

Iyayraykere: welcome to a new Japanese world

In the 21st century, Japan is being faced with the new challenge of finding its place in a globalised world. In the context of the post-war aftermath, a strong sense of Japanese self-identity which focussed on the idea of Japanese uniqueness (*Nihonjinron*) developed, and with it the myth of homogeneity evolved and spread throughout the Japanese nation. However, as the borders between nations are becoming evermore transparent, and minority and indigenous groups are increasingly gaining a voice around the world, Japan can no longer ignore its own ethnic minorities (Koreans, Nikkei Brazilians, Burakumin, other foreigners) and indigenous peoples (Ainu and Okinawans). The perception of Japan as a homogeneous cultural enclave has now become widely discredited among Japanese studies scholars and teachers of Japanese, and there is now a burgeoning literature on Japan's multilingualism, including Noguchi and Fotos (2000) Oguma (1995), (1997, 2000), Dunoon, Morris-Suzuki, and Hudson, (1995), Lie, (2001), Maher and Yashiro (1991, 1996), Maher and Honna (1994) and Maher and Macdonald (1995). In order to place Japan in a contemporary, globalised environment, a reconceptualisation of 'Japanese' identity is of essential importance. In 2005/2006, I collected questionnaires and conducted interviews in Tokyo and Hokkaido to determine both mainstream Japanese and Ainu people's perceptions of what it means to be 'Japanese' and 'Ainu' and the most important components of 'Japanese' identity. Based on this research, in the current globalised world the political rhetoric of former Prime-Minister Nakasone (1986) that "There are no minorities in Japan" is no longer dominant in the eyes of the Japanese public, nor in Japanese Studies ideology. Today, in the search for a more inclusive and holistic Japanese identity, Japan's minorities are being reconceived from being marginalised and on the periphery to being part of a broader Japanese sense of national unity - a multilingual and multicultural society.

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