Occidentalism: images of the West

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Imaging the Other in Japanese Advertising Campaigns

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Against a white misty background a white woman stands in a rounded doorway; her long blondish-white hair is drawn to one side thus half circling her head in curls. A white cloth is draped around her body from the waist down. Naked from the waist up, her arms lie across her breasts thus concealing the nipples, while still revealing the majority of breasts and skin. This was the focal image of an ad prominently displayed inside Tokyo commuter trains, on the walls of major transit stations, and on poster boards lining the streets of shopping districts throughout the summer of 1990. The advertisement was for a Japanese wedding hall 'marriage', whose English name was written in the *katakana* syllabary, commonly used in Japanese to designate words of foreign origin.[1] The visual imagery attempted to capture the viewer's attention and promote a special feeling. The informative content was minimal. The brief message, 'Dramatic Wedding: *Ai no Uedingu Suteeji*' ('Dramatic Wedding: Love's Wedding Stage'), appeared in a combination of English and Japanese. The ad was directed not at foreigners but at Japanese, since wedding services as a commercial industry are directed primarily at young Japanese about to marry, and their parents who are usually involved in arranging and financing weddings. This advertisement was not particularly *medatsu*, or 'eye-catching', since such advertising imagery featuring foreigners, or more precisely Caucasians, is prevalent in Japan.

The prevalent use of foreigners, particularly white foreigners, or *gaijin*, in Japanese advertising, the nature and functions of these depictions, can all provide insights to the representation and perpetuation of otherness in Japanese society. These issues are particularly important, given that for over a decade now Japan, which constructs identity around an assertion of homogeneity, has designated *kokusaika*, 'internationalization', as a primary national goal. Although a buzz word of the 1980s and 1990s, internationalization is a somewhat paradoxical goal for a nation that in

certain periods of its history insulated itself from outside influences, and which asserts strong cognitive boundaries between those who belong to the category of 'we Japanese' and those who do not. Noting the contradictions involved, one journalist went so far as to claim that internationalization was in actuality 'an anti-Japanese activity' (LaBrack 1983). The Japanese government promotes internationalization in part because it recognizes that Japan has risen to the ranks of Western international powers, and as a result must take on responsibilities consistent with its new world prominence. Internationalization can also serve to placate pressures from Western governments to reduce trade barriers or further open Japanese society to outsiders. The prevalent representations of *gaijin* and other foreign imagery often create the impression that Japan is fully open to outsiders, when in reality barriers to either trade or full participation of foreigners in Japanese life remain strong. Advertisers have their own profit motive for parading representations of *gaijin*. They recognize (and attempt to reinforce) a popular interest in foreigners as outsiders, and are also able to capitalize on the use of foreigners to contrast with Japanese images of themselves.

In a semiotic analysis of American advertising images, Judith Williamson claims that ads 'are selling us something else beside consumer goods: in providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are interchangeable they are selling us ourselves' (Williamson 1978: 13). I also suggest that advertising images, in providing representations of 'not us', help to create and sell otherness. This construction and representation of the other is not separate from the construction of self-identity, since the creation of self-identity often involves locating or imagining a contrasting other to highlight the distinguishing characteristics believed to define the self. Japanese national identity has long been affirmed through the contrast between 'ware ware Nihonjin' (We Japanese) and 'yosomono' (outsiders). As Roy Andrew Miller (1977: 77) points out, '[a]ny facet of Japanese life or culture is thrown into sharp relief when it is brought into direct confrontation with a similar or parallel foreign phenomenon'. The prevalence of both foreign places and foreign faces in Japanese advertising functions to delimit Japanese identity by visual quotations of what Japan and Japanese are not.

There has been a long history in Western academic and popular thought regarding the construction of the Orient as other, but, as Jane Desmond (1991: 150) has pointed out, 'this process is a two-way exchange'. For quite some time, Japan has also been constructing an occidentalist other in the form of the white Westerner. This occidentalist construction is

reflected in the actual usage of the word *gaijin*. The word, literally meaning 'outside person', is most frequently translated as 'foreigner', but is commonly used only in reference to whites, who are assumed to be Westerners. A relevant linguistic code distinction occurs between the Japanese words *gaijin* and *gaikokujin* (Manabe, Befu, and McConnell 1989: 40). Blacks and non-Japanese Asians are conceptualized differently and, in recognition of the fact that they come from foreign countries, may be referred to as *gaikokujin* (person from an outside country) but are seldom called *gaijin* since, as I said, this word suggests someone white. Certain groups, such as people of Korean descent who are legal residents of Japan, are none the less conceptualized as 'outside people' even if they are not from other countries. The designation *zainichi kankokujin* (Korean residents of Japan) is commonly used.[2]

The social construction of *gaijin* denies the individual uniqueness of Westerners, transforming all Caucasians into an essentialized category that reduces the complex variations among them. Just as Western orientalisms created self-occidentalisms through an implied contrast with a simplified West, Japanese renderings of *gaijin* are occidentalisms that stand opposed to Japanese orientalisms about themselves. Representations of the *gaijin* other create and highlight contrasting statements about the specialness of being Japanese. Among the essentialized self-orientalisms created are Japanese assertions of uniqueness and cultural homogeneity.

Representations of *gaijin* in Japanese advertisements frequently contrast with representations of Japanese. *Gaijin* are much more likely to be shown with free body posturing, or with hair and clothes in total disarray. *Gaijin* are often shown overtly breaking the conventional rules of Japanese society, or as individuals who struggle incompetently with the habits and customs of Japanese life. Nude representations of *gaijin*, particularly naked shots of the upper bodies of both men and women, are common in advertisements for products and services where naked depictions of Japanese would be considered inappropriate. It is true that naked images of Japanese, particularly Japanese women, do appear on late-night television broadcasts defined as erotic viewing, in *manga* ('comic books'), and in ads for products directly or indirectly defined as part of the sex trade. However, nude depictions of Japanese for everyday, mainstream products and businesses are not common, whereas nude depictions of *gaijin* for these are not unusual. Although this discussion focuses on the representations of *gaijin* in Japanese advertising, there are similarities with the ways *gaijin* are represented in other circumstances, such as in newspapers and Japanese-made television programmes. In these cases, as well, *gaijin* are used to

elicit exoticism, while they are at the same time portrayed as breaking Japanese conventions or humorously inept at Japanese life.

Many questions arise regarding the contemporary depiction of foreigners, the non-Japanese other, in modern Japanese advertising. First, why are such *gaijin* ads so prevalent? Are images of foreigners used to fulfil any calculated functions? Do such ads reflect social attitudes and roles? What differences are revealed in attitudes towards different types of foreigners? These are some of the questions I will attempt to address. Although representations of blacks and non-Japanese Asians will be touched on, the focus of this discussion will be representations of whites, those conceptualized as 'true' *gaijin*, for it is renderings of whites as *gaijin* which most represent the occident in this context.

Symbolism, fantasy, and foreigners in advertisements

Rather than emphasizing information about products, Japanese advertisements have an essentially symbolic nature, which renders them particularly interesting anthropologically. Because of their symbolic focus, these advertisements provide a fruitful means of getting at the characterization of *gaijin* in Japanese society. Depictions of foreigners fit into Japanese advertising images of 'fantasy excursions'. These generally contain minimal informative content, but instead present pleasant imagery and possibilities for playful excursion into a fantasy world. Representations of foreigners become just another series of intriguing image quotations and in the process the occident is brought under control while foreigners are rendered not really real—at least as individual people.

It is important to recognize that advertisements have a problematic relationship to what people think in that they are messages sent rather than lessons learned or common thoughts expressed. The renderings of *gaijin* discussed here are representations created by Japanese advertisers, not the products of a reified Japanese culture. This analysis concentrates on the images of *gaijin* in ads, and reflections on those images provided by the image-makers; it does not assert that all Japanese respond to these advertisements as the image-makers expect. However, the images are intentional representations designed to make people buy, projected by people with a well-developed understanding of what is likely to prompt members of that culture toward purchasing. All the advertising agencies discussed here, some of which are now the world's largest, devote extensive research efforts to studying how Japanese consumers respond to their images. For this reason, it seems appropriate to suggest that advertisers'

explanations of how *gaijin* imagery is perceived are derived from studies of Japanese consumers as the image-receivers. Japanese advertisements, like the advertising catalogues analysed by James Carrier (1990: 702), are 'collections of images that professional image-makers have found to appeal to people'.

Japanese advertising has been characterized as mood advertising. It does not try to explain very much about what is being sold, or position products as superior to their competitors. Instead, it attempts to communicate a special mood or elicit emotional feelings. Advertising that focuses on images rather than informational content is, of course, not unique to Japan. Such advertising occurs, for example, in North America particularly when competing products are essentially the same. However, mood advertising is much more abundant in Japan. Additionally, although some informative and even competitive advertisements appear, they do so much less frequently than in North America. Although there are commercial and economic reasons for mood or image advertising, two explanations, stemming from Japanese cultural predispositions, also help account for it. Advertising is a means of competition, and competition is directly in conflict with espoused Japanese social values. Everyone and everything is supposed to strive continually for a harmonious, co-operative existence. I do not mean to suggest that competition is lacking in Japan; extreme competition does exist, just as conflict exists despite the espoused value given to harmony. However, competition tends to be channelled and open expressions of competition tend to be treated negatively. Advertisers are therefore left in an enigmatic position; they must compete without appearing to be overtly competitive. In particular, comparative advertisements, stressing the virtues of one product over another, tend to be received as overtly competitive and therefore inappropriate.

Another problem is posed by cultural expectations for humility—or, at least, outward expressions of humility. In a society where social etiquette expects that guests are offered painstakingly prepared foods with set self-effacing expressions such as, 'this might not suit your palate, but please eat it anyway' ('okuchi ni awanai ka mo shiremasen ga meshiagatte kudasai'), advertisements that extol the virtues of items being sold, or that even provide extensive information about them, violate expectations for formalized humility. Expectations of humbleness extend to the relationship between sellers and buyers. One advertising chief expressed the view that ads should not appear to make authoritative statements about products, but instead appear to acquiesce to the discerning intelligence of buyers. As he explains:

We never do any competition ads, those claiming that this product is better than that one. We never do them, absolutely never. It's partly because Japanese values frown on that sort of open display of competitiveness. But it's more than that really. The message we want to give customers is that they are the ones in control, they are the ones with discerning good taste and intelligent sensibilities. We're not telling them what to do.

In addition, consumer scepticism about informative ads renders mood advertising economically a more rational way of encouraging people to buy. This possibility first occurred to me on an earlier research stay in Japan, while I was talking to a group of eight Japanese housewives gathered at my Tokyo landlady's home for friendly conversation and a mid-morning snack of rice crackers and green tea. When I asked them whether they would be induced to buy a product whose merits were described in an ad, they all agreed that this would not be a good basis upon which to purchase something. As one woman expressed it, '[i]t is only natural for the sellers to present their own products in a good or favourable light. But how can you believe from their own words that it is really the best product?' With such scepticism regarding the supposedly objective data provided by comparative advertisements and 'informmercials', ads that instead evoke a pleasant mood or create interesting associations achieve greater success.

Fantasy vignettes and startling or impressive visual parades, seemingly divorced from any logical association with the product being sold, are characteristics of the Japanese commercial advertising industry. At the heart of Japanese mood advertising is what has been designated as the 'no meaning ad'. This concept has become such a prominent focus of Japanese advertising that the entire phrase was adopted from English, and is often written in the *katakana* syllabary as 'nō miiningu ado'. The 'no meaning ad' was frequently brought up by people I interviewed in the advertising industry as a partial explanation for the prevalence of foreigners and foreign scenes in Japanese commercials. For example, a creative director from the Osaka branch of Dentsu,[3] Japan's—and the world's—largest advertising agency, states:

To explain the abundance of foreigners in Japanese ads, well . . . American commercials, for example, are very 'realistic'. Japanese commercials and ads are not really trying to be realistic like Western ones; instead they are more image-provoking. Since the goal is just to create a nice or different feeling it does not seem strange to have so many foreigners. It is all part of the advertisements' goal to build a dream world [*yume no sekai*]. The products aren't so different, or at

least they don't seem so different to Japanese consumers. So in order to capture the market you need to create a different image, a better fantasy feeling.

The sentiment that foreigners are aptly used to further this goal of creating fantasy moods is reiterated by a section head of the Osaka Yomiuri Advertising Company (Osaka Yomiuri Kōkokusha), who says:

My idea is that Japanese ads are not so realistic. Unlike typical ads in America, they are not there to give information or to depict everyday life. Instead ads create a mood. Something is wanted to help create that mood, or a fantasy feeling. Pictures of foreigners and foreign places help create this.

She went on to state that images of foreigners in advertisements also detracted from the feeling that 'it is just us trying to sell things to us'.

Looking at it from the perspective of someone who makes ads, there is also an attempt to get around certain feelings of Japanese people. . . . One reason for using *gaijin* is that it helps to reduce the sense of its being 'commercial business'. There is in one sense sort of a contempt for commercial advertising that involves the feeling that companies are trying to make 'us' buy products. That is why mood advertising is so important. If there are only Japanese in the ads, it just feels like 'us' trying to make 'us' buy things. Using *gaijin* reduces this feeling somewhat.

Her words provided further support for the idea that using foreigners in advertisements helps minimize the overtly competitive nature of advertising, while also contributing to Japanese occidentalisms by reinforcing a clear distinction between the Japanese as 'us' and *gaijin* as other.

Gaijin *as bearers of innovation and style*

Throughout Japanese cultural history foreigners have been accorded a dual nature. They are considered both as the bearers of highly valued innovation and style, and as moral threat. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney argues that because foreigners are equated with the outside they are structurally equivalent to deities from whom both blessings and destruction flow. She writes, 'there has been a tendency to equate foreigners with deities, therefore often assigning to foreigners dual—both beneficial and destructive—natures and power' (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987: 145). For centuries Japan looked to China for this role, adopting many Chinese cultural institutions and aspects of material culture. However, from the Meiji Era (1868–1912) on, the role of strangers/outsiders shifted to white Westerners, transforming the Chinese along with other Asians into marginals who were neither insiders nor outsiders (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987: 147).

Historical, political, and economic processes enveloping Japan prompted this shift by which white Westerners became the primary other in relationship to whom the Japanese dialectically define self. The Japanese began introducing Western material goods and ideas in the mid-sixteenth century. Then, feeling threatened by this outside influence, the governing political leaders imposed a policy of seclusion which closed Japan to the outside world for two and a half centuries, until Western powers forced Japan's reopening. The Meiji Era, the first after Japan's reopening to the outside world, was characterized by intense curiosity about the West combined with a strong consciousness of Western power, technological expertise, and economic dominance. Thus, from the beginning of Japan's modern history the white Western world became the model to emulate; it represented a standard by which to gauge Japan's progress and modernization. As a result of these processes the modern Japanese occidentalism of the *gaijin* is directed at white Westerners, not just any alien groups. The impact of these economic, political, and historical processes is recognized by many within the modern advertising industry, as reflected in these comments from a creative director at Dentsu regarding the imagery of white Westerners.

Another reason for the abundance of *gaijin* is that for a long part of Japanese history, from Meiji at least, we have always been looking at Western countries as progressive ones. These were places that Japan had to catch up with. From this there developed sort of a complex—'it's a white world'.

In addition to being a referent for progress, whites came to be considered a standard of beauty, particularly with the shift from kimono for everyday wear to *yōfuku* or 'Western-style clothing'. Several informants declared that Japanese people tended to accept the idea that Western-style clothing, because it originated abroad, would naturally be better suited to Western body types. Therefore it was in keeping with popular expectations for fashion and beauty products to portray foreigners in these ads. A male Japanese scholar who is now researching Japanese concepts of self and other referred to white women as standards of beauty to explain the prevalence of foreign imagery in advertisements.

European and American are the main *gaijin* used; Asians are not represented very much. Both men and women appear, but women are much more beautiful than men, who are not so important. From long ago there has been an image of European women as glamorous and beautiful.

Another male Japanese researcher expressed similar sentiments with an unsolicited amount of detail:

Particularly looking at European women from way back there has long been the idea that they are more stylish. This doesn't apply so much to men. It's very closely tied to the whole idea of fashion and that's what lots of ads are for, women's fashions. There are certain traits associated with European women such as differences in body type from Japanese women. A nicer hip shape for example, the hip is fuller and lifts up, not small or tucked in. European women have longer legs and a larger torso compared to Japanese women. So because of these things, whites are considered more stylish. Whether it is true or just an illusion I don't know, but this is the Japanese belief.

Although there was general agreement that *gaijin* have long been considered bearers of style and beauty, there may be gender bias in these two researchers' insistence that this only applies to foreign women. For example, in contrast to the two males quoted above, a female researcher concurs that white Westerners are accepted as more attractive models for Western clothing, but does not believe the emphasis is all on white women. She states: 'Fashion is a big part of the reason there are so many foreigners. For example, in men's wear. Japanese don't suit foreign goods and styles as much. We don't think those Japanese men look good in Western clothing.'

If white Westerners have become a standard since Meiji, the popular culture of post-war Japan served to reinforce this. As expressed by the president of one consulting firm, 'Post-war Japanese history is the history of Americanization.' The American occupation of Japan brought American popular and consumer culture to Japan. This persisted after the occupation ended because of continuing international economic and political dominance of the United States. The early post-war period in Japan brought with it a craze for movies—predominantly American-made movies—creating the feeling that foreign portrayals in such media were 'natural'. Television was established as a regular household furnishing during the 1950s, which coincided with the American occupation. Shows were either dubbed or side-titled American productions, or copies of such models. Again, this reinforced the feeling that it was only *atarimae*, or 'natural', to see representations of whites on the screen.

The Tokyo Olympics held in the 1960s marked a new age for Japan, representing the emergence from extreme post-war poverty into a more focal international role. The Tokyo Olympics thus had a significant impact on Japanese society, and they further perpetuated the acceptance of foreign images on the screen. The Tokyo Olympics also brought large numbers of foreign visitors to Japan. A *ramen* shop erected across from Yoyogi Park, home of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, which still remains,

reveals the extent of exoticism surrounding occidentals at that time. The lit awning of the noodle shop advertises in Japanese, 'gaijinsan mo, tabe ni kuru', '*Gaijin* come to eat here too'. The phrase was meant to attract Japanese, not foreigners, given the widespread assumption at that time that most foreigners could not read Japanese.

While pointing out one aspect to the dual nature of *gaijin*, their role as bearers of innovation, style, and value, these examples also reveal the occidentalism of the Japanese, an occidentalism that arose in response to specific historical, political, and economic processes. As Western—and in the case of twentieth-century Japan, more specifically American—influence dominated the international scene, American material and popular culture began to permeate Japanese society. *Gaijin* became not all or any foreigners, but an essentialized projection of white Westerners. Japanese occidentalism exoticized *gaijin*, enhancing the appeal of advertisements that imaged or even referred to these strange but attractive alien beings. In ways parallel to Western orientalism, Japanese occidentalism also involved a sexual projection of the other, particularly the allure of the occidental woman. However, as a response to the increasing impact of Western culture on Japan, Japanese occidentalism involved more than attraction to and exoticization of the Western other. The creation of *gaijin* as a social construction of Japanese occidentalism also mirrored a need to assert control over the moral threat of an intruding outside world.

Gaijin *as moral threat*

In explaining the prevalence of *gaijin* ads in Japan, marketing analyst George Fields (1983: 117) claims that foreigners are aliens who represent the 'E.T.s of Japanese advertising'. Such ads confront the fear of the foreign invader, transforming foreigners into 'tamed' beings who are kept in place by Japanese brands. Thus, 'the "ugly" unknowns are [rendered] extremely loveable, like household pets' (Fields 1983: 118). This interpretation relates to the second aspect of the dual role of *gaijin* in Japan—that of moral threat. According to Japanese occidentalisms, Western culture embodies egoism and individualism, attributes which contravene essential Japanese values. Even the sexuality allowed to *gaijin* can be seen as a projection of individual self-indulgence and sensuality. The cultural denial of egoism and individualism in Japan makes the West attractive precisely because of these traits, yet also marks the West as a primary threat to 'Japaneseness'. Core attributes of this self-orientalism include

discipline, order, meekness, responsibility, and submission to group goals (Moeran 1984: 253, 259). Advertisers use these associations with the West to evade Japanese cultural values, thus allowing portrayals and statements that might not otherwise be acceptable. At some point, however, the use of *gaijin* imagery also involves taming the foreigner as moral threat, and a corresponding assertion of the superior value of Japaneseness.

In other words, *gaijin* images are used not only to provide a fantasy mood or simply because this has become the established custom, but because foreigners can be used to break social conventions more readily than Japanese. Where, in order to 'really say it', Peter, Paul, and Mary, American folk singers popular in the 1960s and 1970s, had to 'lay it between the lines', the Japanese advertiser may have to resort to using foreigners. *Gaijin* can do, say, and depict what a Japanese might wish to, but social values militate against. For example, in a society with extensive concepts of classificatory status (Lebra 1976) involving expectations for appropriate forms of dress depending on gender, age, and social rank, red has traditionally been considered an appropriate colour for little girls but too bright and conspicuous for adult women. Although a Japanese model in a bright red outfit might still spark disapproval, *gaijin* women are frequently presented in red dresses with flair and defiance.

Gaijin are a pragmatic tool consciously utilized by the advertising industry to portray images of romance, in evasion of a long-standing cultural expectation of public restraint in such matters. According to a creative director for Dentsu:

> There are a lot of love scenes in ads—like kissing. In Japan for a long time there is an idea that kissing, even holding hands, is something that people shouldn't do in public. But having *gaijin* kiss is one way to portray romance, and it's o.k., because, after all, they are *gaijin*.

In a similar vein, many companies find it safer to portray nudity using foreigners, particularly when criticism might negatively affect a brand image. Commenting on the common usage of naked or near-naked *gaijin* women in advertisements, the librarian of Osaka Dentsu's advertising library says, 'ads can't use Japanese women for such nude scenes because it is too realistic, so *gaijin* are used'. There are many references to the bare-breasted women depicted in orientalism—perhaps modern Japanese advertising reflects the reverse trend, and indeed occasionally seems to be the orient's revenge. The retailing chain Parco featured a full frontal view of a Caucasian woman standing naked in one of their theme ads. Unlike the wedding advertisement described earlier, there was no attempt to

cover or mask her nudity in any way. Images of naked Japanese women may be viewed, as I said, on late-night 'adult' television programmes in Japan where there is an intended and often pornographic purpose. However, one does not see an open, nude presentation of Japanese women to advertise 'respectable' brand-name products or a major department store. Such an advertisement would be as controversial in Japan as a fully naked women advertising a mainstream family department store would be in the West. Although I have mentioned naked depictions of *gaijin* women, the male *gaijin* body is similarly used to image sensuality. One example is the Zephyr lotion commercial highlighting the heavily muscled and sweat-glistening torso of a white male viewed from below the navel to the neck (Abe and Yamakawa 1990: 166).

Foreigners often provide a safer mechanism for expressing selfish sentiments in a culture which has long frowned on *wagamama*, or self-centred concerns. Related to this is the prevalent use of the English word 'my' in advertising and product names rather than the Japanese equivalents *watakushi no*, *watashi no*, or *boku no*. Ads and product labels commonly refer to 'my jeans', 'my car', 'my home', 'my peanut butter', and even—as I recently saw in a small town in Shikoku—'my toilet paper'. Kalman Applbaum contends that the proliferation of the English 'my' reflects increased exposure to Western values that are 'in marked contrast with the earlier generation's critical attitude towards individualism' (Applbaum 1992: 24). Although increasing exposure to Western individualism is related to the prevalent use of 'my', I would disagree with Applbaum's analysis somewhat, suggesting instead that what is most important is the code-switching from Japanese into English to make such individualistic assertions. Using the English possessive 'my' creates the feeling that this self-centred assertion is less 'really real' than use of the equivalent Japanese *watashi no* would. By switching to the English 'my', egoism and individualism persist as occidentalist projections, while the Japanese core of conformity, collectivism, and self-abnegation remains unblemished. In September 1990, the autumn theme poster for My City, a large retailing complex (and itself another example of the prevalent retailing use of the English 'my') in the central Shinjuku district of Tokyo, did use the Japanese word *watashi*. However, in this rare case the assertion of self-desire was seemingly made by the female *gaijin* depicted. This woman, with long reddish-blond wavy hair, was shown wearing a brown sweater, plaid pants, and a rust-tones shawl, to kick off My City's autumn campaign. The accompanying ad captions read, in a combination of *kanji*, *hiragana*, and roman letters:

aki iro.	*shizen iro.*	*watashi iro.*
[autumn colours.	natural colours.	my colours.]
	Affectionate Colors	
	My City	

An advertising campaign for the fast-food chain Lotteria featured a foreign woman to promote the introduction of their new *Kaisaa Sando* (Kaiser Sandwich). One Japanese customer noted that it was more important for fast-food outlets such as this, which she believed to be a Japanese version of the Wendy's or McDonald's type of hamburger shops imported from the States, to feature *gaijin* in order to create a foreign image than it is for what she called the 'real' Western fast-food chains. In actuality Lotteria is a Korean-based company, and given the problematic positioning of 'Koreanness', to be discussed below, it was perhaps even more essential for Lotteria to make such associations.[4] In Lotteria's Kaiser Sandwich promotion, the fuzzy image of a Caucasian woman was shown carrying a large bouquet, accompanied by a statement normally too *wagamama* (self-centred) for Japanese tastes. The *gaijin* woman exclaims in the ad, '*Suki na mono shika, tabetakunai*,' 'I don't want to eat anything that I don't like.' A Japanese person may frequently desire to express such sentiments, but Japanese values define such an assertion as overtly egoistic, ungrateful, and immature. To show how negative such a statement might be if made by a Japanese, I draw on Dorinne Kondo's account of a Japanese ethics retreat in which she participated and learned the expected cultural attitude toward food. She writes:

> Even our food held a lesson for us. . . . Cleaning our plates, even if we didn't like what was served, would prevent selfishness and lead to a grateful, gentle heart. Giving in to likes and dislikes, on the other hand, was the beginning of selfish, egocentric behavior. (Kondo 1990: 91–2)

Advertisements and commercials featuring foreigners are commonly divided into two categories, 'talents' and 'anonymous' depictions. The adopted, and transformed, English word 'tarento' (talent) really indicates that the *gaijin* involved is famous. As in the use of *gaijin* imagery generally, 'talents' are frequently used to break with Japanese conventions, including linguistic ones. In the 1980s a kimono-clad, calligraphy-brush-wielding Woody Allen was featured in Seibu Department Store's 'Delicious Life' (*oishii seikatsu*) campaign (see Nishioka 1989: 131). 'Delicious Life' combines two words not normally put together in Japanese to break with conventional language use, providing an interesting, catchy idea

which captured the public imagination, while the ads played on the additional incongruity of the clumsy *gaijin* engaged in traditional Japanese pursuits. In the 1990s humorous, and somewhat ridiculing, portrayals of Arnold Schwarzenegger swinging kettles or pounding dough while buried in flour for *ramen* commercials became a common sight.

Although prominent foreigners were used in Japanese advertisements from much earlier on, the 1970 advertising campaign for Mandom (a line of men's toiletries) featuring Charles Bronson is most frequently credited with establishing this 'talents' trend which still persists in Japanese commercials. While in Osaka in 1990, I had the golden opportunity to interview the creative director who developed the Mandom campaign. I believe that, as in the other cases discussed here, it was not only more 'exotic' and 'exciting' to have a foreigner for this promotion, but 'safer'. Bronson's image, a clear depiction of sensuality and indulgent individualism, was used to invert the established protocol for Japanese cosmetics and toiletries advertising.

The Bronson commercials were an attempt to change the way men's toiletries were presented while utilizing associations of the West with progress, to promote a more modern, Western image for the then fifth-place company in men's toiletries. According to the ad's creator:

> Until then, when making men's cosmetics we always portrayed a soft, gentle look and always used Japanese men. . . . When creating the [new] name for the product 'Mandom' the desire was to combine the idea of 'kingdom' or 'freedom' with the word MAN, creating the idea of a 'man's world'. Until then the idea of cosmetics for men was to create a 'sweet smell'.

To go with the new image, a new bottle was designed to convey a sense of strength. This was achieved by making a huge cap, larger than the bottle. According to the creative director, '[t]he cap and bottle made a big impression. It conveyed a sense of strength rather than "sweetness".' To go along with this imagery, the ad makers decided to present a 'kitanai Amerika no otoko'—'a dirty American male'—in Mandom commercials, and featured Charles Bronson, looking all sweaty in grimy clothing. The catch-phrase used as a slogan for this promotional campaign was 'otoko no taishū' or 'a man's body odour'. Until that time, according to the creative director, the word *taishū* was considered a negative phrase with a rather bad connotation, having all the appeal of the analogous English 'body odour' or 'BO'. The idea of the advertising campaign was 'to take this negative thing and turn it into a plus'. In this instance, the use of Bronson as 'the dirty American male' with a 'man's BO' successfully

accomplished these goals. Utilizing a foreigner made it easier to be this daring. Had the campaign backfired it would have been easier to revert to more conventional portrayals utilizing Japanese men than if a Japanese man had been used to break with the existing conventional expectations.

Taming the other

Despite the fact that *gaijin* are utilized in advertisements to circumvent certain Japanese cultural values, representations of *gaijin* end up reaffirming Japanese merit and centrality. In analysing why the Japanese study English, Applbaum (1992: 18) suggests that this is a symbolic way Japanese 'express recognition for the pervasiveness of Western culture' while at the same time gaining control over the tongue that had so much impact on their lives and country. In a similar way, prevalent representations of *gaijin* admit to Western dominance and influence, while the West of the occidentalized *gaijin* is brought under control. In recent advertisements, there has even been a shift whereby *gaijin*, once the revered standard of what Japan longed to become, are now used to highlight the economic dominance of Japan.

A Japanese article on advertising trends points out that 'desire requires something unreachable' ('akogare ni wa kyori ga hitsuyō') and Japanese are beginning to feel they have not only reached the standards of Westerners, but have surpassed them. A resulting conspicuous trend involves commercials making fun of foreigners (Asahi 1990). If for decades advertisements reflected a '*gaijin* complex' that 'it's a white world', with Japan's reclaimed assurance in its own cultural identity, *gaijin* faces are now used to suggest that maybe it is, or should be, a Japanese world after all. Humour in recent commercials is provided by beautiful and elegantly attired *gaijin* women trying to tell jokes in Japanese but stumbling inadequately with the language. A commercial for the Osaka Keihin shopping mall features a *gaijin* repeating the phrase, 'I can't keep up with the Japanese' (Asahi 1990).

Another example revealing the use of *gaijin* to assert the centrality and merit of Japaneseness is an advertising poster distributed by the National Rice Council. In order fully to understand the impact of this ad, it is important to realize that rice is both a metaphor and metonym for the collective Japanese self. It is not just any rice, but only the highly polished, short-grain Japanese rice (in contrast to other long-grain forms of Asian rice or rice grown in Western countries) that serves as a dominant symbol of Japanese identity. As a metaphor of identity, Japanese rice

suggests purity, reaffirms a Japanese myth of cultural homogeneity, and asserts a 'natural' link between the Japanese and their land (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993). In this advertisement it is no longer the Japanese trying to 'catch up' with the West, but instead a *gaijin* businessman in Japan perplexedly trying to figure out why the Japanese are the front runners. As the *gaijin* businessman sits, holding a bowl of rice in his hands, he says thoughtfully to himself, 'I wonder what makes Japanese business so successful. It must be the rice they eat' (Ashkenazi 1993: 168). This example is particularly noteworthy given the international pressure, especially from the United States, on Japan to open its rice markets to imports, and Japan's intense resistance to this. In this case, internationalization involves invoking a *gaijin* presence that reaffirms the value and centrality of Japaneseness through Japanese rice, a core cultural symbol, and thus inverts international pressures to open Japan's rice markets while acknowledging the new international prominence of Japanese businesses.

By broadening this discussion to include 'living advertisements' as renderings of *gaijin*, I would like to use an example I have discussed in a previous work (Creighton 1991: 696–9) to show how occidentals are tamed and rendered ignorant foreigners, thus bringing the occident under control. In 1987 I and two other Caucasian women were hired by a prominent Tokyo department store to be 'living advertisements' by working as guides and translators for the store's annual exhibit of Japanese craft traditions. Throughout the exhibit we were dressed in traditional Japanese garb, including *yukata* (summer kimono), *obi* (the wide belt which holds a kimono in place), and *geta* (wooden sandals).

Due to the great interest directed at *gaijin* they have news value in Japan, and so the department store received a great deal of media coverage of our participation in the event. Media releases frequently reiterated stereotypes defining *gaijin* as other. For example, one newspaper headline exclaimed, 'Blue-Eyed Guides for an Exhibit of Japanese Tradition' ('Nihon no dentōten ni aoime no annainin') (*Nikkei Ryūtsū Shinbun* 1987). 'Blue-eyed' serves as a conventional marker for the otherness of *gaijin*. The headline underscored the contradiction involved in having *gaijin* explain traditional Japanese crafts to the Japanese.

Our employment was utilized by the Japanese media to tantalize its public with the blurring of boundaries between the Japanese self and the occidental other. *Gaijin* are supposed definitively to represent other, but the Japanese language is definitively a marker of Japaneseness (e.g. Miller 1977, 1982; Chamberlain 1971). A great deal of attention was directed at the fact that all three of us spoke Japanese. Kimonos are also a marker of

Japanese identity. *Gaijin* wearing kimonos are funny, even endearing, as long as they do not look quite right. We were dressed every morning by a professional kimono instructor who made sure we looked correct in the traditional costume. A great deal of media attention was also directed to the fact that all three of us were married to Japanese men, and hence had legal and family ties in Japan making us *gaijin* but not completely outsiders. That I was the *okaasan* (mother) of a son who is a Japanese national was also emphasized. *Okaasan* represent inside belongingness by symbolizing the family line (*ie*), a person's home-town community (*furusato*), and Japan as a nation. Others have mothers, but *okaasan* are supposed to be Japanese.

During one particular day, a television crew followed us around taping our activities for a feature report on our participation in the exhibit. Since a special *furusato* (home-town) noodle restaurant had been set up for the exhibit, the television crew wanted to interview us eating at the restaurant. Before the interview commenced, one of the women, who seldom ate Japanese noodles, leaned over to ask the other two of us, 'How do you eat these things anyway?' Neither our explanations nor the interview planned for the feature ever appeared on television. Instead, the presentation played with the blurred distinction between Japanese and other. Our family ties were presented, our knowledge of Japanese traditions and the Japanese language were emphasized (and exaggerated), we were presented as occidentals who seemed more competent at being Japanese than Japanese. However, before the all-important distinction between Japanese self and *gaijin* other could break down there was a climactic release in the form of a female English-speaking voice (accompanied by subtitles for the Japanese audience) asking, 'How do you eat these things anyway?' A summarizing comment appeared on the screen proclaiming, 'So even these so-called experts on Japan do not comprehend the proper way of eating Japanese noodles.' The potential threat of the foreign invader was vanquished by this finale in which *gaijin* were revealed as ignorant, incompetent foreigners after all, and the distinction between Japanese and other was reaffirmed.

All of the advertising discussed in this section shows *gaijin* used symbolically to bring the potentially threatening occident under control, rendering them cute, cuddly, and incompetent, hence unthreatening. But more than this, they serve to reaffirm Japanese centrality and the value of being Japanese. Since these advertisements focused on the threatening aspect of *gaijin*, it is important to restate the dual nature of the *gaijin*. Advertisements that tame the *gaijin* as a moral threat and advertisements

that depict *gaijin* as attractive, positive forces can be mutually reinforcing. The cultural distancing involved in controlling the threatening aspects of *gaijin* and the outside world they represent makes it easier to solicit widespread acceptance of Western things defined as positive. Thus, advertisements can simultaneously promote Western goods by presenting *gaijin* as the bearers of style and innovation, while reaffirming Japanese value and centrality.

Orientalizing a homogeneous self

This discussion has focused on renderings of *gaijin*, white Westerners, because they most represent the occident in Japan. Directing some attention at other categories of foreigners will reveal how Japanese interest in foreigners helps reinforce orientalisms about themselves, particularly an assertion of homogeneity. The contrasting ways in which non-white foreigners, whom Japanese classify differently from whites, are rendered also reaffirm the suggestion that the Japanese occidentalism of the *gaijin* is distinctly Western, and not just alien.

Perhaps the most problematic depictions of foreigners in recent Japanese advertising involve representations of blacks.[5] Caricatured black images appear as comic, low-class, or foolish figures. Whereas there are large numbers of white people who appear either as 'talents' or as unknown individuals, depictions of blacks are few relative to whites, and these black individuals must be famous to be featured. Typically they tend to be well-known athletes, dancers, or musicians.

The stereotyping of blacks is long established in Japan. For example, Japan was rocked by a *Dakko-chan* doll craze beginning in 1960. Dakko-chan was a caricatured black figure with big eyes and huge red lips, which came attached to a pole. When prompted by pushing on the pole bottom, Dakko-chan would scurry up the pole. When it became Japan's top-selling toy in its first year, the maker Takara adopted it as the company logo. The Japanese continue to buy 100,000 Dakko-chan dolls a year (Jones 1988).

In the mid-1980s, *Chibikuro Sanbo* (Little Black Sambo) dolls became a huge fad in Japan, more than a decade after the North American debate about whether the book *Little Black Sambo* should be removed from school libraries because of its stereotyped representations. The wide-eyed character dolls were depicted as silly, clumsy, foolish, and uneducated. For example, the caption on one Sambo product read, 'When I'm hungry there's no stoppin' me. I'll be up in a palm pickin' coconuts before you

can count to three. An I can count way past three, too!' (Shapiro 1988). The manufacturers defended the products, saying the figures were 'humorous' and 'friendly' and that, therefore, Japanese children who enjoyed them would 'not grow up to be racists'. A similar controversy arose over a line of mannequins featured at Sogo Department Store. Again, the caricatured large forms, with crossed eyes, large lips, and jazz poses, caused accusations of discrimination and poor taste. Debates also raged over the trademark character for the Japanese drink Calpis (*Carupisu*), which for years had been the same black person with large lips, dressed in hillbilly clothes with a straw hat, consuming the white drink, accompanied by the phrase 'hatsu koi no aji' ('The taste of first love').

An employee of Japan's largest ad agency claimed there was no racist intention behind any of these controversial advertising representations. He admitted that the images reveal Japan's inexperience with racial diversity and lack of true internationalization, stating,

> there is a long way to go before most people have experience with whites even. Right now they are still just '*misemono*', a curiosity, something to be seen. Japanese have had even less experience with blacks; are even less likely to understand them. I think there is no desire to be discriminatory. It is just not understood that such problems arise.

These controversies over the representation of blacks in commercial products and advertisements occurred around the time of Nakasone's now famous *faux pas* about American minorities. In 1986, when he was Prime Minister, Nakasone remarked on the higher Japanese IQ relative to Americans. When criticized for this statement, Nakasone made matters worse by explaining that he had been referring to the negative impact of blacks and other American minorities in pulling down the general IQ level.

Despite the loud protests of racism and discrimination directed at Japan by foreigners, particularly North Americans, because of these issues, the white Western world shares the blame for helping to create the unfortunate stereotyping of blacks in Japan in the first place. Japan was introduced to the comic use of black representations when it was first reopened to the outside world by Commodore Perry in 1853. Perry's crew produced a minstrel show for their Japanese hosts, featuring white crew members with blackened faces (Thorton 1986: 95). When Japanese first began coming to the United States they likewise witnessed the lower position of blacks in American society, as a diplomatic envoy in 1860 encountered the separation of whites and blacks, and the presence of

slavery. Many Japanese have derived their only understanding of blacks through translations of literature written by whites, or through images from popular foreign films. In the 1980s a collection of racially oriented jokes denigrating blacks was written by a white man well known in Japan as the host of a television English show. Published in Japan under the title *It's Only a Joke* (Spector 1984), the book was distributed as an educational guide to the study of English. Like Nakasone's comments, which more than anything else suggested that America's problems stemmed from its heterogeneity, negative representations of blacks tend to reinforce a belief in the value of the presumed homogeneity of Japan.

There are very few depictions of non-Japanese Asians, who, according to one advertising specialist, are not considered 'true *gaijin*'. As I noted, they are not considered insiders in Japanese cuture, nor are they sufficiently distant to provide an appropriate contrasting other. Their marginal status makes them problematic and contributes to a Japanese tendency to look down on other Asians. Non-Japanese Asians do appear in advertisements for designated ethnic products, such as speciality Chinese foods, or for cleaning products that suggest stereotyped labour roles.

Presentations of foreign scenery illustrate this diminished interest in other Asian areas. Japanese advertisements respond to the public interest created by particular events, notably the Olympics. For two years preceding the 1992 Olympics held in Spain, Japan was enmeshed in a Spain boom. Museums and department stores hosted exhibitions of Spanish artists; Barcelona emerged as a popular new vacation destination. A similar boom was noted for the Calgary Olympics, during which time commercials featured scenes of Calgary and panoramic imagery of the Canadian Rockies. The situation was notably different for the 1988 Olympics, held in Seoul. The few commercials invoking Olympic symbolism in that year tended to ignore the host country. One commercial showed the legs of a runner as he raced around a track, thus highlighting the Olympics as an event but removing it from any association with its location in Korea in that particular year.

The problematic nature of Korea in relation to Japan is further seen in the case of Koreans living in Japan. The president of a marketing trends consulting firm categorized foreigners into three groups, white foreigners (*gaijin*), non-white foreigners (blacks, Asians, etc.), and non-foreign foreigners. This third, marginal group is comprised largely of descendants of people brought to Japan as labourers from other Asian countries, particularly Korea, in the pre-World War II period. Although these people were born in Japan, have lived their entire lives in Japan, and speak

Japanese as a first language, they do not have Japanese citizenship and are instead legally designated as 'foreigners'. Their case provides another example of how orientalisms and occidentalisms are used to draw lines within a society, rather than just between societies. Resident Koreans are not included in Japanese self-orientalisms. Denying the inclusion of resident Koreans and other groups within Japan, such as Ainu and *burakumin* (descendants of an occupational caste), allows the projection of an orientalist self-construction of Japan as a homogeneous society.

The representations of racial diversity discussed here are seldom true images of internationalization, serving instead to further the internalization of a homogeneous self-construct in one other significant way. While white Westerners are treated as representatives of an essentialized occident, with frequent disregard for the diverse cultural and historic differences among Western societies, at the same time representations of the racial diversity of foreigners more generally serve as a means of projecting heterogeneity outside. This coincides with John Russell's (1991*b*: 13) assertion that 'In some ways the black other occupies the same symbolic space and function as *burakumin* and Koreans, two categories of other with which blacks are often equated.' Projecting heterogeneity onto the outside world reaffirms the uniqueness and specialness of Japan by contributing to an orientalist self-assertion of homogeneity that denies the diversity within Japanese society.

Conclusions

To a large extent representations particularly of whites, but also of blacks and other Asians, have reinforced their otherness, thus serving to reaffirm the homogeneous unity and uniqueness upon which Japanese identity is largely based. The imaging of white foreigners in Japanese advertisements reflects the dichotomized role of *gaijin* in Japan. They tend to be either objects of glorified attention or conversely a standard of negative traits. In either case they are often stripped of individual identity and their own personalities; encountered and experienced as representative *gaijin* (see Creighton 1991) rather than real individuals. Makers and analysts of Japanese advertisements readily admit that, for the most part, Japanese remain ignorant of the people within the *gaijin* packaging. Much of Japanese advertising is a performance of visual imagery, and appropriately these foreigners are simply *misemono*, 'spectacles' or 'things to look at'.

This attitude was frequently attributed to a sort of ignorance arising

among a people who have had few possibilities of interaction with other cultural groups, socialized to perceive themselves as Japanese, as basically the same. Images of foreigners are fantasy depictions, attention-getters, flights of fancy, which help construct Japanese identity by portraying what Japanese are not, and thus perpetuate a discourse of otherness. Although abundant, these representations tend not to bring any deeper understanding of the outside world. Their very abundance often gives the false impression that Japan is largely open to the outside world and to foreigners.

However, trends within Japan, reflected in Japanese advertising, suggest that many Japanese—although they may not use these labels—are questioning Japan's occidentalisms and self-orientalisms. Within both the general public and the advertising world, many people have listened and responded to foreigners' criticisms of their treatment as essentialized *gaijin*. This has prompted a realization of the need for a more sophisticated understanding of foreigners and for greater care with such issues and representations.

Throughout the 1980s, and now into the 1990s, the Japanese government has peddled internationalization as a national goal. A great deal of criticism has been directed at the possibilities for the true attainment of such a goal. As already noted, one author referred to internationalization as a contradictory goal, claiming that it was basically an 'un-Japanese activity' (LaBrack 1983). Others have condemned such goals as empty words, given the repeated assertions of Japanese uniqueness (Dale 1986). Thus far, internationalization has been emphasized in a very literal sense—an attempt to link nation to nation. However, in a society in which the interconnectedness of people in face-to-face networks of interpersonal relationships is paramount, for the internationalization of Japan to be realized it will, I suspect, require more of a grass-roots basis. For example, the tremendous increase of 'international' marriages greatly affects how Japanese, related in personal networks, understand, accept, and interact with foreigners. The increased numbers of foreigners visiting or living in Japan, and the increasing numbers of Japanese travelling or studying abroad, also have a slow but real impact on Japanese perceptions and interactions with others.

One marketing consultant expressed the view: 'The internationalization of Japanese society will start from inside, and will come.' I believe there is a great deal to this sentiment. There have been big changes in Japan in the past few decades. Where once most people saw only *images* of foreigners, and never a foreigner in person, this is less and less the case.

Although some older Japanese still relate to foreigners as *misemono*, many Japanese young people have grown up to accept their presence as natural. For these younger Japanese such foreigners are less likely to elicit attention as *gaijin*, since they have always been just 'people in the neighbourhood'.

In the 1980s Japan was intent upon learning more about foreign places and foreign peoples. In the 1990s, I believe there will be a greater openness and acceptance of foreign persons. There are clearly many Japanese who have become aware of foreigners as real people, not just as *gaijin*, and many Japanese are more aware of some of the problems of representation discussed here. The 1990s may be a decade of marked change in attitudes towards foreigners, as young Japanese who have grown up seeing them as ordinary people come of age. There are also intentional promptings to encourage Japanese of all ages to reflect on their own degree of acceptance of others, trends which are beginning to be reflected in modern advertising. One example is the question of the decade put to the Japanese public in 1990 in the autumn advertising campaign for a major urban retailing concern, Isetan Department Store. The ad shows a black woman, a white girl, and an Asian man, suggested to be non-Japanese by his somewhat darker skin colour and style of clothing. The theme phrase reflects the common use of punning in Japanese advertising. The phrase has a certain ambiguity because in Japanese the ideographs used to write it can be read two different ways, resulting in two slightly different meanings. These are:

nannin made aiseru ka
[Up to how many people are you able to love?]

or:

nanbito made aiseru ka
[Up to what kind of people are you able to love?]

In the internationalized reality of the 1990s, this remains an important question not just for the Japanese, but for all of us.

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Notes

1 Foreign words and phrases are commonly adopted into the Japanese language but the writing system reserves a special syllabary, *katakana*, for these words to mark them as words of foreign origin, in contrast to words of Japanese origin which are written in *kanji* (ideographs) and the *hiragana* syllabary. Switching from one writing form to the other allows the incorporation of foreign words into the language while symbolically reaffirming the distinction between Japanese and other.

2 The different referents for types of foreigners show that they are not all categorized together. Whites, no matter what their country of origin, are called *gaijin*, a word which could in theory be used for non-white foreigners but usually is not. In addition to the referent *gaikokujin*, blacks are most commonly called *kokujin*, while other Asians are either called 'Asians' (*ajiajin*), or referred to as people of a specific country (i.e. 'Chinese'—*chūgokujin*). Difference is not strictly dichotomized but forms an array of classificatory otherness, such that the various groups are situated more closely or distantly *vis-à-vis* each other within the cognitive space of this array. I return to this point later in this chapter.

3 The word 'Dentsu' appears in this chapter without a macron, in keeping with the company's own romanized version of its name.

4 I am grateful to Robert J. Smith for pointing out this possibility to me.

5 Although a brief description of representations of blacks is presented here, this is currently the subject of much more extensive research. For example, John G. Russell (1991*a*) has researched Japanese renderings of blacks, and his research has been published in Japanese in a book entitled *Nihonjin no kokujinkan: mondai wa 'Chibikuro Sanbo' dake de wa nai* (The Japanese View of Blacks: A Problem Bigger than just 'Little Black Sambo').

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