

Does Diversity Matter to the National Unity of Japan? -The Hidden Diversity of the Japanese people-

Okamoto Masataka, Fukuoka Prefectural University

Since the latter half of the 1980s, the multi-ethnicity of Japan has become more apparent. For example, the number of foreign residents increased from 899,000 in 1988 to 2303,000 in 2007; the rate of international marriages increased from 0.93% in 1980 to 6.08% in 2006; and the number of children born to mixed couples has increased to 223,500 during the last decade (1998-2007). Now the number of foreign languages spoken by students as their first language in public school is 63 (Portuguese: 26%, Han=Chinese: 26%, Spanish: 14%). The number of Brazilian Schools increased from 1 in 1995 to 97 in 2006. In my estimation, immigrants and their descendants in Japan numbered 2.7 million in 2005 and could reach 4 million by 2020 and 5 million around 2030 under the current conditions.

With this social change, more xenophobia against the 'Non-Japanese' has also become more apparent since the 1990s¹. Many people think that it is because Japanese are originally exclusionistic. This illusion started to spread just after the collapse of the Japanese (multi ethnic) Empire with its defeat in the Asia-Pacific War (World War II) in 1945. Tsuda Soukichi argued in 1946 that "Japanese are homogeneous agricultural people," "Japan is an isolated island country peacefully integrated by the Yamato Dynasty," "They have little experience of contact with other nations or peoples."

The Minister of General Affairs, Aso Taro, stated in October 2005 that "Japan has one civilization, one language, one culture, and one nation. There is no country in the world like that, except Japan." My current study started from a question I had in response to a series of such speeches about Japan as a "homogeneous nation" by Japanese politicians. I found it strange that almost all of them did not include references to any 'homogeneous' ethnic group. I would like to refute this "homogeneous nation" ideology not by asserting the existence of the Ainu and Okinawans but rather, by revealing the hidden 'internal' diversity of the Japanese

¹ With regard to concrete cases of xenophobia in Japan, see Okamoto Masataka ed., *Racial/Ethnic Discrimination in Japan: Problems in Light of the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (Akashi Shoten, 2005).

people.

1. Who is the Ethnic Majority in Japan?

In 2001, after the examination of Japan's initial periodic report under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) pointed out the following to Japan in its Concluding Observations;

“While taking note of the State party's point of view on the problems involved in determining the ethnic composition of the population, the Committee finds that there is a lack of information on this point in its report. It is recommended that the State party provide in its next report full details on the composition of the population as requested in the reporting guidelines of the Committee.....”(UN doc.CERD/C/304/Add.114)

In the same year, in its response to a question posed by the Ainu Association of Hokkaido, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs clarified that, "No generally agreed on name for the national/ethnic majority in Japan exists".

The Japanese government explained in its initial report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that "minorities in the sense prescribed by the Covenant² do not exist in Japan (UN doc.CCPR/C/10/Add.1, 14 November 1980).”³

In spite of the fact that 6 to 7% of the marriages in Japan (10% in Tokyo) are now international marriages and that the number of children raised by mixed couples have rapidly increased, the Japanese government has not clearly distinguished between the ethnic/national majority and the ethnic/national minorities, especially being reluctant to recognize those who acquired Japanese nationality as ethnic/national minorities.

Actually, while I was writing my latest book, *Japan's Racial/Ethnic Discrimination (Akashi Shoten, 2005)*, I had to face this question over and over: What is the majority ethnic/national group in Japan? I had come to realize that the government cannot move forward on this ethnic composition issue because it had not clarified who the ethnic/national majority was in Japan.

In 2004, some students in my class at Fukuoka Prefectural University gave me their comments on this issue. They wrote that “I do not know which ethnic group I belong to.” “I knew about nations and ethnic groups, but I never thought about which

² Article 27 of the Covenant prescribes that: In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

³ The Comments adopted by the UN Human Rights Committee after consideration of the third periodic report of Japan (CCPR/C/79/Add.28, 5 November 1993, paragraph 15) described as "Principal Subjects of Concern" that "The Committee notes with concern the exclusion of Koreans from the Government's concept of minorities. This is not justified by the Covenant...."

ethnic group I belong to.” “I could not understand why people have national or ethnic identities because I had no consciousness of what ethnic group I belonged to.”

In fact, from the middle of the “Meiji period (1867-1912)” to the end of the World War II, the ideology of Japan as a multi-ethnic nation which included Yamato (=Tenson), Izumo, Emishi, Kumaso, Hayato, Ainu, and other groups was mainstream. For example, *Ancient Japan-Korea Relations*, published by the Office of Governor General of Korea in 1937 stated, "There were various ethnic groups in Japan. The four biggest were the Tenson, the Izumo, the Emishi and the Kumaso. These four groups united and formed today's Japanese nation".

However, after WWII, especially during the 1960s as Japan entered a period of accelerated economic development (which resulted in a dramatic change in the social structure and peoples' consciousness), references to Japan as a “homogeneous country” and “homogeneous society” emerged and soon became mainstream.

2. Fusion of Ethnic Groups?

The former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro stated at the Diet in November 1986; “The Japanese Nation (Nihon Minzoku), was formed from the indigenous people who, over a long history in the Japanese archipelago, mixed with southern and northern peoples and others on the continent and became one.” “The Ainu people were just one of them.” On the other hand, he stated in 1969 in his speech as the president of Takushoku University that “The Yamato people, since ancient times, have been a completely pure race and there is no mixed element”. It means that the Yamato is one of the ethnic groups which compose the Japanese nation. Under this kind of theory, if the USA is a "melting pot of races," Japan could be referred to as a “melting pot of ethnic groups”.

However, in February 2007, Bunmei Ibuki, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science who is from Kyoto (the ancient capital of the Yamato), stated that "It is an unchallengeable truth that the Yamato Minzoku (people) have historically ruled Japan, and therefore, Japan is an extremely homogeneous country." Some newspapers criticized his speech from the viewpoint of the existence of the Ainu people, the indigenous people in Hokkaido, but no newspaper noticed the invalidity of his historical viewpoint.

On June 6, 2008, the Japanese government finally recognized the Ainu as an indigenous people in Hokkaido with their own language, religion and cultural identity. After the resolution, much discourse referring to the "Yamato people" appeared on the Internet in relation to this resolution insisting that the Yamato *are* Japan's indigenous people.

Among the discussants, Hanako Tokita argues that⁴:

“Why is it necessary to isolate the Ainu, who have nearly been assimilated into Japanese society, now?”, “Until last week, Japan was an ethnically homogeneous nation”. “Japan is a country that has successfully unified its citizens. The Ainu and the Ryuku are now no more than mere local traditions”, “If the Ainu are an ethnic group, then the rest automatically become the Yamato people and the Ryukyu who do not belong to either group become yet another ethnic group”, “The situation has changed. A framework for ‘ethnicity’ has suddenly emerged between the “citizen” and the ‘individual’”, “What happened on June 6th is an event that could change the shape of the nation.”

Then, we have to consider who the Yamato people are. In my research, the term “Yamato Minzoku (people)” did not appear until the year 1888. Following the emergence of the term “Yamato Minzoku (people)”, the term “Izumo Minzoku (people)” also appeared in 1896.

3. Creation of Nation

When leaders in the Meiji Period (1867-1912) were forging the nation state, they created a national consciousness based on the ancient Japanese texts "Kojiki (the Records of Ancient Matters)", written in C.E.712, and "Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D.697)", written in C.E.720. KiKi (an abbreviation of “Kojiki & Nihonshoki”) were originally used as the ideological base of the "Oseifukko” (Meiji Restoration), which justified the abolition of the Shogunate as well as regency rule and the revival of the "emperor's rule" for the first time in about 1000 years. On December 9, 1867 (Keio 3), the *Tobakuha*, a party who advocated the overthrow the Shogunate, executed a coup d'etat, declared the *Oseifukko*, and restored imperial rule. In this proclamation, they declared the abolition of a *Bakufu*, the shogunate that had ruled Japan for nearly 700 years since the latter part of the 12th century, and the *Sekkansai* or regency rule established in the middle of the 9th century by the Fujiwara clan to take over political power from the *Mikado* (Emperor), the Yamato king, under the slogan "everything is ground on Jinmu’s foundation" (*Jinmu Sogyo no Hazime ni Motozuku*), It was the starting point of the creation of nation(s) in Japan.

Jinmu is a Han (Chinese) style name created in the latter part of the 8th century for the fictitious first Yamato king (Emperor) *KamYamatoIwareHiko*, who appears in the Kojiki in 712 and Nihonshoki in 720 (myth). According to the *KiKi*, *KamYamatoIwareHiko* became the first Yamato king in BC 660, and after a 76 year

⁴ Hanako Tokita, *Ainu recognized as indigenous people*, Global Voices, August 12, 2008 (<http://globalvoicesonline.org/>)

reign, passed away at the age of 127. No document records before Kojiki exist in Japan and it is said that the story of the KiKi myth is a reflection of the political situation in the end of the 7th century, i.e. not 1000 years before but a few decades before from the KiKi. However, at the end of Edo (Togugawa) Period (1603-1867), the movement to idealize the 'Emperor Jimmu' (and its far ancient times which are said to have begun the country) gathered momentum, and attempts to return to more primitive politics, namely the unification of rituals and politics (*Saisei Icchi*) which 'Emperor Jimmu' established, surfaced and became the Anti-Bakufu party's central theme. In my view, this *KamYamatoIwareHiko* is the origin of the name *Yamato Minzoku*.

Actually, the Meiji restoration and its government were strongly connected to *Emperor Jimmu*. For example, the Meiji government made February 11 *Kigen Setsu*, the Anniversary of the Dawn of History, by converting the date, written in Nihongi as the day when *KamYamatoIwareHiko* became the "first emperor", into the solar (Gregorian) calendar. After WWII, *Kigen Setsu* was abolished by the order of the General Headquarters (GHQ) / Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), but in 1966 it was revived as 'National Foundation Day'.

The government, on the very day of *Kigen Setsu* (February 11) in 1889 (Meiji 22), promulgated the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (Meiji Constitution) and legally established the national order that "The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal" (Article 1 of the Constitution). With the Constitution, the government started to legally spread the thought that the Emperor (*Mikado*) is the descendant of *Amaterasu* or the Sun Goddess in Heaven, supreme deity of Yamato myth, enshrined in Ise shrine. And in the year (1888) before the proclamation of the Constitution, the name of the Yamato people (minzoku) appeared in Japan's history. According to my research, the creator of the word was Shiga Shigetaka. He used the word for the first time on "*Nihonjni*" (*Japanese*) No.2, April, 1888.

After that, the KiKi myth was introduced in schools to justify the Emperor's rule. However, about 30-40 % of the Kojiki is devoted to the Myth related to Izumo, which says that the emperor's rule in Japan started when the Izumo gods surrendered their realms to the Yamato gods. Consequently, Meiji historians concluded that there was a country ruled by the Izumo people before the Yamato people came to Japan and that the Izumo were an indigenous people in Japan's main island. In this Yamato myth, they describe *Susano*, one of Izumo's major gods, as the younger brother of *Amaterasu* and state that he was exiled from Heaven and dropped down to Izumo. It also describes *Onamuch* or *Okuninushi* (Land Creator) who created the country, as the son, son-in-law, or descendant of *Susano* and that he surrendered his country to *Amaterasu* and withdrew.

However, there is another account from the oldest existing book in Japan, from early C.E.700. That is the "*Izumo Fudoki* (*Ancient Records of Izumo*)" which was

completed in 733 and edited by the Izumo Kokuso (descendants of the Izumo king) family. The myths included in “*Izumo fudoki*” are very different from the myths included in Yamato’s *KiKi*. According to the original Izumo Myth, there is entirely no relation between *Okuninushi(Onamuch)*, *Susano* or the Sun Goddess. *Onamuch*, the supreme deity of Izumo myth, enshrined in Izumo Great Shrine, called “*Amenoshita Tsukurashishi Okami* (Great God who Created the World Under the Heaven) ” in the “*Izumo Fudoki*,” does not surrender the land of Izumo. He proclaims that he will continue to govern the country of Izumo while entrusting his other lands to the descendants of *Amaterasu* (the ancestor of the Yamato's king). The Izumo myth also states that the Izumo gods built the Great Shrine (the oldest and biggest Shinto Shrine in Japan) for *Onamuch*, contrary to the Yamato myth that *Amaterasu* built it. The fact that descriptions in *Izumo Fudoki* are very different from the *KiKi* has been ignored in Japan’s historical education.

It might be natural that, with the birth of the *Yamato Minzoku* concept, the words *Izumo Minzoku* (Nation) appeared in 1896. According to my research, the creator of this word was Sasagawa Rinpu (1870-1949). After that, the Izumo Minzoku identity spread out quite soon. In 1921, Okagaki Yoshito, wrote an article titled “*For the sake of Izumo Minzoku*”, and stated that “I declare a war against the abuse (to the Izumo), as a vanguard of 500 thousand *Izumo Minzoku*.” In the same year, a journal titled *Izumo Minzoku* started. They might have been influenced by self-determination ideology and the establishment of the League of Nations and its Minority Treaties around 1920.

The Izumo ethnic identity is also seen in the “Izumo Nation Study”, written by Tokutani Toyonosuke, in *Shimane Hyoron*, 1934-1936 (18 issues). In this thesis, he states that “Every time when I met persons from other countries (within Japan) and heard their languages, I noticed they were extremely different from our Izumo language and I felt very strange.” “We are descendants of the Izumo nation from thousands of years ago. Therefore, we have a duty to obtain accurate and detailed knowledge about the Izumo nation.” “There is no big ethnic change, ...and current Izumo people still maintain certain characteristics such as their physique, looks and character.”

In fact, many authors have even recently asserted that Izumo is very different in history, religion and language from Yamato.

4. The Other Human God -Izumo Kokuso

There were many human gods in the middle of the 19th century in Japan. Among them, the two biggest human gods in Shinto had religious authority which exceeded Daimyo’s political authority. They were Mikado/Tenshi (Emperor) and Izumo Kokuso (Lord) who were descendants of ancient kings. The Izumo king, after accepting Yamato’s rule in around 7th century, became a regional lord, *Izumo kokuso*.

Izumo Kokuso had been the chief priest of the "(Izumo) Great Shrine," the oldest and the biggest shrine in Japan, since Yamato restricted his power to only the religious aspects in 798. Izumo Kokuso, the descendants of the Izumo king which have a similar length of history as the Yamato imperial family, still exists. Mikado, the Yamato king, had its political power taken over too by the *Sekkan* (regency) in the middle of the 9th century and by the *Bakufu* (Shogunates) in the 12th century. Under the unification of rituals and politics (*Saisei Icchi*) in ancient times, the Mikado or Sumera Mikoto (Emperor) was also priest-king (of Amaterasu). The Shogunate restricted Mikado's power to only the religious aspects. The Mikado family in the Edo period was actually a kind of small regional lord in the Yamashiro country. Ordinary people usually respected the Shogun or their own lord in political fields. Under the Shogunate regime, the Mikado lost political power but maintained his religious authority. Both of the two descendant of the ancient king also existed as the priest king (religious authority) at the end of Edo period and they were regarded by ordinary people as human gods descended from Amaterasu or Onamuchi or, in other words, who had inherited the great souls of ancient kings.

After the Meiji Revolution, the new government portrayed the *Mikado* or *Tenshi* as an Emperor who took over the Shogunate, and spent huge public funds and mobilized the bureaucracy on its behalf. Two human gods in this era were the 80th Izumo Kokuso (Lord), Senge Takatomi (1845-1918) and the Yamato Mikado Mutsuhito (1852-1912), Meiji Emperor.

Lafcadio Hearn wrote in his books *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* in 1896: "Only a generation ago, the religious power of the Kokuso extended over the whole of the province of the gods. ...Yet to the simple-hearted people, he is still divine or semi-divine....How profound reverence was paid to him (Izumo Kokuso) in former ages can scarcely be imagined by any who have not long lived among the country folk of Izumo. Outside of Japan perhaps no human being, except the Dalai Lama of Tibet, was so humbly venerated and so religiously beloved." (Kizuki: The Most Ancient Shrine of Japan).

Many scholars have pointed out that Izumo religion is different from Ise (Yamato) as the former worships gods that are related to the sea, lakes and rivers (and is thus similar to religion in the Ryukyu (Okinawa) islands) while the latter worships gods related to the sun. It is said that Izumo's god concept has a horizontal character (the gods come from the sea and have no hierarchy), while Yamato's has a vertical character (the gods come down from heaven and have a hierarchy structured under Amaterasu who is said to be the ancestor of the Yamato King, emperor).

This Izumo religion was one of the two most influential pillars of Shinto power in Japan (another one is Ise=Yamato) until the middle of the Meiji period. Lafcadio Hearn, wrote in his final book "*Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation*", 1904, "Of the higher forms of Shinto worship, ...There are two supreme cults: that of the

Sun-goddess, represented by the famous shrines of Ise; and the Izumo cult, represented by the great temple of Kitzuki. This Izumo temple is the centre of the more ancient cult. ”

Therefore, Izumo Kokuso Senge Takatomi, who was also the Shinto West Japan Supervisor, and priests belonging to the Hirata (Atsutane) School insisted, in the first decade of the Meiji period, that people had to worship *Okuninushi* first rather than *Amaterasu* in order for Shintoism to be a religion. It led to the “pantheon dispute” in the first half of the second decade of Meiji (around 1880) which is said to have involved 133,087 people. This dispute fundamentally interfered with the emperor system the government leaders had tried to create through publication of the concept that the Emperor was a descendant of “Japan’s supreme god, *Amaterasu*”. As a result of this incident, (1) Izumo religion was marginalized, (2) the government moved towards the dereligionisation of Shinto and (3) Yasukuni became one of two main ideological pillars (with Ise shrine).

5. Linguistic Diversity of Japan

Unlike the recognition of the Minister Aso, before the mid-Meiji Period (around 1900), people in different regions within the current Japanese islands could not communicate with each other verbally.

Nishitaka Totsu (1838-1915), an official of the Ministry of Education, wrote in 1873 in the “*Ministry of Education Magazine*” (文部省雑誌), “The languages of east and west regions are not mutually understandable.” “Now, someone from Mutsu-Rikuu (Northeast) and someone from Satsuma-Osumi (South Kyushu) cannot talk to each other at all”. “A person of Ou (Northeast) and a person of Kinai (Kansai), also, in many cases cannot speak to each other.” “There is no other country like Japan, whose territory is only 2400km wide from east to west (not including Hokkaido), in which the languages are so different and the people cannot communicate with each other”.

At that time, people usually communicated in written Chinese, the same mode of communication used with people from Korea or China. Mizuhara Akito, in his book titled “Edo Language, Tokyo Language, Standard Language” (1994), concludes that the common language among the *Samurai* and the intellectuals at the end of the Edo Period (1603-1867) was classical Chinese. Takasugi Shinsaku (1839-67), one of the Meiji Revolution leaders, also communicated through written Chinese in Shanghai, China in 1862.

In the middle of the 19th century, the present Japanese archipelago (not including Okinawa and Hokkaido) was divided into 68 states and there was no Japanese national identity among ordinary people. Nitta Hitoshi writes in 1999 that “In the Edo period, what was recognized as ‘country’ were domain (han) governed by lords (Daimyo). A Samurai's loyalty was toward their Daimyo, and another domain was a ‘foreign country’. Therefore, even if other domains fought with a European country

and lost, they regarded it as a foreign matter that had fundamentally no relation to them.”

Under this situation, I suppose there was little difference between how people from Satsuma (Southern) Kyushu regarded people from China (Qing Dynasty), Ryukuan or Korea, and people from Ou (North East). They were all different from each other, and could communicate in written Chinese but not verbally.

The following are letters between the First Prime Minister, Ito Hirobumi (1841-1909) and the Chief Equerry, Tokudaiji Sanenori (1840-1919) from March 1895 (Meiji 28).

Tokudaiji: 聖上亦不強起之蓋期大用子異日耳無幾伯再拜首相熙載調元煥耀国光於四表者未嘗不由感激此詔也恭記以伝君臣遭遇之盛云

Ito: 博文嘗奉敕創草憲法草成進呈以供御覽詔置枢密院撰拔勲舊親任顧問官若干員以討論之博文為之議長期日會議

Contemporary Japanese, including me, can not understand them. This shows that politicians still used classical Chinese, which was completely different from current Japanese, even 30 years after the Meiji Revolution.

Aota Setsu wrote in 1888 (Meiji 21) in his book titled *Opinion on Dialect Reform*(方言改良論): “If there’s a person from Kyushu and a person from Ou (Northeast) together here, they cannot make themselves understood, not even one word.” “When I took the train from Tokyo to Fukushima, a British man and a woman from Sendai were sitting next to me. The language of the Sendai woman was extremely hard to understand and we could not make conversation at all. On the other hand, I was able to talk with the Britisher a little since I understand a little English.”

No standard Japanese language existed until the end of the 19th century. Miyake Tatsukichi, who later became the president of Tokyo University’s Faculty of Literature and Science, wrote in 1884 (Meiji 17) about opinions exchanged among people in those days regarding the unification of language. According to this source, the argument was, at first, divided into whether language should be based on (1) the archaic words or (2) the language used now. In case of (2), there were three different ideas. Some insisted it should be based on (a) Kyoto language (the Emperor’s mother tongue). Others insisted on (b) Tokyo language. The third opinion was that it should be based on (c) the language which most people use, after investigation of the languages spoken throughout the whole country. However, if they decided to base it on Tokyo language, there was also the argument regarding what language should be regarded as the Tokyo language, because people in different social classes used different languages. Miyake concluded that it was very difficult to decide.

Hoshina Koichi wrote in 1898 in his thesis titled *Regarding Dialect* (方言に就て) that “In order to collect dialects, we have to decide on a language which should be regarded as standard”, “Therefore, we have to take a major language like *Kyoto language or Tokyo language* and formalize it as the standard one”. We should notice

that even at this stage, Kyoto language was considered first. However, Kyoto language did not become the standard language and the Meiji Emperor lost his mother tongue. This fact also implies that the Emperor was not a real sovereign in modern Japan.

So, what is the standard language we are using now?

It is an artificial language created in the early 20th century, based on "the words used by an educated middle-class family living in Yamanote area of Tokyo (where bureaucrats gathered)." In 1900 (Meiji 33), A course named "National Language" was introduced by the Elementary School Policy. In 1903, the first government-approved textbook written in the language based on the "spoken language of educated Tokyo people" was published (尋常小学読本). In 1913, the National Language Study Committee published the "Rules of Spoken Language" and finally established the Yamanote language as the model for the standard language.

This situation did not change a lot even after World War II. In 1961, Sato Tetsuo, who transferred to Matsue (Izumo) as a bureau chief at the Asahi Newspaper, in his contribution to Bando Taneichiro's book "*Izumo Dialect*", wrote as follows: "I have lived in Matsue for 4 years. But when I talk to middle-aged people or to the elderly, I still often can not understand more than half of what they say". "There are many words different from standard language. When people talk in a peculiar accent with peculiar words, I can not even distinguish phrases".

When I lectured on this topic at an event in San Francisco, a Nordic American audience member married to an Izumo person suggested that he knew the Izumo dialect and there were English dialects in the US too. I replied that what he thought of as a dialect was actually a standard language spoken by Izumo people. People try to/are trained to speak standard language when they talk to foreigners, and foreigners recognize them as dialects because their pronunciation and accent are different. But if someone speaks 'real Izumo language' with peculiar words, even Japanese outside of Izumo can not understand.

The following chart provides examples of the differences.

Izumo language	Standard Japanese (Yamanote language in Tokyo)	English
otonge	ago	chin
shirokui	kakato	heel
kobira	fukurahagi	calf
bontaku	(no word)	lower part of the back of the head
Kenbeki	(no word)	illness caused by stiff neck or fatigue

A famous linguist, Kindaichi Haruhiko wrote in his book "*Japanese Language*" in

1957 that: If we brought the Kanto, Kansai, Tohoku, Kyushu, Kagoshima and other dialects to Europe, they would be regarded as separate independent languages”. At least, those differences are bigger than the difference between Spanish and Portuguese.

Nishikori Masahiro wrote in 1988 that “Until 20 or 30 years ago, young people (of Izumo) who went to the capital (Tokyo) used to be distressed by a language complex. Now young people can speak the standard language quite well”.

I then began to understand why I (born in 1967) could not understand (about 30% of) the language used by my grandmother, and why I had to ask for translation when I talked with an old shaman woman in my high school days despite my being born and raised in Izumo.

It seems that rapid economic growth was a major factor enabling language unification, i.e. when the social structure of Japan was rapidly changed into a homogeneous community suitable for standardized mass production and when the mixed nation theory was shifted to the homogeneous nation theory. At this point media appeared, particularly television, greatly influencing the spread of the standard language.

Sanada Shinji states in his book “*Dialects Will Die Out? - Japanese Who Have Lost Their Own Language*” (2001) that the “Homogeneity of Japanese language was almost complete by the 1980s when television media reached full maturity” and “Since the 1990s, dialect rehabilitation movements have become prominent in various regions of Japan.”

For example, Dr. Yamaura Harutsugu positioned *the Kesen language* (in Iwate) as an independent language equivalent to Arabic or French and has published the Kesen language texts since the latter half of the 1980s as well as the Kesen Dictionaries in 2000.

6. The Emishi, Kuma-So & Hayato and other ethnic identities

In February 1988, the former Suntory president from Osaka made discriminatory remarks against Kumaso and Emishi. He said, on the TV program "Report Special," speaking against relocation of the capital to Sendai, that “The Northeast is a Kumaso area.” (He confused Kumaso with Emishi with this remark). “The culture is extremely backward.” This led to a boycott campaign against Suntory. Suntory goods disappeared from liquor stores, bars and restaurants in Sendai. Northeastern commercial broadcasting abolished Suntory’s commercial advertising broadcasts. Some people in the Northeast still won’t buy Suntory beer.

It is said that an ethnic identity as descendants of the Emishi exists in the Northeast (Tohoku). Prof. Akasaka Norio, a founder of “Northeast Study” in 1990s, claimed in 2000 that in Iwate he met many who were taught by their grandfathers to “be proud since you are descendants of the Emishi.” Mr. Takahashi Katsuhiko, author of the

novel "*Kaen (火怨)*" published in 1999 and describing the life of Aterui, chief of the Emishi in the latter part of the 8th century, who fought against a Yamato invasion, also said in 2003 that "Those who thought of themselves as descendants of Emishi, but would not say so before, have begun to say it recently."

Furthermore, attempts at the rehabilitation of Kumaso and Hayato have also been made. For example, Menda town in Kuma country, Kumamoto made a film titled *Rehabilitation of Kumaso* in 1993. In relation to this film, Mr. Yamada, an official of the Menda town government said as follows. "Kumaso was regarded as a "barbarian," one of the "Disobedient People" conquered by Yamato Takeru. The town people of Menda, when they went to Tokyo or Kansai, were called "descendants of Kumaso" and looked down upon. They lost self-confidence. Yet, what I learned from the Menda elderly was completely different from the *KiKi*." (In the *Kojiki*, Yamato Takeru, who killed KumaSo Takeru and Izumo Takeru is regarded as a hero.)

Kindaichi Haruhiko classified the (spoken) languages in Japan (excluding Okinawan and Ainu) into "inner dialect" and "outer dialects". What is interesting is that those languages spoken in Izumo, South-Kyushu, and the North-East are classified as "outer dialects." These areas completely coincide with the former countries and people that had political power independent from the Yamato until the 6th century.

The revival of Osumi Hayato dance in 1971 by residents of Osumi in Kyoto (said to be descendants of Osumi Hayato, who migrated to Kinai) and the Hayato Summit held in August 2004 by Hayato town, Kagoshima are also regarded as parts of the rehabilitation movement.

7. The rapid economic growth and suppression of internal diversity

Sakaiya Taichi, argues in his book "Japan's Rise and Fall" (日本の盛衰) published in 2002 that during the rapid economic growth era from 1950 to the 1960s, Japan adapted its society to standardized mass production and created the "*optimal industrial society*". In the field of education, they trained human resources (1) to be patient, (2) to be cooperative, (3) to possess common knowledge and skill, but (4) not to display originality or personality. In the field of regional structure, they aimed for the unification of information and culture by concentrating everything around Tokyo.

Thus, the contemporary national consciousness of the Japanese people is rooted in the suppression of an awareness of their own internal diversity. But now, if someone said, "I am a member of the Yamato," I would say, "I am a member of the Izumo". I had never identified myself this way until I moved to Kyushu in 2000, one of Japan's four main islands located in the southwest and facing South Korea and East China. Kyushu people, in general, tend not to recognize Japan as a homogeneous country not because of the existence of Ainu, Okinawan (Ryukyuan) or Koreans, but because they consider themselves different from the Yamato. My university colleague from

Kumamoto, southern Kyushu, once said to me very naturally “I am the Kumaso,” a people originally from East China Sea kulturkreis who had resisted Yamato’s aggression until the 7th century. Then in 2006, I came across a lecture, titled ‘Munakata people and Izumo people’⁵. Such things would be strange to those who live in the Tokyo and Kansai area. I can confirm this since I lived in the Tokyo metropolitan area for more than 10 years, during which time I did not notice such diversity. Moreover, since most information about Japan, including newspapers, is filtered through Tokyo and Kansai, this kind of consciousness is seldom made known to mainstream Japanese society, much less to the rest of the world.

The deconstruction of the “nation building” policy and “fusion of ethnic groups” (“melting pot”) theory prevalent in Japan since the latter half of the 19th century is required and should be replaced by a national identity based on ethnic diversity. Therefore, in conclusion, diversity matters to the current and future multi-ethnic Japan. The idea that “Japanese are originally homogeneous and then exclusionistic” is merely an illusion. Any measures based on an illusion can not be efficient. The Japanese people should release themselves from the illusion of a homogeneous society and instead accept and embrace cultural diversity. I believe this is an effective way to eliminate current xenophobia in Japan too.

I would like to further reveal the processes underlying the creation of the Japanese nation state by addressing questions as to why the *Yamato* became culturally dominant, how Japanese national identity was determined, how the Kansai and Tokyo regions became the political and economic centers they are today, and how the standard Japanese language was created at the expense of other distinct languages later categorized as dialects. This research would endeavour to reveal the internal ethnic diversity of Japan and acknowledge groups such as the *Izumo*, the *Emishi*, the *Kumaso* and the *Hayato*, all of which have different historical origins, cultures and languages from the *Yamato*.

In this article I haven’t commented on the concept that Japan’s homogeneous ideology is based on the idea that Japan is an isolated-islands country populated by rice-farming people. Prof. Amino Yoshihiko pointed out the historical importance of the “sea road” and said that the sea is something that connects, not separates people. Areas called *Backside Japan* from 1895 had actually been the front side of Japan for centuries. This will be the next subject of my research and I hope it will contribute to a change in consciousness regarding the center and margins of Japan.

Okamoto Masataka is an associate professor at Fukuoka Prefectural University.

⁵ **Munakata in north Kyushu where coastal people live has, via ocean lanes, been connected with Izumo since ancient times.**