

# Becoming Asian in Australia: Migration and a Shift in Gender Relations among Young Japanese

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## Introduction

1. Japanese temporary migration has been on the increase over the last few decades, and thousands of Japanese students and Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) enter the country every year.<sup>[1]</sup> Upon arrival, these temporary migrants become minority members of a society where the white majority has cultural dominance over the 'ethnic' Others. By drawing on the concept of 'contact zones', in this article I explore the question of minority migrants' agency with a focus on everyday representations of unequal racial relations—as viewed from their standpoints. I pay particular attention to the intersection between the structural power relations in which migrants-as-agents are located, and how these actors discursively develop desirable subject positions. By responding to the theme of this Special Issue titled 'Post-Colonial and Contemporary Sexual Contact Zones in East Asia and the Pacific', my analysis deals with interview narratives which explicitly refer to gendered aspects of being young Japanese newcomers in Australia.
2. My analysis is based on a case study of Japanese WHMs, and language and vocational students in Australia. In interview narratives, the Japanese women and men self-consciously engaged with, and creatively appropriated ethnicised gender stereotypes prevalent in their host society. Central to their discursive practice was the colonial binary oppositions between the dominant West and feminised Asia, from which their marginality stemmed. I argue that their attempt to make sense of, take advantage of, and resist their new social location was simultaneously about seeking more satisfactory identities. My analysis discusses how the women's pursuit of a more powerful social position was closely connected with the men's experience of status loss, resulting in a shift in their gender relations. In conclusion, I point to a wider implication of cross-cultural encounters on migrants' identity formation.

## Context and approach: contact zones through a gendered lens

3. In 2009, nearly 760,000 Japanese nationals were living abroad as temporary residents, compared to less than 400,000 in 1990.<sup>[2]</sup> In that period, Australia has become a prominent destination, and it has now surpassed the UK to become the third most common host country for Japanese after the US and China.<sup>[3]</sup> The popularity of Australia is particularly pronounced among WHMs and students of English or vocational courses, who are the focus of this article. Since the Working Holiday (WH) program commenced in 1981, twice as many Japanese have chosen Australia compared to Canada, the second most popular destination.<sup>[4]</sup> Australia is also a favoured place to study, as seen by the fact that it was the fourth most popular destination for Japanese overseas students in 2008.<sup>[5]</sup> Of the 56,151 Japanese students who commenced study in Australia in 2010, over a quarter studied at vocational schools and nearly half were English language students (a total of 41,465).<sup>[6]</sup> The real number of English students is estimated to be twice as large, for many of them study on a tourist or WH visa.<sup>[7]</sup>

4. In most categories of Japanese migrants to English-speaking, western countries, women tend to outnumber men. For example, Paul White reports that women outnumber men in all groups of Japanese migrants in London except for expatriates, while Curtis Andressen and Keiichi Kumagai point to the greater number of women among Japanese university students in Melbourne.<sup>[8]</sup> Currently, only 36 per cent of Japanese residents in Australia are men.<sup>[9]</sup> This gender imbalance has ignited considerable scholarly interest, and numerous investigations have offered explanations of this phenomenon. A major 'push factor' is thought to be women's limited opportunities due to gender oppression in Japanese society, especially in the work domain.<sup>[10]</sup> In particular, Karen Kelsky, in discussing highly educated and economically privileged 'internationalist' Japanese women, argues that their desire for association with the West is about their rejection of Japan in general, and specifically of Japanese men.<sup>[11]</sup> This article overlaps with these existing studies on Japanese female migrants in that I take a gendered perspective in my analysis of migrant narratives. I diverge from these studies, however, by also viewing male migrants through a gendered lens. When Japanese temporary migrants such as WHMs and students arrive in Australia, they are frequently marginalised in the host economy and society, in part because of their newcomer status and their lack of English language skills. In Anglo-Celtic dominant societies such as Australia, they are marked as ethnically 'other', and this too contributes to their social marginalisation. Their ethnicity is, moreover, always represented as gendered. By taking into account both female and male migrants' gendered perspectives, this article compares the ways in which female and male co-nationals negotiate their social position in the host society.
5. In discussing Australia as a space where migrants encounter a new web of power relations as well as bringing their own, I draw on Mary Pratt's concept of 'contact zones'. Contact zones are 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.'<sup>[12]</sup> Pratt developed this concept to investigate imperial encounters. Unlike a term such as 'colonial frontier', which evokes a Eurocentric image of imperial expansion, the idea of 'contact zones' is intended to emphasise the mutuality of influence such encounters have on identities of the powerful and less powerful alike, as they come into contact in a shared space.<sup>[13]</sup> I share Pratt's interest in privileging the everyday practices of the colonised, and their agency to appropriate, take advantage of and resist the ways in which they are represented by the colonisers. Given this, the central concern of this article is how those less powerful in contact zones '*engage with the colonizer's terms*' (italics in original).<sup>[14]</sup>
6. The colonial context associated with Pratt's concern is relevant to my case study. Young Japanese in my study are firmly situated in the dominant imagining of international relations developed as a result of Euro-American colonialism. Matching and emulating the economic and military might of the European and American colonial superpowers was directly related to Japan's effort to modernise itself.<sup>[15]</sup> When it comes to national identity and Japan's place in the world, the image of the West has since continued to be Japan's reference point.<sup>[16]</sup> Due to its history as an offshore 'branch' of the rich and powerful British Empire, Australia has been widely imagined as belonging to the western world in a racialised, colonial view of the world.
7. By drawing on the concept of 'contact zones', this article explores the question of minority migrants' agency, with a focus on everyday representations of unequal racial relations in Australia—as viewed from their standpoints. My findings show that, as young Japanese enter their host society, these relations of the contact zone become one factor that shifts the grounds on which intra-ethnic gender relations are played out.

## Methodology

8. This article is based on interview data that I obtained in Sydney between 2005 and 2008. Interviews included for the purpose of this article were conducted with thirty-three temporary migrants. Of these, one

interview was conducted in Melbourne. Twenty-one interlocutors were women and twelve were men, [17] roughly representing the aforementioned gender balance in the wider Japanese population in the country. Those on the WH visas were the largest group (eighteen), [18] followed by those on a temporary skilled worker visa ('locally hired workers', seven) and student visa holders (eight). The gender balance within each group varied greatly. Five out of the eighteen WHMs and one out of seven locally hired workers were males, whereas the student group was mostly male (six out of eight). The age of the interlocutors ranged from twenty to forty years at the time of the interview, with the average age being twenty-eight years. The fifteen males were equally spread in different age groups (a third each in the 19–20, 25–26 and 28–30 years old cohorts). The women tended to be older, as only two of them were under 25 years. The rest of the sixteen females were equally divided into the 25–27 and 28–30 year old cohorts. All were single when they arrived, except one WHM and one locally hired worker, who came with their Japanese husbands.

9. I recruited interlocutors by advertising on Japanese language websites, targeting those in Sydney, flyers at migration agent offices, and through personal introductions made by interlocutors. My recruitment method meant that I mostly interviewed people that I had never met before, with a few exceptions. Of various interlocutor attributes and past experience that may have impacted on their perceptions, behaviour and beliefs, heteronormativity is a particular issue that needs some clarification. In hindsight, my recruitment method may have meant that interlocutors were less likely to initiate frank discussions of topics falling outside the dominant heteronormativity in Japan and Australia. For instance, the majority of the interlocutors proactively offered accounts that suggested their heterosexual orientation, and their questions and comments about me as an interviewer/migrant also assumed my heterosexuality. Only one interlocutor whom I met through the introduction of a gay Japanese friend identified as 'possibly gay'. Had I specifically sought non-heterosexually identifying migrants, different discussions might have emerged. Heteronormative expectations, beliefs and practices exhibited in my data must therefore be understood in this limited context, and only as one of the discourses circulating among Japanese people in Australia.

### Japanese as the racial other in Australia

10. Prior to arrival, interlocutors either had a strong desire to be associated with white westerners, or looked forward to interactions with (white, western) Australians as part of an authentic Australian experience. Expectations were at times quite high:

By the word 'home-stay', I pictured being welcomed into a friendly happy family house. The image of a Christmas turkey on a big dinner table and everyone is wearing a party hat. And the people would become my second family. I would keep in touch for years to come (Ryo, male, 29, WHM). [19]

11. In such imaginings, the Japanese as the racial Other is seamlessly integrated into a group of westerners. Similarly, theme parks such as the British-themed British Hills in Fukushima prefecture are an indication of how the West is widely imagined as devoid of class and ethnic tensions in Japan. According to Philip Seargeant, British Hills employs native English speakers (who 'look British', that is, white people) to interact with visitors in English. [20] Factors prevalent in the UK, such as racial, linguistic and religious diversity, unemployment and poverty are obviously omitted from its representation of Britishness. As the marketing slogan succinctly expresses, this sanitisation makes British Hills 'More English than England Itself' for the Japanese visitors. [21]
12. In contrast to the harmonious image of the West and the secure position of the Japanese within it, interlocutors' expectations for being welcomed by Australians with open arms were often unmet:
 

I had a terrible time at my host family's house. I lived with a single mother who always wanted me to look after her ten year-old boy. She was often irritable and complaining about everything. I realised I was there just to help her with things around the house, like a live-in nanny. But I was paying rent! (Rieko, female, 30, student).
13. For many Japanese in my study, the experience of racism brought home what it meant to be the racial

Other. Always describing the perpetrators as white Australians, my interlocutors reported several such incidents:

Someone on the street shouted at me in Melbourne, 'Hey Japanese, give us money!' (Maki, female, 24, WHM).

[On difficulties of living in Australia] on the Gold Coast, we got eggs and water bombs thrown at us by young Aussie men. [Kumiko: Do you think you were targeted because you are Japanese?] I think it's Asians [who are the intended target]. But there are many Japanese there, so maybe Japanese (Miyoko, female, 30, WHM).

14. For the majority, becoming the target of racism was unexpected. Not one interlocutor mentioned that they anticipated racial tensions in Australia before arrival, and there was no expectation of being unwelcome or having trouble fitting in amongst white Australians because of their skin colour. In other words, they failed to imagine themselves as a racialised Other, in what they perceived as a 'white people's country'. Such a gap between the expectation and the reality was also a salient feature of narratives of racism in the UK as experienced by Japanese university students. Yumiko Nishimuta's study describes how the pre-arrival image of the UK as a pleasant country of the 'English gentleman' was shattered when the students became the target of racism, a totally new experience since they belonged to the ethnic majority in their own country. [22] Nishimuta further explains that her interlocutors seldom expected to experience racism, especially on campus, because as educated and middle-class members of the ethnic majority in their home society, they did not dream of being discriminated against by equally educated, middle-class white people in the UK. [23]
15. Among my interlocutors, not everyone was bothered by racism to the same extent. Natsuko (female, 30, WHM), for instance, who had many friends around her and was very much enjoying her new life in Sydney, shrugged off her experience of having her foot bruised when a man on a street threw an egg at her: 'I don't think he targeted me, probably it could have been any other person.' She did not consider that the man's act reflected her lower social status, but thought of it rather as an isolated incident. However, more often than not, such experiences intensified the interlocutors' sense of isolation from the mainstream.
16. The social marginalisation of the young Japanese was not only a result of experiences of racism, but also derived from their position in the local labour market. Interlocutors frequently expressed feelings of exploitation when the conversation turned to their workplaces. Of the twenty-five interviewees who worked, twenty-one of them worked for local Japanese businesses as waitpersons, shopkeepers, kitchen-hands, dishwashers and entry-level administrators. For those in the hospitality industry, working in the black market was extremely common, which increased the chance of maltreatment and labour law violations by employers. All white-collar workers in my data were female administrators at the minimum-salary level or just above. Interlocutors reasoned that it was their newly arrived status in Australia, a low level of English language proficiency and insufficient local work experience that lowered their bargaining power as workers.

I was paid \$7 [an hour as a souvenir shop attendant], cash in hand. They [Japanese employers] definitely take advantage of us (*ashimoto miteru*). It's like 'You don't want to work here? Fine, we can find someone else' (Emi, female, 27, WHM).

[Discussing her full-time work as an administrator-receptionist at a Japanese-owned office] In fact, I wanted to work for an Australian company [...] but I never got interviews. I don't dislike my current job, but I do a lot of unpaid overtime, and after one year, I'm still paid at the entry-level. [Kumiko: Do you know if you will get a pay rise?] Apparently it does happen to some people [...] but it's a small company and those above me are not going to leave. [Kumiko: Why not?] They won't dare trying Australian firms, and for what benefits would they leave this job for another *nikkei* (Japanese) job? [Mika, female, 27, locally hired worker]
17. These experiences highlight the young migrants' isolation from the mainstream in the economic realm, as they heavily relied on precarious jobs in the Japanese niche market, which is itself a marginalised section of the Australian economy. All these instances discussed above illustrate that, instead of being treated as an equal member in the conflict-free imagined West, the young Japanese occupied a position of the marginalised Other, both because of their physical appearance, and their status as newcomers with a non-English speaking background. In what follows, I will explore the ways in which Japanese migrants

discursively negotiated their gendered and ethnicised social positioning. They variously exercised their agency to access a desirable subject position. My findings will show how gendered ideas of racial differences were simultaneously reproduced and resisted in the contact zones.

### Shifting Japanese gender relations: women's 'popularity' in the contact zone

18. Interview narratives repeatedly brought up the perception that Japanese women were more popular than Japanese men with Australian people. Keiko (female, 31, WHM) claimed the general likeability of her own gender group in the following manner:

My host family liked me very much, and were very kind to me. But they wouldn't have enjoyed having a Japanese man as a guest, because he would be less open-minded and generally incommunicative.

19. The self-portraits of female interlocutors tended to highlight their superior communication skills, better adaptability and flexibility in comparison with their perception of rigid, uncommunicative and maladapted Japanese men, who lack English language proficiency. Such claims are also reported by Japanese women who work as skilled workers in Singapore.<sup>[24]</sup> Emphasis on Japanese men's undesirability often went hand in hand with a statement that they as Japanese women enjoyed a better status in the host society.
20. The supposed popularity of Japanese women with Australians was most often discussed in relation to their romantic/sexual attractiveness to western men. Several interlocutors had a past or present relationship with men from countries such as Australia, South Africa, Canada or the UK. The commonality of such a configuration, as opposed to the reverse case of the Japanese male/western female combination, has been noted in existing literature.<sup>[25]</sup> Highlighting their closer association with the dominant social group in Australia, the female interlocutors accentuated the changing grounds for their gender relations with co-national men. The praise for western men came as a package with claims of undesirability of Japanese men. For example, Natsuko (female, 30, WHM) bluntly branded co-national males as 'low quality':

For the present, they are considered the lowest rank [in Australian society], I think. First of all, they are small-bodied, and there is an issue of poor communication and escorting skills. They tend to be silent, and not at all able to whisper sweet nothings to women.

21. Kazuyo (female, 23, student) complimented Asian men, but only for their ability to emulate western men's escorting skills, which she did not think the Japanese men possessed:

I personally like Asian men. Japanese men are an exception, but Asian men are proud of their 'Ladies First' attitude. Like western men, these Asian men have this male pride for their ability to treat women well.

22. Male interlocutors were acutely aware of being cast as unpopular in the host society, especially as an object of sexual attention. Mitsuru (male, 33, locally hired worker) voiced a widely shared view among my male interlocutors regarding the different treatment they and their female counterpart receive in Australia:

It's easy for them [Japanese women] to become friends with Aussies, because [Australian] men will just come to them. Nobody will come to us.

23. Japanese men frequently discussed their marginal social position. They portrayed western men as corrupting Japanese women through their dominant social position, while pro-western Japanese women were depicted as undesirable. The recurrent phrase used in these discussions was *namerareteru* ('being made a fool of'):

I'm proud to be Japanese, so when I feel I am *namerareteru*, I hate it. I often feel this way in Sydney (Yasushi, 23, student).



24. Several other male interlocutors made similar comments. When doing so, it was noticeable how they always placed themselves as angry, but nevertheless passive observers of the phenomenon. Tetsuo (male, 26, student) 'feels like punching stupid Aussies acting like playboys with Asian women, thinking they are cool (*iketeru*)', but only 'stare[s] at them like this (indicating persistence)' in response. Shin'ichi (male, 28, student) also witnessed flirtation between Australian men and Japanese women. He said it made him 'very angry' (*suge mukatsuku*) to see such a scene, but without offering further comments.
25. Female interlocutors took advantage of the racialised and gendered logic of the contact zones that favoured them over Japanese men, whose undesirability was portrayed as innate and universal. Japanese women's (symbolic) attachment to the dominant males of Australian society can be interpreted as discursively mitigating the gendered power imbalance with their male counterparts, who collectively dominate many spheres of contemporary Japanese society. Individual desires and aspirations are socially, culturally and historically shaped, and their ability to advance their agendas (i.e. the capacity to exercise agency) is differentiated due to power relations. These power relations, furthermore, may shift or persist. As diverse actors enact their agency to achieve their own goals, it inevitably creates situations of dominance and resistance.<sup>[26]</sup> For the Japanese youths in my study, being in contact zones shifted their gendered relations, and the women's pursuit of a more powerful social position was simultaneously the men's experience of status loss. What persisted in this changing context, however, was the discursive dominance of western men over both groups. This is because while non-white women's idealisation of western men, and rejection of non-white men based on their ethnicity may have the effect of empowering the women, this also 'reproduces white male heterosexual privilege'.<sup>[27]</sup>
26. I have so far discussed Japanese women's positive self re-evaluation, and Japanese men's sense of devaluation in relation to western men. In the following section, I will shift attention to the discursive portrayal of western women in Australia.

### Negotiating marginality: attitudes towards Australian women

27. The pairing of the Japanese woman and the western man is unlikely to raise anxiety in Australian society, because the gendered power relations are congruent with the racialised power relations in this particular contact zone. However, the reverse combination is perhaps more confronting to both Australians, especially women, and Japanese, especially men, because of its disturbance of the existing alignment of gendered and racialised power relations.<sup>[28]</sup> Such a coupling was totally absent from my data. The only case of relationships my male interlocutors had with non-Japanese women involved Korean women. Japanese men in my data frequently maintained discursive distance from Australian women:

I'm indecisive so I couldn't compete with strong Australian women. That's why I don't fancy the idea of having [one of] them as a girlfriend (Takeshi, male, 26, WHM).

I have a Japanese girlfriend. There are a lot of Japanese couples around me too. [Kumiko: Why do you think?] Well, the conversations wouldn't last otherwise, because we couldn't express everything well. The cultures are different too. (Tomoyuki, male, 20, student)

Asian men aren't really seen as sexual partners [by Australian women]. Some are into Asian men, but that's rare (Yasushi, male, 23, student).

28. Some men in my study voiced strident criticism of Australian women:

Oji ['Aussie'] women drink like men, and when they get drunk, they are so loud (Shin'ichi, male, 28, WHM).

I prefer Japanese women. I might sound like a misogynist, but Aussie women have no grace. And they want everything. They are like 'Lady first, open the door for me', but at the same time 'I'm a woman, protect me' (Tetsuo, male, 26, student).

29. The unfavourable evaluation of Australian women was constantly contrasted with a positive representation

## of Japanese femininity:

I'd love to marry a Japanese. Aussie women are strong, but Japanese are delicate, gentle and pure. I love women who are homely and pay due respect to men. I've never liked white women, they are like men (Yasushi, male, 23, student).

30. Japanese men's passive distancing from, or defensive rejection of Australian women were always coloured by their invisibility and almost asexual role in these contact zones. Asian men's disempowered position in the West has been pointed out by others. For example, David Eng states that the popular US cultural imaginary assigns to Asian-American men the role of the 'emasculated sissy'. [29] Richard Fung, in a similar vein, points out that in the realm of US-dominated western cultural representation, the Asian man has long been shown as either the 'wimp' or the kung fu master/ninja/samurai—'almost always characterized by a desexualized Zen asceticism'. [30] A similar process of de-sexualisation of the Asian man is at play in Anglo-dominated Australian society. Unlike Japanese women who eroticise the West, [31] Australia, as the West, is largely a de-eroticised place for the Japanese men in my study. In the context of this particular contact zone, Japanese men's rejection of Australian women, as well as that of Japanese women who favour western men, is their assertion that they indeed possess the power to reject these women, and not the other way around. In other words, it is through this rejection that the men resisted the dominating force of the gendered and racialised hierarchy in the host society, in their search for respect and influence as agentic actors. But, in so doing, I argue that they risked becoming complicit in perpetuating the western colonial regime of racial hierarchy, which stereotypes Asian men as undesirable sissies or unenlightened misogynists (presumably as opposed to appropriately manly yet gentlemanly western men).

31. Despite their more favourable position in the imagined West, Japanese women also rejected Australian (western) women, and in their accounts, used this rejection to accentuate their own desirability as romantic partners of western men:

You know how messy Australian women are. My colleagues' desks are filthy. I can't imagine how they can ever find boyfriends. This is why I live with other Asian women. Always clean and no money problems (Satoko, female, 36, locally hired worker).

Japanese women are becoming stronger but still quite feminine, so Australian men find us sweet. Australian women are getting increasingly tougher, so...they won't satisfy their men's wish to be devoted to and looked after (Yoshie, female, 32, locally hired worker).

32. In asserting their desirability, female interlocutors often relied on ethnicised gender stereotypes. Emi (female, 27, WHM) was, in her own words, a 'proud traditionalist' who planned to quit her work as a dancer at the age of thirty, 'because I'm a woman'. She shared her views of what men and women's roles should be:

Before I came here, I was thinking like 'yay, handsome blond boyfriends for me! But...after a couple of short relationships with them [Australian men], I've reconfirmed my preference for Japanese men. This must be a cultural difference, but I like men who are dignified in a manly way.... As for [Australian] women, they totally lack femininity, by ordering men around and trying to be equal. I couldn't do that, I don't even mind walking three steps behind a man (*sanpo sagatte tsuiteiku*—a phrase to express submissive female loyalty to their male partners).

33. Promoting the subordinate nature of Japanese women's position in relationships with men might help them claim their greater attractiveness compared to western women. However, it directly clashes with their newly gained upper hand over Japanese men. Emi's comments express this ambivalence. In the above comment, she seems to advocate women's role as trailing spouses, but in the same interview, she passionately supported 'girl power'. Emi explained how she disagreed with the manager when he said his Japanese dance studio did not need female students:

I told him girls are much more active than boys, and there is no way not to use their energy. Initially he was reluctant, but I said 'You don't understand, girls are impressive. Let me create a new team, please!'

34. Such contradictions were frequently observed in both male and female interlocutors' narratives. When Tetsuo (male, 26, student) relayed his Australian male friends' ambitions to acquire 'good cars, good suits, good watches, and Japanese girlfriends', he expressed a mix of pride and condemnation: he was proud of the desirable status of fellow Japanese, but condemned western men's open claim for women from his home country. While enjoying the attention from interested western men, Keiko (female, 31) was also aware of an Australian stereotype that views Asian women as sex workers. She confided that although she was aware of this image, it was still shocking to hear her friend's Australian flatmate say that he thought of Asian women whenever he heard the word 'prostitutes'. Similarly, after praising western men, two female interlocutors felt the need to state that they were not a 'yellow cab'. This label was popularised by Japanese female journalist Ieda Shoko in the early 1990s to refer to young Japanese who go abroad, in particular to the US, to seek sexual adventures with foreign men. Well aware of a negative representation of Japanese women in the West, these interlocutors sought to balance between the advantageous and disadvantageous aspects of emphasising their 'popularity' with western men.
35. The ambivalent nature of Japanese WHMs and students' narratives about their shifting self-representations evidences the multiplicitous nature of subjectivity, and how people adopt various subject positions in an emotional and subconscious way. [32] The young people's resistance against their marginal status as one of Australia's minority migrants and their at times defensive claims to their own desirability also illustrate a crucial link between identity and power. Even though there are competing discourses and practices to allow for a diversity of subject positions, occupying the dominant subject position may come with a 'reward' in the form of 'such things as social power, social approval and even material benefits'. [33] People come to have an interest or emotional commitment to a particular subject position (i.e. they invest in a certain identity), because they expect satisfaction, reward or payoff. [34] From this viewpoint, the temporary migrants' attempt to make sense of, take advantage of, and resist their location in the gendered and ethnicised landscape of the contact zones can also be interpreted as their exercise of agency to pursue more satisfactory identities afforded by a mix of dominant discourses of ethnicity and gender that plays out in Australia.

## Conclusion

36. In this article, I have explored some of the major patterns with which the Japanese women and men in Australia discursively negotiated their positions as Asian migrants. On arrival, they faced an unexpected scenario of being situated on the margins of the host society, after having imagined the West as a place where they could belong as welcome guests. Drawing on hegemonic discourses and the language of sexual desirability (or its lack thereof) was extremely common among interlocutors, which I interpreted as part of the process for their cultivating more satisfactory subject positions. As they did so, their differential positioning in the logic of the contact zone profoundly affected the gender power balance within the co-national migrant group. The women tended to capitalise on Japanese men's emasculated status to feel empowered, as well as portray themselves as caring and attractive Asian 'sweethearts', in contrast to 'unfeminine' western women. The men had few avenues to reclaim the dominant social position they collectively enjoyed in Japan. In the absence of viable alternatives, they resorted to discursive aggression towards Australian men and to a 'rejection' of western women, as well as Japanese women who favoured western males.
37. In my case study, creative exercise of individual agency occurred by engaging with the ways in which they, as the racial Other, tend to be represented by the dominant group in Australia. In particular, the migrants often relied on the colonial binary oppositions between the dominant West and feminised Asia, from which their marginality in the contact zone stemmed. Hence, this article has illustrated how individuals are still shaped by the social, historical and cultural discourses, even as they actively resist these. This points to the nature of agency being played out '*within* existing societal discourses and symbolic structures rather than *in opposition* to them.' [35]



Each gender group self-consciously referred to various ideas of gendered ethnicity in a manner in which they simultaneously resisted and reinforced power relations that marginalise them. The migrants' discursive strategies discussed above tended to reproduce boundaries based on nationality, ethnicity and gender, and therefore highlighted their gendered and racialised differences, both from the majority population and from each other. This runs counter to finding what Pratt calls the 'joys of the contact zone', such as 'wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom' that emerge from cross-cultural encounters.<sup>[36]</sup> Indeed, for some interlocutors, revelation and new wisdom came from '(re)discovering' the supposedly superior qualities of gendered Japanese-ness. These cases show that a heightened sense of national pride is one possible consequence of minority migrants' active appropriation of the dominant discourse. This in turn reminds us that experience of contact zones does not automatically lead to cross-cultural understanding or cosmopolitan identity.

## Endnotes

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[2] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Annual Report of Statistics on Japanese Nationals Overseas*, Tokyo: Gaimusho Ryojikyoku Seisakuka (2009): 1–72, pp. 1, 7, 9. The figures refer to *choki taizaisha* (long-term residents), defined by the Ministry as non-permanent residents who stay three or more months in a foreign country.

[3] Foreign Affairs, *Japanese Nationals Overseas*, p. 16.

[4] Japan Association of Working Holiday Makers, *W&\$257;kinguhoridebiza no hakkyusu*, 2007.

[5] Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan (MEXT), *Nihonjin no kaigai ryugakushasu nit suite*, press release, 22 December 2010.

[6] 'International Student Enrolments in Australia 1994–2010,' *Australian Government: Australian Education International*, ca. 2010, online: <http://www.aei.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Pages/InternationalStudentData2010.aspx>, site accessed 20 September 2011.

[7] 'International Student Enrolments in Australia 1994–2010.'

[8] Paul White, 'The Japanese in London: from transience to settlement?,' in *Global Japan: The Experience of Japan's New Overseas Communities*, ed. Roger Goodman, Ceri Peach, Ayumi Takenaka and Paul White, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003, pp. 79–97; Curtis Andressen and Keiichi Kumagai, *Escape from Affluence: Japanese Students in Australia*, Brisbane: Centre for the Study of Australia-Asia Relations, 1996, pp. 71–72.

[9] Foreign Affairs, *Japanese Nationals Overseas*, p. 40.

[10] Machiko Matsui, 'Gender role perceptions of Japanese and Chinese female students in American universities,' in *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 39, no.3 (1995): 356–38, pp. 361, 375; Toshie Habu, 'The irony of globalization: the experience of Japanese women in British higher education,' in *Higher Education*, vol. 39 (2000): 43–66, pp. 45, 55–58; Misa Izuhara and Hiroshi Shibata, 'Migration and old age: Japanese women growing older in British society,' in *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2001): 571–86, p. 575; Hiroshi Ono and Nicola Piper, 'Japanese women studying abroad, the case of the United States,' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 27 (2004): 101–18, pp. 103, 110–112, 115–116.; Susan Karen Burton, 'Interviews with female Japanese study abroad students in England,' in *NUCB Journal of Language, Culture and Communication*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2004): 1–11, pp. 5–6; Yoko Kobayashi, 'Japanese working women and English study abroad,' in *World Englishes*, vol. 26, no.1 (2007): 62–71, p. 67.

[11] Karen Kelsky, *Women on the Verge: Japanese Women, Western Dreams*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, pp. 22, 127–29, 151–53, 165–66, 181–87, 229.

[12] Mary L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008 [1992], p. 7.

[13] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 8.

[14] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 9.

[15] Minoru Ishizuki, 'Overseas study by Japanese in the Early Meiji Period,' in *The Modernizers: Overseas Students, Foreign Employees, and Meiji Japan*, ed. Ardath W. Burks, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985, pp. 161–86, p. 164.

[16] As Carol Gluck points out, it is certainly the case that the West can be imagined as having positive or negative characteristics, depending on the circumstances surrounding Japan's need for self-definition. Whether positive or negative, however, the imagined West has always been the standard against which Japan judged itself. Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 137.

[17] I prefer the term 'interlocutor' to 'interviewee', because the latter gives an impression that she or he was passive in our conversation. The former recognises that we were both participants of a dialogue that we had.

[18] For a study specific to Japanese working holiday makers in Australia, and their gendered experience of return migration, see Kumiko Kawashima, 'Japanese working holiday makers in Australia and their relationship to the Japanese labour market: before and after,' in *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2010): 267–86.

[19] All names that appear in this article are pseudonyms. All interviews were conducted in Japanese. All translations are by the author.

[20] Philip Seargeant, "'More English than England itself': the simulation of authenticity in foreign language practice in Japan,' in *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2005): 326–45, p. 327. The [British Hills](#) promotional website explains that English language teachers who provide lessons on site come from the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. See 'Highland life: private and small group,' on *British Hills*, 2007, online: <http://www.british-hills.co.jp/english/private/>, site accessed 20 September 2011.

[21] Seargeant, "'More English than England itself'," p. 327. Currently, the slogan is 'A Britain anybody can visit without a passport.' See 'Highland life: private and small group.'

[22] Yumiko Nishimuta, 'The interpretation of racial encounters: Japanese students in Britain,' in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2008): 133–50, pp. 141–43.

[23] Nishimuta, 'The interpretation of racial encounters', p. 142.

[24] Takeshi Hamano, 'Looking at the nation from outside: a reflection on the uncertainties and sexuality of Japanese *marriage migrants* in Australia,' conference paper presented at The Inter-Asia Cultural Typhoon, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 3–5 July 2009: 1–25, p. 18; Leng Leng Thang, Elizabeth MacLachlan and Miho Goda. 'Expatriates on the margins: a study of Japanese women in Singapore,' in *Geoforum*, vol. 3 (2002): 539–51, pp. 547–48.

[25] Hamano, 'Looking at the nation from outside,' pp. 12–13; Jared Denman, 'Japanese wives in Japanese-Australian intermarriages,' in *New Voices*, vol. 3 (2009): 64–85, pp. 66–69.

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[27] Karen Pyke, 'An intersectional approach to resistance and complicity: the case of racialised desire among Asian American Women,' in *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 31, no.1 (2010): 81–94, p. 91.

[28] Vera Mackie, 'Reimagining governance and security in the Asia-Pacific Region,' in *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, vol. 15 (May, 2007), online: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue15/mackie.htm>, site accessed 12 April 2011.

[29] David L. Eng, *Racial Castration*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001, p. 29.

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[31] Kelsky, *Women on the Verge*, p. 80.

[32] Henrietta L. Moore, *A Passion for Difference*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 66.

[33] Moore, *A Passion for Difference*, p. 65.

[34] Wendy Holloway, Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity, in *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*, ed. J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Benn and V. Walkerdine, London: Methuen, 1984, pp. 272–84, p. 238, cited in Moore, *A Passion for Difference*, pp. 64–65.

[35] Anne-Marie Hilsdon, 'Introduction: reconsidering agency – feminist anthropologies in Asia,' in *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2007):127–37, p. 136.

[36] Mary Pratt, 'Arts of the contact zones', in *Profession*, vol. 91 (1991): 33–40, p. 40.

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