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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Title: Prof. Okamoto on the Hidden Diversity of the Japanese People**

Japan is not as racially and ethnically homogeneous as many Japanese believe and some Japanese politicians have recently declared yet again. The multiracial and multiethnic character of contemporary Japanese society is, however, not only a matter of the large Korean minority in Japan or the indigenous Ainu and Okinawan people or the large number of recent immigrants. Professor Masataka Okamoto, visiting scholar at San Francisco State University, will present some interesting findings from his current research on an unrecognized dimension of ethnic diversity in the origins and identity of the Japanese people on the Japan islands.

- Who were the Izumo people of “the backside of Japan, as well as the Emishi of the North East, the Kumaso and Hayato of the Southern Kyushu people”? So called “the backside of Japan” facing the Japan Sea, once, for many centuries, the front side of Japanese civilization and culture.
- Why did the people of Yamato become culturally dominant in the Japanese national identity and the geographic areas of Kansai and Tokyo facing to the Pacific become “the center” as it is now?

Professor Okamoto says: “I would like to reveal to the audience how the contemporary national consciousness in Japan was rooted in a suppression of the awareness of the internal diversity of Japanese society that once existed. There are still distinct traces of the Izumo (my particular interest) and the others, who became, in effect, ethnic minorities whose very existence

has been suppressed in contemporary Japanese consciousness.”

Prof. Masataka Okamoto is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Fukuoka Prefectural University in Fukuoka, Japan and visiting scholar at San Francisco State University. The focus of his work for the past 20 years has been the protection and promotion of human rights of minorities in Japan. Dr. Okamoto earned his PhD in Social Sciences at Hitotsubashi University in 2000.

The program, sponsored by the Japanese American National Library and San Francisco State University’s Edison Uno Institute, will be held on Saturday, February 21, 2009 at 1:30–3:30 p.m. in the Union Bank Hospitality Room. It is free and open to the public. The Hospitality Room is located behind the Union Bank in San Francisco’s Japantown, 1675 Post Street. The program will be moderated by Wesley Ueunten, assistant professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University. For more information, call Karl Matsushita at 415 567-5006.

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--prepared by Ben Kobashigawa on January 25, 2009