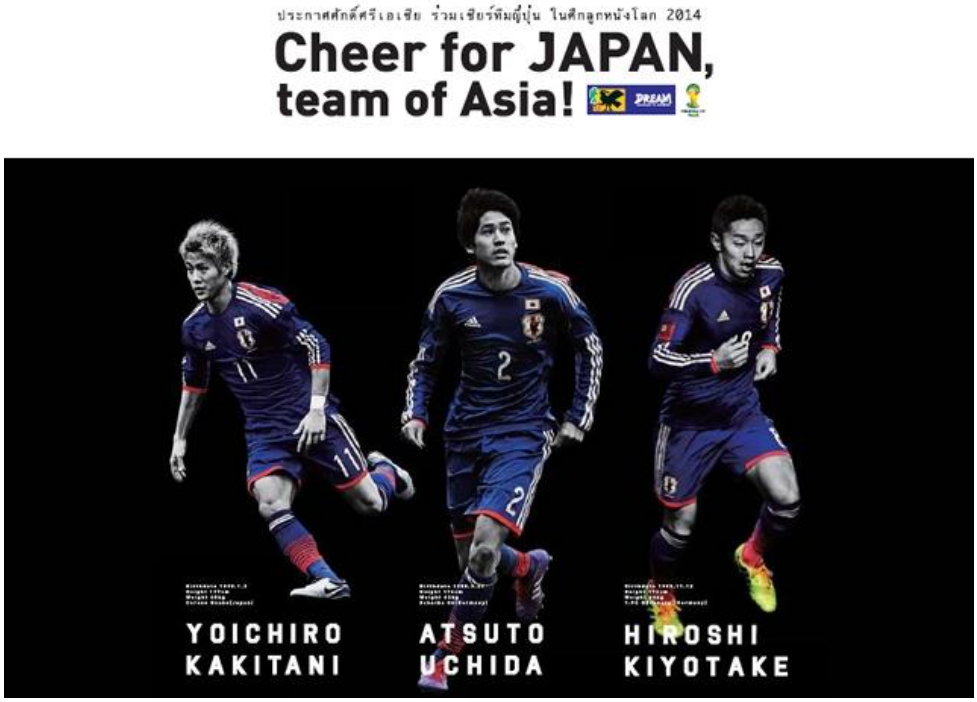

Image 12. **Campaign to support the Japanese National Team in Thailand Source: Japan Football Association Web Page.**

The image above was part of the campaign released by the JFA to promote the support for the Japanese male national squad in Thailand, during its participation in the 2014 FIFA World Cup. As it can be seen, it tries to appeal to the idea that the Japanese team represents all Asia, even though Japan was not the only team of the region competing – South Korea and Iran were also there.

[150] Many reports on the popularity of aesthetic surgery in Korea show the way Korean women and men try to erase typically Korean physical features as wide jaws, narrow eyes or low noses.

In the middle of the *non-Japanese-but-evidently-part-of-Japan* spectrum are White people from highly developed countries - United States, England, Germany, Canada, Australia. Although they are a smaller number than Asians, they are relatively more integrated to Japanese society. One reason has to do with the same dominant discourse on *Japaneseness,* which has made Japanese people more willing to interact with them, as they are considered to possess some admirable qualities and 'better genes'; also, they tend to go to Japan in order to interact with Japanese, not to remain isolated with their own people. Nevertheless, even if a comparatively higher number of Japanese people is willing to befriend or even marry these Westerners, Japanese society as a whole hardly accepts them as part of it and they keep been look at as outsiders.

In media, it is common to see White people; they appear as nameless extras who just add a cosmopolitan feeling to a content, or as guests who talk about Japan. Japanese television has many shows that revolve around the topic of foreigners and their interest in Japan; in these shows, White Westerners are a big part of the discourse, as they praise Japanese culture and Japanese people (Image 13). Nonetheless, at the same time, they are often represented as *otaku,* this is, as obsessive fans of *anime, manga,* video games, and other media culture products related mostly to the Cool Japan phenomena. In this way, they boost Japanese pride, but also create an image of White people as foolish in some way.

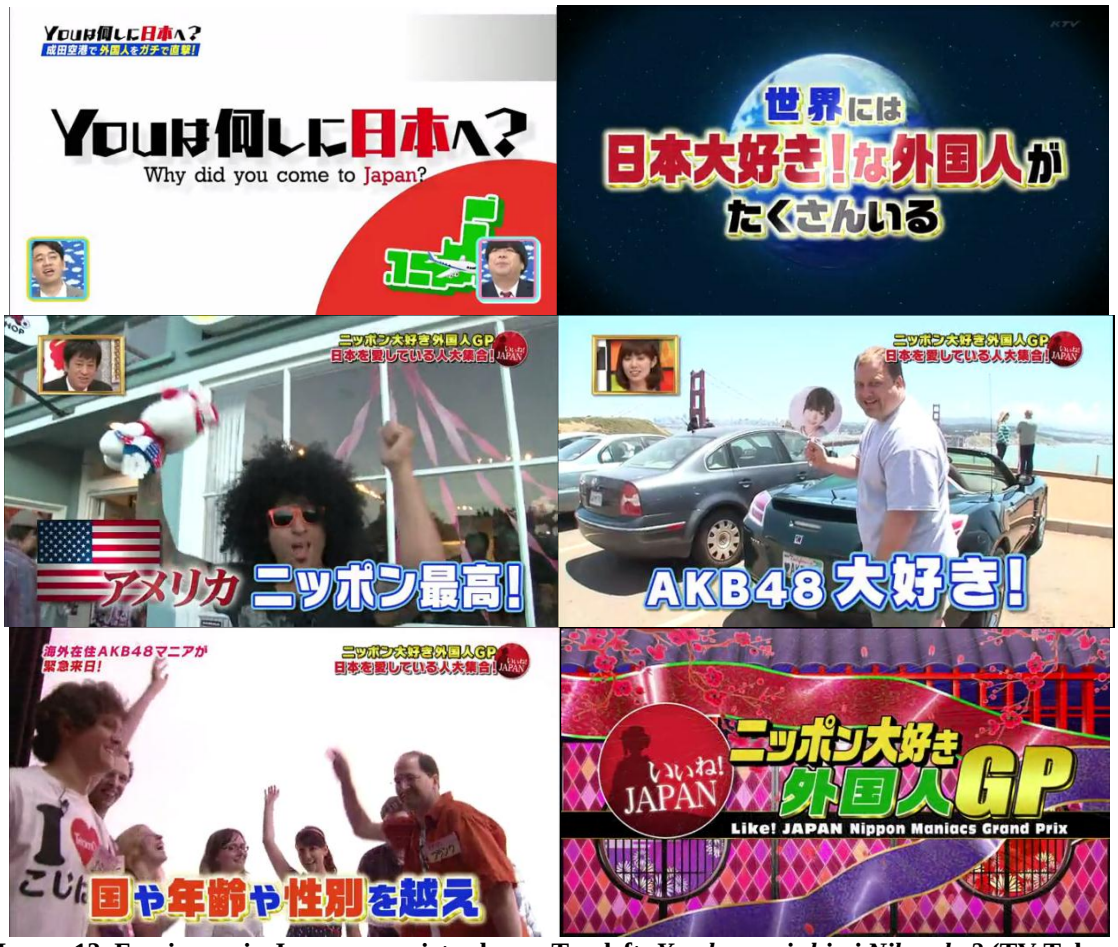

Image 13. Foreigners in Japanese variety shows. Top left: *You ha nani shi ni Nihon he?* (TV Tokyo, 2013, May 6). Others: *Iine! Japan Nippon daisuki gaikokujin Grand Prix* (Fuji TV, 2012, July 13). From the top left, the Japanese captions read: "What did you come to do to Japan?" "In the world there are lots of foreigners who love Japan!" "The Grand Prix of Foreigners who love Japan. Great meeting of people who love Japan! – An American - Japan is the best!" "I love AKB48!" "Maniacs of AKB48 who live overseas come to Japan! We surpass countries, age and gender." "So good! JAPAN Foreigners who love Japan GP." Source: TV Tokyo, Fuji TV. Images taken by the author from the open broadcastings in Japanese television.

Another community with a significant presence in contemporary Japan is that of Latin American *Nikkei*, descendants of Japanese, but most having also Latin American ancestry. In 1989, lacking blue-collar workers amid the Bubble economy, Japan enacted a New Immigration Law that allowed Latin American people of Japanese ancestry to have access to working visas. Because during this period Latin American countries were hit by economic crisis, a large number of people with such characteristics moved to Japan under the working visa program.[151] The first flow of immigrants was mainly from Brazil and Peru – countries

[151] For studies focused on Latin American *Nikkei* communities in Japan, see Castro-Vázquez & Tarui (2006), Green (2008), Reyes-Ruiz (2005), Sueyoshi (2011).

with significant Japanese diasporas; they were working class people, not 'purely' Japanese, with minimal or none knowledge of the culture and language, thus, easily spotted as *non-Japanese*. The difficulties derived from such situation made Latin Americans to build communities to support each other. Because they could relatively understand their languages and had some other common cultural traits as religion, many of these groups were centered on Catholic churches, which even offered masses in Spanish and Portuguese and helped immigrants to cope with the psychological problems resultant from the cultural shock. By the end of the 1990s, people from other Latin American countries, not *Nikkei*, and without legal working visas began to arrive to Japan, adding themselves to the *Nikkei* communities and working in less secure and sometimes plainly illegal fields.

The media reports on illegal Latin American immigrants or on humble and not completely Japanese *Nikkei* residents, adding to the reduced knowledge about the region by the average Japanese and the importation of the Latino stereotypes from the United States, contributed to the poor image Latin Americans have in Japan. I had the opportunity to experience everyday life in different Japanese cities and observed two patterns of attitudes from locals. In Okazaki City, Aichi Prefecture, a small city with a significant community of Peruvian, Brazilian, Colombian and Ecuadorian blue collar immigrants – *Nikkei* and not – I went to local non-profit associations that gave free Japanese lessons and to a local Catholic Church and could talk with some members of this community. Most had many years living there and still could not communicate with Japanese people freely, so they continued to get involved only with other Latin Americans and the very few Japanese they met at the associations and the church. At the same time, I noticed that the discrimination against them and other Latin American people – even if these were tourists or students - was not very different to that suffered by Black people: people in stores kept looking all their steps with a nervous look, some moved away at trains or buses, and others just refused to talk if approached. The reason I was given when asked some Japanese contacts was that Latin Americans were responsible of many of the criminal acts in the area: shoplift, prostitution, drug dealing, gang violence, etc.

On the other hand, in Tokyo and Osaka, where it is common to cross everyday with all types of foreign *tourists* and Latin American *immigrants* are not as noticeable as other

minority groups, the discriminatory attitudes were less common, and Latin Americans were mostly ignored as are most foreigners. Nonetheless, talking with some of the resident Latin people, they reveled their suffering when trying to live as a regular citizen; most of these problems related to bullying at regular Japanese schools and workplaces or to the denial of access to public services or Japanese civilian groups.

Other *non*-Japanese and Japanese minority groups – those of other foreign origin or the *burakumin,* the Okinawan and the Ainu – also live inside Japanese society, but remain mostly disconnected from it because they do not fit in the imaginary of a homogeneous Japan. Thus, even if on paper there have been policies destined to support their acculturation, elites have consciously cut them apart from the dominant discourse destined to flag in Japanese society the national identity, perpetuating the myth of homogeneity among Japanese and just allocating those who are different in the *gaijin* or *Zainichi* or *half* or *Nikkei* or any other category that clearly sets them apart from *truly Japanese.*

4.2 THE INTERNATIONAL-FRIENDLY JAPAN

Japan has many faces; the elite promoted discourse about Japan and Japanese internationalization does too. As in the video-message from the *Japan. Endless Discovery* campaign after the 2011 earthquake (Image 14), the official discourse for the exterior emphasizes Japan as a welcoming country eager to show its traditions and spirit to the world.

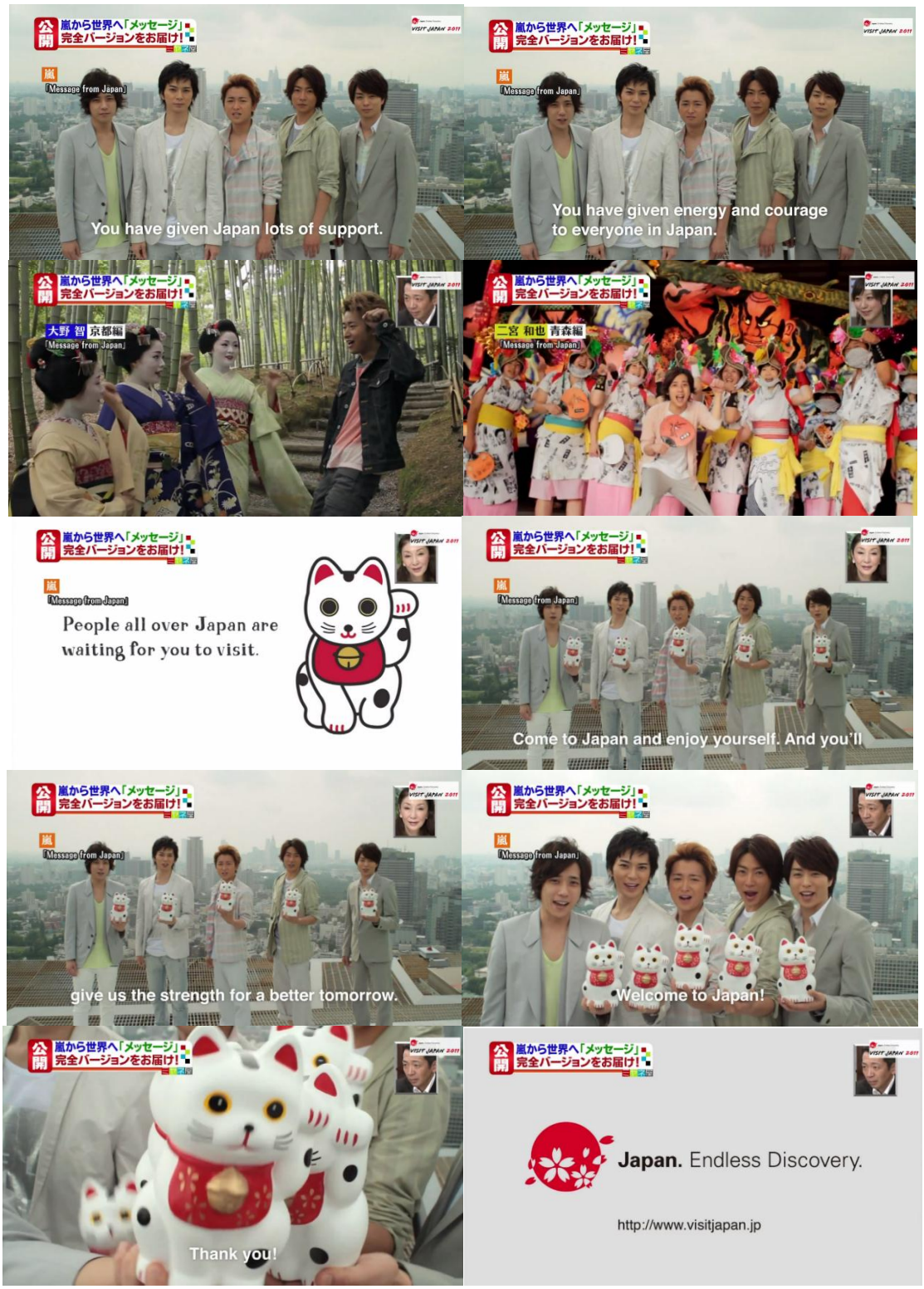

Image 14. ***Message from Japan*** **by JTA. Source: JTA, YTV. Images taken by the author from the open broadcasting in Japanese television.**

As it has been mentioned, since 2010, the Japanese government has been implementing a campaign aimed at the promotion of an attractive image of Japan amid the international public for economical and soft power related reasons. Through the tourism campaign specifically directed to the exterior and the promotion of Cool Japan products and phenomena internationally, Japanese governmental, economic and media elites have been using a discourse focused on the syncretism of Japanese contemporary culture – the coexistence and importance of both traditional and modern elements – the strong and sublime spirit of Japanese people, the peacefulness and security of Japan, its role as representative of Asia and the openness towards foreigner *visitors*.

The media tourism campaign has been aimed mostly towards Asia, where people already consider Japan a likely tourist destination, and are directed to public with a high level of disposable income; they emphasize the cultural elements that appeal to other Asians, such as diversity of shopping malls and high-end products and brands, hot springs and resorts, temples and shrines, gourmet food, etc. This campaign does not rely on subculture phenomena to attract people, on the contrary, it uses *tarento*, public figures or even fictional characters that are regionally acknowledged and can relate to wide sectors of population – i.e. Arashi, the football players, or a classic Japanese character as Doraemon. However, besides this, the Japanese government has kept a relatively low profile regarding the country's cultural promotion internationally and has relied on the economic elites to exploit the already existent niches of foreign enthusiasts of Japan.[152]

Cool Japan phenomena have been the flag of Japanese culture in Western countries since the 1990s; not because Japanese government or producers specifically aimed to, but because the globalization forces in media worked to take some products to countries around the world and some people got deeply attracted by the exotic images, music and storylines, which contrasted with the hegemonic American media culture of the time. As internet was

[152] I am not considering the cultural and academic exchange programs because these were not a consequence of the policies of the 2000s and are not media-related, although in my fieldwork experiences I observed that those programs have been involved in the discourse. As I mentioned in the introduction, one of the aims of The Japan Foundation's program for foreign academics and diplomats is to give the participants *the Japanese experience*, thus, during the conferences and cultural visits, the same imagery and discourse of the media campaigns destined to the outside is present. Nevertheless, these programs existed before the policies and they just have aligned with the official trends.

just becoming available for individual use in developed countries, the Western *otaku* culture began to flourish having as main characteristic the fervor for everything Japan-related, as those foreign consumers – most of them young and without actual experience living in or visiting Japan - perceived Japanese culture to be through *anime, manga,* videogames and some movies they could have access to. They took the label from the *otaku* culture in Japan, which actually had – and still has - a bad reputation inside the country; as Kitabayashi (2004, p. 2) puts it:

> What image does the word *otaku* evoke? Somewhat bizarre individuals - idol enthusiasts who devote almost all of their time and disposable income to [follow] their favorite idols […] without caring for their own everyday life, or hi-tech enthusiasts who wander around the back streets of Akihabara, a famous electronics retail district in Tokyo, with a back-pack full of junk PC parts.

Still, for foreign fans, being an *otaku* was a choice - not an imposed label as for Japanese *otaku* subculture - and became something to be proud of, as it set them apart from the mainstream-American-culture fans. They began to idealize Japan, finding deep values, traditions and emotions in the simplest contents and contrasted them with what they considered shallow, commercial and senseless Western culture. As it was argued, Japanese elites noticed this and, consequently, the government responded with the policies of Cool Japan and Japan Brand. Nonetheless, more than aiming to reach new segments of consumers, Japanese companies and creators have been just relying on the already rooted ideas Western *otaku* have and promoting this subculture by means of international conventions and exhibitions of *anime, manga,* fashion, and so forth, sending J-pop rock bands, female idol groups or other personalities related to this kind of products.[153]

For example, in an episode of the Japanese wide show *Mr. Sunday* (Fuji TV) broadcasted in 2012 (Image 15), there was a special report on the Japan Expo held in Paris. They dedicated more than fifteen minutes on air to present the French 'Japan experts'[154] and their opinions and enjoyment of Japanese popular culture and products. The *half-Japanese half-French* reporter interviewed people in the event about their fondness for Japanese pop culture and the responses broadcasted were those concurrent with the dominant discourse: "American music is very commercial, but Japanese music is not like that;" "The expressions

[153] For a complete study on *otaku* culture inside and outside Japan, see Sasaki (2011).
[154] *Nippon-tsū.*

in Japanese are rich in sentiments, they are beautiful and painful, in French language this cannot be done;" "[Referring to the female idol group performing at the expo] They are kind and graceful, this is also the Japanese spirit."

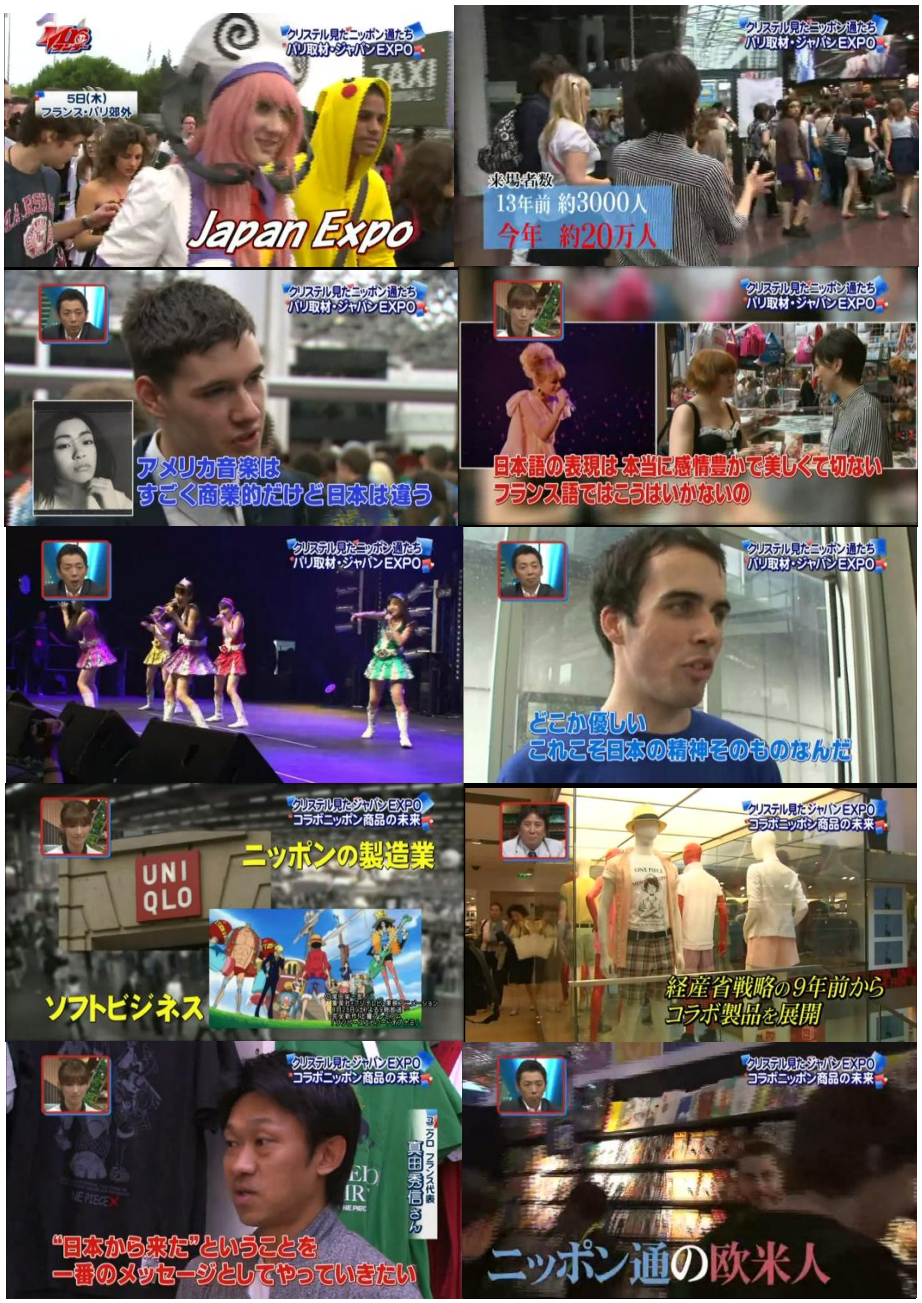

Image 15. *Mr. Sunday* (Fuji TV, 2012, July 8). Source: Fuji TV. Images taken by the author from the open broadcasting in Japanese television.

After showing French fans enjoying karaoke competitions, posing with Hello Kitty, proudly showing their *cosplay*,[155] and enthusiastically yelling and dancing along with the idol group, it was presented the interview with a business rep from one Japanese apparel company – Uniqlo – participating at the event. He said that even before the application of the policies of Cool Japan, the company had begun to focus its attention on exploiting the market of Western 'Japan experts' by producing clothing with Japanese media culture images that sent the clear message of such products originating in Japan, not just in any Asian country. Evidently, Japanese media has been making use of this foreign enthusiasm to reinforce the internal discourse to boost Japanese self-esteem, as it was argued in the previous section.

By these two strategies, through controlled media discourses, Japanese elites have been working to propagate an international image of Japan as a friendly country that can offer significant and unique experiences through its culture to visitors from around the world. The key term in this discourse is 'visitor', as it has been argued that Japan is not exactly friendly to the 'outsiders' who try to be part of its society. Thus, there is a two-folded discourse regarding Japan's internationalization: for domestic audiences, elites promote the Japanese homogeneous society ideal, which intrinsically rejects the inclusion of those who are different; on the other hand, for the international community, the discourse invites foreigners to visit a nation that is welcoming and eager to share its cultural richness.

[155] Costume play. Fans personifying some fictional character or popular artist.

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 *Japaneseness* 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.

ANNEX. ABBREVIATIONS

AFC	Asian Football Confederation
CJAC	Cool Japan Advisory Council
FIFA	International Federation of Association Football
FUJI TV	Fuji Television Network
JAL	Japan Airlines
JFA	Japan Football Association
JETRO	Japan External Trade Organization
JTA	Japan Tourism Agency
METI	Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry
MLIT	Ministry of Land Infrastructure Transport and Tourism
NHK	Japan Broadcasting Corporation
NPA	National Police Agency
NTV	Nippon Television Network Corporation
RIAJ	Recording Industry Association of Japan
SDF	Self Defense Forces
TBS	Tokyo Broadcasting System Television
TV Asahi	TV Asahi Corporation
YTV	Yomiuri Television

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