

誌 上 討 論 (Exchange)

Comments on Ichiro Numazaki's "Imagined Commonality"

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Professor Numazaki has indeed led a globetrotting life to date, from childhood to young adulthood and on into the years when one can write an auto-ethnography with amassed experiences that are worth relating and worthy of reflection. His article "Imagined Commonality" raises numerous interesting issues that might be dismissed as deceptively simple, if not thought through. It seems to me that perspective, even of an extreme Amazonian and analytic kind (Kohn 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2004), is the elephant in the paper. Beyond the author, the reader is introduced to a series of cameo appearances inhabiting shared space and time; is one person's Shamisenya or Hayami Yu the same as another's? One is ever-compelled to ask whose Japan, whose Hawai'i, and whose America are we talking about? One can further refine the questions; whose Sendai, Honolulu, and Michigan? Of course very clearly and unabashedly it is the author's placement and impression of places. All anthropology, self or other focused, is about perception from a perspective. Yet, the reader might rightfully ask what 'of' these people and places anyway? Is ethnicity or identity *jus soli*, of the soil, or is it *jus sanguinis*, of the blood? Can it, or perhaps must it, be both? Or have globalization, mobility and fragmentation progressively conferred meaningful feelings of belonging to a more individualistic and affect-oriented realm. There is also the issue of a retrospective gaze at 1985 from the vantage point of 2015; we are dealing with reflections reflecting back self and other. These are all fascinating inter-subjectivities and perspectives that could be further unpacked. Numazaki ends his piece by referencing the cosmopolitan theorization of Kwame Appiah (2006) and Nigel Rapport (2012). He concludes

with the some questions, one being “Can Japan become more cosmopolitan?” And this is where I choose to weigh in.

The first logical bookend question regards squaring of the objects of inquiry. What is meant by cosmopolitan? What is meant by Japan? And why are they juxtaposed? To start, Ulrich Beck’s notion of “forced cosmopolitanism” is helpful (Beck 2009). A key point Beck makes is that we are often and increasingly thrust into our cosmopolitan engagements as opposed to choosing them. Think for example of the difference in making one’s way as a refugee in opposition to the selective cosmopolitanism of a Kantian inspired global citizen choosing to go to university in another country. I would emphasise that cosmopolitan by force and cosmopolitan by choice are not separate. Numazaki’s paper underscores this. Force and choice (structure and agency) are entwined in one’s many lifelines to vamp of Tim Ingold’s meshwork concept (2011). That is to say they are always in dialogue, subject to changes over time and in relation to the environments where acts are played out and individuals are played upon. In this macro meets micro sense, Japan has little choice but to become more cosmopolitan. Beyond a few select ideologues, the dream that Japanese language or culture is destined to play a dominant role (with the key word here being dominant not influential) in international intersections and discourses is more or less dead. Japan, whether thorough language, trade, education or migration policy or through dealing with Fukushima’s global impact or reactions to whaling ‘research’ is progressively forced to open up and accept peripheral opinions and ideas. Young Ichy returning to Sendai from Buffalo as an “ethnoperipheral” child in 1965, post Olympics but pre Expo, was a surely difficult transition. But I wonder would it be the same today? How has Sendai changed? How have youthful perceptions of self and other? I think of my own neighbourhood in the ‘multicultural’ Canadian hometown where I grew up. I played ice hockey with Japanese-Canadians, Chinese-Canadians, and Korean-Canadians alongside Canadians with a melange of pedigrees European, South American. My classmates were (and I am guessing here) made up of 20% kids of East Asian descent. Whatever the statistics, being Asian, or having an Asian

name, was not uncommon. The spelling of Greek or South Asian names confounded us far more than that Kitagawa or Fujimoto, Chen or Kim. However in my high school of over 2000 students there were only three ‘black’ students; two of whom were biracial including my girlfriend at the time whose mother was Trinidadian and father Japanese-Canadian. These students stood out then, *circa* 1989, but I doubt they would stand out today. The point is, the Honolulu of 1985 may well have produced an imagined ethnic commonality, perhaps given the examples of food and festivals a shared “ethno-symbolic” semiotic system of understandings even (Smith 1999). But I think the author might have had a similar experience in areas with historically large East Asian populations such as Vancouver or San Francisco. Cosmopolitanism in such areas is initially forced, but gradually it becomes chosen. If someone wearing a cowboy hat ordering ramen is now imaginable in my hometown, surely East Lansing today houses similar individuals.

In this paper we are dealing with particular places and individual interpretations, and bravo for that. I would opt to add and build on this paper and suggest that it is in internal peripheries where the future of cosmopolitanism in a Japanese context is taking root. Numazaki notes that “Japan is a highly ‘discriminatory’ society in that it draws a sharp line between those inside and those outside.” I agree (Ertl and Hansen 2015). I am frequently asked by Tokyoites if living in “*inaka*” (middle of nowhere) Hokkaido is difficult due to its rural (and presumed closed or conservative) nature. Just as frequently I savour the expression of confusion and shock when I reply that I find rural Hokkaido to be a far more tolerant and cosmopolitan place than much of Kanto (Hansen 2014). One can very easily be enveloped into a myopic Japanese worldview in Kanto or Kansai. Though there are many more cosmopolitan choices available (*à la* Appiah); foreign films, Dutch lessons, and Vietnamese pho, one is not forced to engage. The average “Suzuki-san can” choose to partake or not as these cosmopolitan offerings can easily be ignored, kept on the periphery while maintaining an exclusively “Japanese only” existence and worldview is possible. However, in the Hokkaido town of under 5000 where I did doctoral

fieldwork and now live, there are numerous Chinese workers, elderly Zainichi, a smattering of Brazilians and Philippines, an American English teacher, and a woman from the Ukraine and another from Kyrgyzstan who are both married to local Japanese men. If you go to the local convenience store, *onsen*, or *matsuri* they will be there, with fluent Japanese, broken Japanese, wanting to fit in, happy to stand out, but be sure you *will* rub elbows. Indeed, at a recent party all were a bit taken back when I noted that most of the people over 60 and most of our children under 10 were *dōsan*ko (Hokkaido Born), but the rest of us are from Kyoto, Fukuoka, Okinawa, Saitama, Alberta or Kiev, etc. Cosmopolitanism in Japanese daily life, albeit often of a reluctant and forced nature at first, is perhaps where one least expects it.

It is in this context of betwixt and between forced and chosen cosmopolitanism, that I confess I have a different reading of Rapport's *Anyone* than Numazaki. That is to say, I think author and Rapport are of the same mind but speaking at cross purposes. The main informant in Rapport's aforementioned book, Rickey Hirsch, has led a cosmopolitan life of contingent chance, mobility and agency. Rickey was forced to make some choices imposed by economic conditions, his nationality, and via the context of ethnicity, nationality and war. But, like all individual humans (our shared but individuated universal humanity), or "anyone," he also elected to take chances, make plans, and in these endeavors he was lucky and unlucky. He has led a cosmopolitan life, crossing borders, fitting in and not fitting in, feeling prejudice and having his own regrets at his mistreatment of others. The key point is that these very human conditions are often not determined by social structures or social expectations. Rickey, like Ichy, and like you the reader, are all somebody; individual someone(s) to take from Jacques Derrida who are "particular" (2008) and someone(s) to take from Donna Haraway (2008) who are "significant others". All beings are thrown into an ever-changing world and humans (alongside sentient others I would argue with more space) make our way with capabilities and options, not just structures and obstacles. Indeed for Rapport anyone is someone, a person creatively making and navigating a life. Importantly, anyone

can never be everyone. Everyone is the imposition of expectation, the rooting out of creativity, individuality, and anomaly. Everyone is the *ware ware nihonjin* of *nihonjin ron* the presumption of similarity. And, it seems to me, Numazaki is anyone but everyone.

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