

Research Note

Representing Japanese Hospitality: Takigawa Christel's¹ Speech for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics

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Abstract

Up until recently, Japan has been widely regarded as a mono-cultural/mono-racial country, populated by a single ethnic group (*tan'itsu minzoku*). Minority groups were made invisible in public discourse until as recently as the 1990s, where discourses about multiculturalism (*tabunka kyōsei*) started to surface (Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu, 2008).

Yet, in 2013, the biracial announcer Takigawa Christel was chosen as an ambassador for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The speech she delivered in front of the IOC (International Olympic Committee) was widely reported on Japanese media, becoming one of the most popular news items of the year and spawning the buzzword *omotenashi*.

Throughout this paper I will analyze the politics behind Takigawa's apparition in front of the IOC. By analyzing her speech, I will argue that her *hāfu* body served as the perfect vessel for an ideological stance that Japanese institutions have been trying to propagate domestically and abroad. Through the intersection of familiar discourses such as "Cool Japan," multiculturalism and nihonjinron-style cultural nationalism, the announcer's speech recreates a (self)-orientalistic (Iwabuchi, 1994) image meant to captivate the hearts of the global public. Japan as embodied by the biracial body of Takigawa Christel is a nation whose driving force is a tension between the "old" and the "new," the "oriental traditions" and "newfangled modernity". It is a nation of hybridity, much like the speaker herself. It is my intention to show the ways in which the announcer became the vessel for a new type of nationalism, one that is incredibly well matched with the desire for consumption of national images in an incredibly globalized world.

Keywords: *Hāfu*, Mixed-race, Nationalism, 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Orientalism

In the days between the 6th and the 10th of September, 2013, representatives from Japan, Spain and Turkey assembled in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for the 125th session of the International Olympics Committee (hereafter IOC). The three states were competing to host the 2020 Summer Olympics.

Among the Japanese representatives figured a well-known media figure: former Fuji Television Announcer Takigawa Christel, who was invited to participate as "Cool Tokyo" Ambassador. Viewers from Japan had the chance to see the newscaster, born from a French father and a Japanese mother, deliver her speech in perfect

¹ This manuscript uses last name-first name order for Japanese names.

French.

Takigawa's presentation received considerable media exposure, and it popularized the buzzword *omotenashi* (hospitality), which won the Buzzword award of that year (Huffington Post Japan, 2013). Not only that: the speech is also widely credited by prominent businessmen such as Sony former president Chūbachī Ryūji for helping Japan win the bid for hosting the 2020 Olympics (Nikkei Business Online, 2017; Sankei Biz, 2013).

Since she has no relation with either sports or politics, one might have found it surprising to see her on the stage. I will argue that the announcer's *hāfu* body was used as a powerful ideological tool in the race for the Olympics – one that was arguably more powerful domestically than internationally.

Nationalism, Globalization and the hybrid body

Questions of inter/nationalism have been a staple feature of Japan's post-war political discourses. In this section I will briefly summarize how nationalism (and inter-nationalism) have intersected with and participated in the construction of discourses about ethnic-racial hybridity.

Following the loss of the overseas territories in China, Korea and Taiwan, redefining the nation's boundaries was considered a major task during the period that succeeded the Second World War. It was once again necessary to find a convincing answer to the question "what is Japan", and this was logically followed by an intellectual quest to define the qualities of the Japanese people.

It is in this period that the *topoi* of Japanese insularity and Japanese mono-ethnicity started to emerge. Crafted as an antidote to the "multiethnic" (*ta-minzoku*) expansionism of the Japanese empire, the discourse of Japan as an ethnically homogeneous (*tan'itsu minzoku*) nation began to take hold on society (Kawai, 2015).

Postwar Japan wasn't, of course, an ethnically homogenous society. Many internal boundaries existed (and still do), ranging from the Ainu minorities in the northern regions of Hokkaido to the marginalized *burakumin*, and the communities of *zainichi* Koreans that decided to remain in the country well after 1945. Nevertheless, the ethnic-racial homogeneity of its inhabitants was a powerful rhetorical device during the postwar reconstruction of the national image².

It is no wonder that in the first 20 years following the war, "mixed race"³ was perceived as a pressing social issue. Up until the sixties *mixophobia* (Taguieff, 2001) characterized the discourses surrounding inter-racial mixing. The picture painted in the media was that of children born out of illicit relationships with men in the US army, if not from violence (Horiguchi and Imoto, 2014). Thus, the images of *konketsuji* (literally "mixed-blood" children) were intertwined to that of defeat in the war and of subjugation, through Japanese women's bodies, from an external enemy. "Mixed race" as a social problem was debated through questions such as the position of these children in Japanese society, as well as the (im)possibility of integration (Horiguchi and Imoto, 2014; Shimoji, 2018).

The first major shift in the perception of mixed race happened in the 1970s, with the transition from what Ifekwunigwe (2004) defines as an "Age of Pathology" to something more akin to an "Age of Celebration". It was during this period that the more positive sounding English loanword *hāfu* started to replace *konketsuji*.

Originating in media discourses, the term initially referred to individuals of white origin, most often women (Iwabuchi, 2014: 11-12), who were associated with characteristics such as beauty and desirableness⁴.

² For an overview to the individual contestations to national discourse of homogeneity, cfr. Murphy-Shigematsu 2000.

³ The question of how to refer to racial hybridity is a hotly debated one. I will here follow Ifekwunigwe (2004) and use the hyphenated term "mixed race" as an umbrella term that refers to individuals born from parents belonging to different racial groups.

⁴ These discourses are not completely new: "mixed-race" marriages with white women to better the Japanese race were advocated as a minority opinion in the pre-war eugenics debate. (See also Robertson 2002).

Hāfu is nowadays the most common way to refer to “mixed race”⁵, and is increasingly used to refer to people who, racial background notwithstanding, have a foreign parent. However, the cultural history of the term is still very much alive. With a few notable exceptions, media representation is still skewed towards people who have white origin⁶, and as the controversies surrounding Miss Universe Japan 2015 Miyamoto Ariana demonstrated, “mixed-race” people with black ancestry at times prove much more difficult to accept.

Throughout the last decade the *hāfu* body has acquired further significance as a symbol of an increasingly globalized country. “Mixed race” citizens of Japan are often represented as a bridge to the “outside world”, a precious asset to have in an age in which global interconnectivity has taken the spotlight. Paradoxically enough, this fascination with the “mixed race” body is not at all unrelated to the often self-orientalistic (Iwabuchi, 1994) insistence on particularism that characterizes most Japanese discourses on the nation. The insistence on a Japanese cultural hybridity that mixes modernity and tradition, of which some *hāfu* bodies become a complex symbol, is, as Friedman (1997) theorized, almost completely dependent on the widespread perception of essentialistic boundaries between the self and the other. White heritage becomes a symbol of modern “other” which is non-problematically fused with the Japanese “traditional” self.

Tokyo 2020 Ambassador Takigawa Christel, can be considered a suture point between the discourses of “mixed race”, nationalism and globalization. Her elite biracial body was the perfect symbol for an emerging national rhetoric that oscillates between particularism and universalism, that has also been instrumental in the ideological imagining of the upcoming Olympic tournament.

Becoming the Metropolis of Harmony: Tokyo 2020

In 2020, Tokyo will host the Olympics for the second time since 1964, becoming the first Asian city to do so. The bid for hosting the sports mega-event in 2020 was not the first: in 2009, Japan raced for hosting the 2016 Olympics. The candidacy was strongly wanted by the then mayor of Tokyo Ishihara Shintarō, who saw the event as a catalyst for tackling “the ‘adaptation to an aging and welfare society’, ‘consideration for environmental problems’ and ‘sustainable city development’ ” (Shimizu, 2014). Japan eventually lost to Brazil, but Ishihara came back to charge just two years after the proposal failed.

On June 11, 2011, just a few months after the disastrous Great Tōhoku Earthquake, Ishihara announced that Tokyo would make its bid to host the Olympics once again. On that same day, the diet passed a proposal to change the Fundamental Law on Sport: the new act emphasized a national responsibility of sport promotion. As worded by Kōno Ichirō, the director of the Japan Sport Council until September 2015, athletic disciplines were considered “an important strategic tool to show the existence of a nation” (Shimizu, 2014). Thus, the bid for the 2020 Olympics would have full governmental support, as it was now clear that it could have been used as a strategic tool to present a positive image of the country to the rest of the world (Roche, 2000).

It has been argued that mega-events such as the Olympics have an explicit political nature. Studying the development of mega-events in the 1800s and early 1900s, Roche argued that due to their “inter-national” nature they:

“helped to create a fragile space, something of an ‘international public culture’, in which ‘official’ versions of collective identities, particularly but not exclusively national identities, were asserted and recognised in an [...] international ‘world of nations’ ” (Roche, 2000: 22).

The historical situation has been deeply changed since the 1800s, and nationalism now co-exists with globalization in a relationship that is at times complicit, whilst at other times conflictual. Nevertheless, the

⁵ The term has also been the object of criticism: some members of the mixed-race community claim that since the original English word “half” implies incompleteness, the use of the word is discriminatory. Nonetheless, it still remains the most widely-used term to refer to mixed-race on the national level.

⁶ This is especially true of fashion and those sectors in the media that focus on beauty practices.

Olympics have remained a site for the display of “inter-nationalism”: it is in this light that seemingly “apolitical” mega-events such as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics have been recently re-analyzed. In his 2011 essay, Tagsold described how the event offered the opportunity to recuperate the war-tainted nationalistic symbols of the emperor and the national flag in a benign, peaceful light, thus contributing greatly to the reconstruction of a nationalistic sentiment (Tagsold, 2011). Similarly, the 2020 Olympic games are animated by a deeply self-conscious Japanese “brand nationalism” (Iwabuchi, 2007), this time centered on discourses of “western-eastern” hybridity.

The desire to show the “inter-national” aesthetic of the “Japanese national character” in the best possible way was evident in the discourse centered around the word *omotenashi*, that has been translated in the IOC speech as “hospitality”. The word *omotenashi*, popularly associated with Takigawa as it was one of the key points in her speech, has a distinctly nationalistic feel to it. It is implied to be a distinctive trait of a Japanese culture that is essentially different from its “western” counterpart. *Omotenashi* has been defined in the Japanese business world as the mindset that people in the service industry employ towards their clients – one that implies emotional tuning with the customer in order to make him or her feel at ease. Nagao and Umemuro (2012) imply in their definition a clear distinction between the strictly materially oriented “western” concept of hospitality and the feeling-oriented *omotenashi*, whose origins they trace back to tea ceremony, *ryokan* and geisha districts. The announcer’s take on hospitality, presupposes a Japanese actor and a foreign receiver, taking the mirror games of self and other to the international level, making explicit the connection between the intersecting local and the global dimensions of nationalism.

Roche also recognizes a globalist aspect of mega-events which appeal to the global, touristic consumer in three distinctive ways: the “specificity of when they occur, [...] the specificity of what uniquely dramatic and memorable activities and experiences occur when people attend them in person, and [...] the specificity of where they occur, namely the city that staged and ‘hosted’ them” (Roche, 2000: 26-27). Indeed, the potential global appeal is very highlighted in discourses surrounding the 2020 Olympics: the public is being presented with many innovations which are being developed in order to better accommodate the prospective tourists, such as foreign-language speaking robots (Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2017), free wi-fi services (Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2017) and so on. The citizens are also being invited to take part in the “internationalization” process of the Prefecture of Tokyo through volunteer activities such as translator or guide services (Tokyo Volunteer Navigator, n.d.).

What is surprising about the 2020 Olympic discourse is that the international discussion about it was radically different from the discussion nationally, as it was mostly focused on environmental problems and possibilities. Whereas it is not rare in Japan to hear that Takigawa’s internationalist contribution was significant in winning the race to the Olympics (Uotani, 2017), overseas commentary was more focused on prime minister Abe Shinzo’s speech about the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster and the narrative of a “safe capital city” which would not be affected in the slightest (BBC Sport, 2013; Longman, Fackler, 2013).

The national narrative surrounding the Olympic Games is consistent with Roche’s interpretation that mega-events “project the image and status of the local power elite which produced the event for the city’s public” (Roche, 2000: 10). In a time in which Japan’s elite is rushing to globalize, it is perfectly understandable that they would insist on the multiculturalism-globalism-internationalization triad, making the words “Unity in Diversity” one of the ideological pillars of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (The Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, n.d.).

Takigawa Christel between “East” and “West”

According to Eriksen, globalization as a modern phenomenon exists in the acceleration of multiple pre-

existing processes (Eriksen 2014), among which figure communication processes, economic flows and the movement of people. This last process is of particular interest to this article, as it could be considered the main factor behind two very important concepts that form its theoretical background, namely what Eriksen dubs "mixing" and "identity politics".

Mixing has been one of the theoretical keywords of the last 30 years, gaining the spotlight in disciplines such as postcolonial studies and anthropology. Eriksen understands mixing as a complex phenomenon that can take multiple different forms whilst being able to elude strong identities and fixed boundaries. It is not a necessarily new phenomenon, as it could be said that the cultures that are being mixed now are, to a bigger or lesser degree, the products of prior cultural mixing (which might have taken place at a slower pace). However, it is undeniable that we are assisting an acceleration of these processes, which is in turn generating the reaction that Eriksen refers to as identity politics. Identity politics seek to fix identities and re-establish often nationalistic boundaries, whose erasure are perceived by the members of the group as a threat (Eriksen 2014: 158-160).

Japan might be seen as a case in point for Eriksen's argument that "globalization does not create global people" (Eriksen 2014: 154). As Iwabuchi (1994) has pointed out in one of his earlier articles, the increase of international exchanges mostly had the effect of reinforcing the images of a particularistic national identity constructed through dialectical relations with the "Western" and the Asian other. Iwabuchi's main argument consists in the fact that Japan's self-image is not, as one might think, a tool in the battle against Western cultural imperialism. It is in fact complicit with western ideologies of domination (thus the term "self-orientalism") and it has been employed as a strategy to suppress the country's minorities as well as to ideologically ground the country's culturally imperialistic expansionist tactics in Asia. In other words, Japan's complicit self-orientalism is often utilized as an ideological tool, especially in those arenas in which the warfare tools of soft power take center stage.

Discourses of Japanese self-orientalist cultural nationalism, often based on the presupposition of uniqueness, have been significantly challenged by the narratives of internal diversity and multiculturalism which have emerged in the last 30 years. Furthermore, figures such as the *kikoku shijo* and *hāfu* have made visible the presence of individuals who cannot easily be labeled as either Japanese or "foreign". However, some of these identities have been subsumed into a newly emerging national ideology, who found in them a powerful tool to reimagine the nation as a hybrid between "western" modernity and "Japanese" tradition. Paradoxically, this ideological construction is reminiscent of the two orientalist gazes of traditionalism (here understood as the condition of being "stuck" in a pre-modern past) and the often dehumanizing hyper-futurism (Wagenaar 2016). In this, we can see a continuity with the mirror-games of self-image construction that Iwabuchi refers to.

This newly emerging discourse surrounding the nation is embodied in the selection of the *hāfu* newscaster Takigawa Christel as Olympic ambassador – an ambassador to the nation in an extremely inter-national context. Takigawa stands out among the 10 Olympic ambassadors as the only one who has no direct relations to the sports event. There is an undeniably globalist reasoning behind her selection, that would arguably be based on her status as an individual who is "global" in virtue of her "mixed-race". Her proficiency in French is further proof of this "international" status.

Takigawa Christel became famous as a female newscaster for Fuji Television, where she worked until 2013 (Suzuki, 2013)⁷. Viewers of Japanese television might also be familiar with her presence in commercials. Her line of work blurs the boundaries between journalist and that of the celebrity; she could be considered as a *tarento* (TV personality) that is endowed with a high cultural capital. Thus, their image, consumable in various merchandising such as yearly released calendars, puts together physical beauty with the added element of intelligence and social status.

⁷ Takigawa is now an independent newscaster and animal-rights activist.

Takigawa nowadays is perhaps more famous for her persona than her work as a broadcast. Her image, which is built around her *hāfu* identity, her high education⁸ and prestigious line of work, are tied to her multicultural background. Japanese individuals with white mixed-race backgrounds became increasingly well represented in the media since the 1970s. The word *hāfu* started being associated with characteristics such as beauty and cosmopolitanism (Iwabuchi, 2014). Contemporary discourses about *hāfu* are heavily influenced by discourses about globalization; Iwabuchi ironically remarks on how they are perceived “global not only in their looks but also in their way of thought” (Iwabuchi, 2014: 12).

Especially relevant to the construction of her persona is her father’s country of birth, France, often idealized and imbued with a high symbolic capital (Wyatt, 2017) and thus occupying a very special place in the network of shared meanings of the Japanese⁹. These elite connotations have landed her roles in commercials for high-end products such as Ebisu Beer and Shiseido make-up products, and at the same time her appearance in such advertisements are further reinforcing her image of prestige.

Takigawa’s multiculturalism plays its role into positioning her among the cultured, highly sophisticated upper-middle class, she is a perfect example of the ideal *global jinzai* (global human resource)¹⁰. Physically, with her black hair and very light-coloured skin, she is the ideal proxy for an elite class who is nationalistically looking outwards, who aspires to be modern (and thus “westernized”) while retaining some kind of “traditional Japaneseness”.

This perfectly balanced mixture between “Japanese” and foreign that allows her to be chosen as the proxy for a “new Japaneseness” is only possible because the physical characteristics inherited from the white side of her family are tame enough to allow her to exist in the middle ground of a spectrum that goes from “*jun-nihonjin*” to foreigner. As Iwabuchi pointed out (2014), advancement in plastic surgery and make-up techniques has made it possible for non-mixed Japanese to obtain the semblance of a facial structure that is racially ambiguous. It is hard to imagine an ambassador with no relation to sports and whose foreign looks were more visible than Takigawa taking center stage to culturally represent Japan as she did¹¹. Her white heritage, upper socio-economical status and gender made her the perfect candidate.

Because of her inherently “global” *hāfu* status and her linguistic proficiency, Takigawa is perceived as a “bridge” between the all-Japanese panel speakers and the international audience of the IOC. She assumes the role of the “internationally-oriented national economic power elite” that serves to “internationalize” the nationalistic endeavor of bidding to host the 2020 Olympics (Roche, 2000); her elite status granted in virtue of both her profession and her biracialism. These tensions between national and international clearly emerge from her ambassador speech, that I will analyze in the following section.

⁸ Takigawa has a bachelor’s degree in French literature from Aoyama Gakuin University.

⁹ For the self-orientalistic construction of the European “West” see MIYAKE, Toshio, *Occidentalismi, Venezia, Cafoscarina*, 2010, pp.103-107 (in Italian).

¹⁰ Chapple translates as following the definition of the term given by the MEXT and the METI:

“people who, in today’s competitive and cooperative world, can—while maintaining their sense of Japanese identity—possess a broad worldview based on both general and specialized education, have communicative and cooperative abilities to build relationships which go beyond values, cultures and different languages, and that have the ability to create new values and the desire to contribute to society now and in future generations” (Chapple, 2014. Cursive in original.)

As it can be inferred from the institutional definition, *global jinzai* are expected to be the agent of globalization in Japanese companies.

¹¹ A comparison with the media coverage that former Miss Universe Japan Ariana Miyamoto got two years later might be useful to illustrate this point. Her selection prompted an immediate reaction from the ultra-conservative population of the 2chan boards, widely considered to be the underbelly of Japan. Although the extreme stance taken by these netizens is definitely a minority opinion, the reportages of her victory mostly focused on racial discrimination. One could see a faint continuity between the framing of (especially black) *konketsuji* as social problem and Miyamoto’s media presence.

Takigawa Christel's speech: the "magic word" *omotenashi*

Takigawa's presentation in front of the IOC was conducted in French and lasted approximately five minutes long. She was preceded by former Tokyo governor Inose Naoki, who introduced her as "the one who would communicate to the audience how will Tokyo welcome people from all the world" (Huffington Post Japan, 2013). The announcer began her speech in the following way:

Tokyo will welcome you uniquely. In Japanese, we can express [the way in which Tokyo will welcome you] as omotenashi (Huffington Post Japan, 2013).

Since the beginning of her speech, Tokyo, in virtue of being the capital city of Japan, is positioned as "unique". This references the cultural nationalist Nihonjinron discourse, that in the 70s aimed to construct a Japanese identity defined by its alterity from the "West". Similarly, *omotenashi* is constructed as a traditional (and thus exclusive to Japan) concept, unable to be rendered in foreign words. The alien quality of this concept is further emphasized by Takigawa's gestures; she spells out every syllable with a peculiar gesture of the hands, and then repeats the word once again, bowing with her hands held together as if she was praying¹². Overall the first part of the speech is the most popular one, and it is the reason why the word *omotenashi* was premiated with the "Buzzword of the Year" award (Osumi, 2013).

That is the spirit of hospitality without expecting anything in exchange, that has been transmitted to us from our ancestors and is deeply rooted in our hyper-modern culture. The word omotenashi expresses why Japanese people help each other and why they think that the guests they are welcoming are important.

Here, Takigawa makes a first reference to the hybrid cultural nationalist discourse which sees Japan as a hyper-technological, hyper-modern society that is nonetheless spiritually connected to its traditionalist roots. Once again, the apparently deep links between *omotenashi* and "Japaneseness" are highlighted.

Takigawa then proceeds to give examples of *omotenashi*.

Here is a simple example. If by any chance you lost anything in Tokyo, you would almost certainly find it back. Even money. In fact, last year more than 30 million dollars were brought back to the Tokyo Police Bureau as a lost item. According to a recent survey conducted on 75,000 people who travel the world, Tokyo is the safest city in the world. Also, according to this survey, Tokyo ranked first even in the following categories: traffic safety, cleanliness, and the kindness of the taxi drivers.

Safety is a priority concern when organizing mega-events, and they can even become catalysts to pass new security laws. Here Takigawa is appealing to this, describing Japan's safe environment as directly related to its unique culture. In what could be presented as a twist on the "futuristic" variant of Japanese nationalism, the country is presented as an unbelievably hyper-safe environment. She then goes on to describe what in the *nihonjinron* discourse is presented as the reason behind Japan's uniqueness.

*You can observe these resources in every neighborhood. The traditional **oriental** culture. Together with top class **occidental** shopping and restaurants they are in this town, who has the most Michelin stars in the*

¹² A video of the speech is available on ANN news's Youtube channel at the following link. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hgggygKWwhg> (accessed on ??, ??, 201?)

world; everything is incorporated in the landscape of this futuristic city. (my emphasis).

Here Takigawa slightly changes the topic, going back to the motif of hybridity. In a (self)orientalist twist, Japan is presented as being the perfect union between “oriental” and “occidental” cultures, providing to the visiting tourist exotic Japanese entertainment while at the same time offering them the safety of the already known. Following the reasoning behind her presentation, it is this co-existence of exotic “oriental tradition” and “foreign innovation” that makes Tokyo “futuristic”. It can be argued that these words have an even more powerful impact when pronounced by someone that is *herself* the union between the “oriental” and the “occidental”.

Takigawa’s hybrid, biracial image resonates with the nationalistic ideology as she is conflated to what is being constructed as the idealized “futuristic Japan”: the biracial body becomes the flesh for the multicultural, hybrid nationalist ideology tailor-made for the age of globalization. In the international space of competition that is the Olympic bid, the physical thus becomes a mirroring representation of the ideological.

The Elite Biracial Body as Proxy for “Future Japanese-ness”

Being frequently featured in television, both as a newscaster and as a *tarento* featured in commercials, Takigawa is very well known to the audience of Japanese television. Her multicultural background, high profile announcer career and her endorsement of high-end products mutually reinforce themselves, creating the image of an elite superwoman. By choosing her as the ambassador for the 2020 Olympics, the Japanese Olympics Committee, backed by the government, has chosen the “face” of Japan that it wanted to show on an international arena. Takigawa Christel’s biracialism, far from being subversive, becomes the embodiment of the cultural strategy of blending new and old, “oriental” and “occidental”, and constructing it into a new national(istic) self-identity. Takigawa’s presentation was incredibly successful nation-wide; it could be assumed that part of this success derives from the fact that she herself is constructed as the perfect mirror for the nationalist discourse in the subtext of the words she was addressing to the IOC.

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