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Beyond being either-or: identification of multiracial and multiethnic Japanese

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ABSTRACT

Although the number of multiracial and multiethnic Japanese who are socially recognised and identified as *haafu* (mixed) has increased due to a rise in intermarriages, the identities and experiences of mixed persons in Japan are seldom critically analysed. Based on interviews with 29 multiracial and multiethnic individuals residing in Japan, this article explores not only how multiracial and multiethnic Japanese identify themselves but also how they feel they are identified by others in society. The analysis shows that multiracial and multiethnic persons self-identify in a way that goes beyond either-or categories and the binary notions of Japanese/ foreigner. It also reveals how both multiracial and multiethnic persons face a gap between self-identity and ascribed identity and that they negotiate this gap in various ways. However, the gap and the negotiation process that multiracial persons face differ to those of multiethnic persons. Multiracial persons whose mixedness is phenotypically visible experience more constraints in their ethnic options and have more difficulty in passing as Japanese, whereas multiethnic persons whose mixedness is invisible can pass as Japanese more easily but face constraints in their ethnic option to be identified as mixed and in claiming their multiethnic background.

Introduction

People categorise and generalise things around them to understand and make sense of the world. Categories are constructed rationally – they enable us to identify objects in our daily lives, help solve problems simply and serve as ideational concepts (Allport 1979). Categorising and identifying certain groups of people based on their ethnicity, race, religion, or age (i.e. assigning a certain identity to others) is widely accepted as a rational and normal process. Goffman ([1963] 1990) argues that society categorises people based on what is perceived to be 'ordinary and natural' in the society and when a person is perceived to possess an attribute that differs from others in the category, the person risks being categorised as 'other'. This process of categorisation and identification happens automatically. In this process of identification, the visibility of the attribute that is perceived as different

becomes crucial. In Japan, one of the ways we can observe this categorisation process is through the dichotomy of being Japanese or *gaikokujin/gaijin* (foreigner). The word *gaijin* is the word most commonly used in Japan today to refer to those who look physically different (e.g. Arudou 2015; Wagatsuma 1967). Kashiwazaki (2009) explains that those who have a different skin colour or language, behaviour, and ethnic name will stand out as *gaijin* and will be racialized and assumed that they are not Japanese citizens.

The binary categories have become more salient and complicated due to the increasing number of intermarriages and children with mixed backgrounds. In 2014, around two percent of new-born babies in Japan had either a father or a mother who is a citizen of China, Philippines, Korea, or the United States (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2015). These 'first-generation multiracial' children (Daniel 2002), with one Japanese and one foreign parent, challenge the notion of what it means to be Japanese, especially those with marked phenotypical differences. This naturally gives rise to the question, does the increasing number of mixed Japanese people redefine and challenge the traditional dichotomy of Japanese/*gaijin*?

The aim of this article is to explore whether multiracial and multiethnic Japanese persons experience ethnic options (Song 2003; Waters 1990) – meaning the ability to choose or claim a certain ethnicity. An ethnic option is only valid when one's claim to a certain ethnicity is validated by others. Mixed Japanese persons are often questioned their position in the dichotomy of either-or – Japanese or *gaijin* – in the media, and in the national and political discourse. In this climate, many multiracial and multiethnic Japanese are speaking up to redefine and reclaim their position as we recently see in the case of Naomi Osaka, a Japanese tennis player of multiracial background. Shimoji (2018) argues that there has never been a sufficient analysis on how mixed persons express, position, and define themselves in relation to the dichotomy of Japanese/*gaijin* and in relation to other racial and ethnic terms. Therefore, this article will examine not only how mixed individuals self-identify but also their understanding of their ascribed identity i.e. reflected appraisal, how they believe they are classified by others (Morning 2018). Mixed Japanese persons who are visibly distinct from the majority Japanese, not only in phenotype but other aspects such as language skills or surnames, may experience constraints in their claim to be Japanese. Through the interviews with mixed Japanese individuals, this article addresses how these individuals reclaim and reappropriate their positions as Japanese, *gaijin*, and mixed through exercising their ethnic options. This article will contribute to the growing body of research on identities and mixed populations (e.g. Carter 2014; Iwabuchi 2014; Kawashima and Takezawa 2017; Miura 2015; Murphy-Shigematsu 2012; Ogaya 2016; Author, 2018; Weltly 2014; Yamashiro 2017).

Mixed in Japan – a brief historical overview

In Japan, the notion of *shiroi* (lit. the colour white) skin as desirable and *kuroi* (lit. the colour black) skin as unattractive existed long before the country came in contact with the West (Wagatsuma 1967). Later in its modern history through contact with the West, Japan gradually came to understand the concepts of race and whiteness from the western point of view and experienced what it means to be racially inferior, which led to an admiration for being white (Arudou 2015; Ashikari 2005; Watanabe 2016). In fact, Japanese emphasised its self-image as Caucasian through body projects for the

improvement of the Japanese race by mixing with westerners and promoting the western body type as the ideal body type (Majima 2014). Along the same line, Japan's fascination with Western movie stars grew in the early twentieth century, which led to the idealisation of white women (Okamura 2016). They were seen as attractive, and this led to attempts to recreate Japanese female beauty by westernising the subjects' features with a taller nose or larger eyes (Watanabe 2016).

Mixed marriages with Korean and Taiwanese were also encouraged during the colonial period through Japanisation policy. People from Japanese colonies, such as those on the Korean peninsula, in Taiwan, and in areas of China, were considered as Japanese *minzoku* (ethnic group) and not equal to the native Japanese, however 'quasi-Japanese' and inferior to the 'pure Japanese' (Oguma 1995). After the Pacific War started and Japan began to invade other Asian countries, greater attention was given to mixed marriages and mixed persons in the colonies. It resulted in the fear that the increase in mixed people born to Japanese people and people from Japanese colonies would lead to an identity crisis for the Japanese (Sakano 2009).

With the outbreak of World War Two, the image of white people became less idealised. In post-war Japan, whiteness was predominantly connected to being American due to the significant American military presence in the country. This was also when Japan became home to people with visible phonotypical differences, including multiracial Japanese (Arudou 2015). During this time, mixed individuals were racialized as *konketsuji* (mixed-blood children) or *ainoko* (mixed-breed children) with negative connotations (Majima 2014; Murphy-Shigematsu 2012). However, persons born to Japanese and people from the Korean peninsula or China were not included in the *konketsu* (Kano 2007). Japanese society treated the relatively small number of children who were born to Japanese women and military men as a moral, practical, political issue and a social problem (Okamura 2017), particularly, the black Japanese children. Moreover, 'Asian other' became less important in Japan after the decolonisation, and a consensus was established that Korean and Chinese share the same racial characteristics (Kawai 2014).

In contemporary Japan, especially since the late 1960s, the celebration of 'Generation E.A'. (Ethnically Ambiguous) (La Ferla 2003). There is a significant increase in the number of celebrities on TV with multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds and the admiration of part-white women continue through the emergence of the *haafu-gao* (multiracial and multiethnic face) make-up trend (Okamura 2016; Want 2016; Yamashita 2009). Moreover, athletes with a mixed background are given much attention for their success (e.g. Schanen 2016). Despite this celebration of mixed individuals, a reluctance to see them as Japanese remains today; for example, when Ariana Miyamoto (who has a black American and Japanese background) was chosen as Miss Japan in 2015, a strong reaction was directed at her (e.g. Fackler 2015). In response to this reluctance to view these individuals as Japanese, multiracial and multiethnic persons are raising their voices and engaging in ways to redefine and reclaim their position as Japanese. Through the internet and social media, documentary films and other art forms (e.g. Hafu film and Hafu2hafu), mixed Japanese communities have created spaces for activities where they can express their identity and experiences (Horiguchi and Imoto 2016; Iwabuchi 2014; Okamura 2017).

Over the past decades, various terms have emerged to address multiracial and multiethnic individuals. The term *haafu* (which is derived from the English word *half*) is a well-

established and recognised term with a positive connotation and refers to multiracial and multiethnic populations today (Arudou 2015; Iwabuchi 2014; Okamura 2017). Originally, *haafu* was an assigned term with the connotation of being 'half white', but it has since evolved into a self-claimed social identification which embraces all mixed people (Murphy-Shigematsu 2012). An alternative term, *kokusaiji*, reflects an attempt to shift the focus of *haafu* away from being 'half white' and positively redefine persons of multi-ethnic and multiracial background with their international and cultural qualities (Murphy-Shigematsu 2001). *Daburu*, which is derived from the English word 'double', emerged as an alternative and idealistic term compared to *haafu*, especially in media outlets in the context of Okinawa (with its US military presence), the Korean community in Japan, and the parents of multiracial and multiethnic children (Carter 2014; Kamada 2010; Okamura 2017). However, the terms never became established among the multira-cial and multiethnic individuals themselves, and many claim that the term *haafu* is pre-ferable to *daburu* (Murphy-Shigematsu 2012; Yamashita 2009). Also, influenced by the North American discussion, *mixed-roots* is a fairly new term which has been introduced into the Japanese language (Yamashita 2009) and is increasingly gaining recognition.

Although the term *haafu* still evokes the image of a multiracial person rather than a multiethnic person – with white, western *haafu* still seen as the ideal type of *haafu* (Murphy-Shigematsu 2001) – the recent trend for multiethnic Japanese of Asian mix to 'come out' reflects that the term *haafu* has been embraced as a form of social identification both among the general population and the mixed population today.

Mixed identity – ethnic options and passing

In exploring the identities of the multiracial and multiethnic persons, it is crucial to under-stand that identity is not static but rather flexible. The process of identification is a two-way, dialectic process (Jenkins 2005, 20). One may identify oneself and another through relational modes such as kinship or friendship, but also through categorical attributes such as race, ethnicity, language, nationality, or gender which continues to maintain its importance in society (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). The distinction also needs to be made between self-identification (i.e. acquired identity) and the identification and categ-orisation forced on the individuals by others (i.e. ascribed identity, observed or reflected identity). Especially racial and ethnic identification can be experienced in different ways depending on whether it is a self-classification or a reflected appraisal (Roth 2018; Morning 2018), which may create a feeling of misrecognition.

Studies of mixed identities show how mixed people identify and redefine their identity (e.g. Aspinall and Song 2013; DaCosta 2007; Rika Houston and Hogan 2009). Although individuals may claim greater scope of racial and ethnic identification, this claim being accepted in every social context is still questionable. Ethnic options, as in, the choices and constraints in ethnic claims individuals have, are most straightforward when mixed-ness is visible; some may have a wider range of choices and fewer constraints than others (Aspinall and Song 2013; Brubaker 2016; Fhagen-Smith 2010; Holloway, Wright, and Ellis 2012; Jenkins 2005; Song 2003; Waters 1990). Moreover, a mismatch between self-identification and ascribed identification may occur, as one's self-identification is affirmed or disapproved by others (Aspinall and Song 2013; Franco, Katz, and O'Brien 2016).

In understanding ethnic options, the practices of passing and covering (Goffman [1963] 1990; Yoshino 2007) are essential. The concept of racial *passing* refers to a practice of a person of one race identifying and presenting themselves as being of a different race, usually the race of the majority population in the social context (Goffman [1963] 1990; Dawkins 2012), whereas *covering* refers to a practice 'to tone down their stigmatised identities to get along in life' (Yoshino 2007, x). Racial and ethnic covering can be achieved by changing one's name, clothing, or behaviour patterns and languages (Goffman [1963] 1990). The practice of passing and covering for multiracial and multiethnic individuals should be conceptualised as an ethnic option which one may or may not have control over (Song 2003). However, while passing and covering can give privileges in certain situations, it can also lead to misrecognition and thus a potential emotional and psychological dilemma.

The different constraints mixed persons experiences in their ethnic options are well documented in the English-speaking contexts (Aspinall and Song 2013; Harris and Sim 2002; Song 2003; Tashiro 2002) however only few studies address the ethnic options and practices of passing among mixed people in Japan. The studies that have been conducted on mixed identity in Japan show that the constraints and options depend on family structure, living environment, and whether they are multiethnic or multiracial (Almonte-Acosta 2008; Oikawa and Yoshida 2007; Oshima 2014). For example, Takeshita's (2010) study shows that Japanese-Brazilian mixed children tend to hide that they are Brazilian and attempt to pass as Japanese. Murphy-Shigematsu (2001) explains that mixed individuals in Japan are still not given the ability to express themselves as persons of more than one ethnic background and the majority of those who pass as Japanese cover their non-Japanese side and those who cannot pass as Japanese find it easier to pass as a foreigner. These studies suggest that visible phenotypes are read as racial differences and become basis of racialisation based on the traditional dichotomy of Japanese/*gaijin* (e.g. Arudou 2015; Kashiwazaki 2009; Wagatsuma 1967). Therefore, in this article we refer to mixed interviewees with phenotypical differences as multiracial and those with no visible phenotypical differences as multiethnic.

Method and data

Analysis is based on 29, 19 interviews conducted by Osanami Törngren and 10 conducted by Sato.[1] The interviewees were recruited based on identifying as *haafu* (mixed), meaning they have one Japanese parent and one parent of a foreign background (or who are not Japanese citizens) and have lived in Japan for a significant period of time. As Japan do not register race and ethnicity of the individuals, the parental country of origin was inquired in the interviews. The age range of the interviewees was between 18 and 25 at the time of the interviews, and the majority ($N = 26$) have grown up in Japan.

It is important to note the differences in the approaches we took when interviewing mixed persons. Osanami Törngren conducted semi-structured interviews and recruited the interviewees through snowball sampling, while Sato conducted more open-ended and active interviews, and these interviewees were recruited within the Sato's network of friends and acquaintances. Because Sato knew the interviewees prior to the interviews and is also of multiethnic background, the conversation naturally entailed some unspoken consensus and understanding about what it means to be multiracial and multiethnic in

Japan. Although not mixed, Osanami Törngren has a bicultural background and is a parent of mixed children. Thus, she tried to create an atmosphere that would be comfortable for the interviewees, but nevertheless retained the more traditional relationship between the interviewee and interviewer. We are at different stages in our academic careers, and this, paired with having a different yet shared background with the interviewees, potentially affected the interview context. Despite the differences in the way we conducted the interviews, we found common and recurring themes.

All the interviewees except one were attending well-known universities or newly graduated from such universities and working. Therefore, this study represents mixed Japanese persons with a high socioeconomic status. The socioeconomic status is also reflected in that the majority of the interviewees are able to travel frequently to the non-Japanese parental home country ($N = 21$). Most of the interviewees grew up in Tokyo,[2] and thus, the experiences of growing up in other parts of Japan is underrepresented in this article. Another bias is the proportion of mixed background among the interviewees. Although Japanese statistics show that intermarriages are more common among Japanese men, a little less than half of the interviewees have a Japanese father ($N = 13$). Moreover, almost half of the interviewees have North American and Western European backgrounds ($N = 13$), but this is contrary to the national statistics, which show that the largest mixed population are of Korean, Chinese, and Filipino background. Detailed information about the interviewees can be found in Table 1.

When translating the interviews conducted in Japanese to English, some original terms that the interviewees used such as *haafu* or *gaijin* were left untranslated. The racial background of the parents is indicated in cases interviewees mentioned it, however most interviewees referred to their parents by their national origin rather than their racial background. All interview materials are treated anonymously and confidentially, and all the names that appear in this article are pseudonymous.

Findings

When analysing the 29 interviews, it became clear that multiracial and multiethnic Japanese interviewees identify themselves in diverse ways. One third of the interviewees identify with a single category of Japanese ($N = 9$) or as mixed ($N = 9$), or as human being ($N = 5$) while the rest identified with terms implying multiple identities ($N = 6$). Brubaker (2016) discusses the process of claiming a neither-nor identity that places mixed identities outside the prevailing categories, and the interviewees seem to challenge the traditional dichotomy of Japanese/*gaijin* by identifying themselves with multiple categories.

Table 2 shows interviewees self-identification and ascribed identification, and it compares the interviewees with multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds.

What is striking is that although the multiethnic interviewees self-identify in diverse ways just as much as the multiracial interviewees, the multiethnic interviewees predominantly experience that they are perceived as Japanese or partly Japanese, whereas the multiracial

Table 1. Self-identification.

	Japanese	More Japanese	Japanese and mixed	Mixed	More American	Human being	Total
Frequency	9	2	2	9	2	5	29

Table 2. Self-identification and ascribed identity by background.

Mix			Japanese	Ascribed identity					Total
				Japanese and haafu	Haafu	Foreigner and Japanese	Foreigner and haafu	Foreigner	
Multiracial	Self-identification	Japanese		0	0	1	1	1	3
		More Japanese		1	1	0	0	0	2
		Japanese and mixed		1	0	0	0	0	1
		Mixed		0	0	1	1	2	4
		More American		0	0	0	0	2	2
		Human being		0	0	0	2	1	3
	Total			2	1	2	4	6	15
Multiethnic	Self-identification	Japanese	2	3				1	6
		Japanese and mixed	1	0				0	1
		Mixed	2	3				0	5
		Human being	2	0				0	2
	Total		7	6				1	14

*The category includes interviewees with American, Australian, British, Italian, Nigerian, Norwegian, Palestinian and Swiss background for the purpose of the analysis.
**The category includes interviewees with Chinese, Filipina, Hong Kongese, Korean, Singaporian, Thai and Taiwanese background for the purpose of the analysis.

interviewees experience their reflected identification to be mixed, partly foreign, or foreign. It indicates that multiracial interviewees who may be visibly different face difficulties in their self-identification validated (see similar examples in contribution by Rodríguez-García et al. 2019; Song 2019; Chito Childs, Lyons, and Jones 2019; King-O'Riain 2019; and Rocha and Yeoh 2019) while multiethnic interviewees may pass as Japanese.

Despite this difference, both multiracial and multiethnic interviewees experience a gap between self-identification and ascribed identification. Another interesting finding is that many interviewees experience that they are assigned multiple identities by others, such as being Japanese and *haafu* or foreigner and *haafu*. These reflected appraisals indicate that the traditional binary of foreigner/Japanese (Kashiwazaki 2009) may be changing. Moreover, contrary to what Murphy-Shigematsu (2001) discussed in the early 2000s, it might be a sign that both multiracial and multiethnic individuals in Japan are increasingly given the ability to express themselves as persons of more than one ethnic background.

The following analysis will examine how visible characteristics such as phenotype, name, or language abilities affect the way both multiethnic and multiracial interviewees self-identify and be appraised as Japanese. The analysis also further explores the ethnic option (i.e. whether interviewees can claim a specific identity and have this identity accepted).

'I am not hiding it, but it's not noticed' – identifying and passing as Japanese

Half of the multiethnic interviewees experienced that they are identified as Japanese and therefore could pass as Japanese, therefore possess the ethnic option of claiming that they are Japanese. Yoko and Nanyo identify as Japanese, and they also believe that others see them as Japanese. Therefore, on the surface, they do not seem to experience a misrecognition between ascribed and acquired identity. However, listening closely to their stories, it becomes clear that they negotiate their self-claimed identity and ascribed identity constantly. Yoko, who is of Japanese and Singaporean mix, asserted her identity as being Japanese quite adamantly. Yoko was born in Singapore, and her family moved between Japan and Singapore for several years each when she grew up. When she was younger, she identified as both Singaporean and Japanese; however, she claims that even then she lived her life as Japanese within the Japanese community in Singapore and was seen as Japanese in Singapore. She explains,

> When I think about it, you can't really separate the language [with identity], and my way of thinking is formed in the Japanese language; therefore, I have my identity as Japanese. If I could speak English or Chinese, and if they pop out in my mind when I speak, I might have thought of myself as Singaporean, but normally, in my daily life, I use Japanese, and that's why I think of myself as Japanese.

Yoko feels that her mixedness is invisible, in terms of both her physical appearance as well as her language skills. Her first and last names are Japanese, which indicates no connection to her being Singaporean. With nothing visible, she seems to reason that she does not have 'proof' to her claim of being mixed. In other words, Yoko does not have the ethnic option of claiming her Singaporean identity and having that identity validated.

Nanyo, whose mother is Chinese-Thai, also identifies as Japanese, and just like Yoko, experiences being identified as Japanese by others. Nevertheless, it is clear that passing as

Japanese for him comes with a negotiation and a coping process when admitting that he identifies himself as Japanese. He recalls,

> The elementary school and the middle school I went to consisted of only Japanese, 100%. I felt the pressure to conform, and I felt that I needed to follow the others. At times, I did experience the gap between feeling the necessity to conform and the realization that I am different after all.

Nanyo's passing as Japanese meant covering of his mixed background, which entailed negotiations and coping with the Japanese context that he was in. Nanyo explains that until he 'came out' as *haafu* when he started attending a university with 'people with various backgrounds', he intentionally hid that his mother was Thai. Although Yoko claims that her identity is Japanese, she also says that she started to actively mention the fact that she is *haafu* when she began studying at university and met many others with an 'international background'. They both talk more openly about being *haafu* but are very clear that they do not identify themselves as such. They claim their identity as *haafu* strategically when they are in a more international setting. Nanyo's and Yoko's experience truly reflects how the process of identification is dialectic, flexible, and relational (Jenkins 2005). Moreover, it shows how multiethnic identities are also constructed through experiences with other multiethnic and multiracial people (DaCosta 2007) and how self-identification goes through contextual shifts depending on the social space (Brubaker 2016).

The reasons for intentionally covering one's non-Japanese roots are different for each person. One of the reasons why multiethnic Japanese persons sometimes hesitate to claim their background can be, as in Yoko's case, that there are no visible markers of mixedness, which several other multiethnic interviewees expressed. Sakura is one interviewee of multiethnic background who explicitly stated how her being *haafu* is invisible. Sakura, who has a Chinese-Japanese background, says that she passes as Japanese and that her being *haafu* is not often revealed because her mix is not physically visible. She explains, 'Well, we Asian *haafu*, we do not look phenotypically different, and if it doesn't get noticed, I don't think it's [being mixed] something you should mention yourself'. Contrary to Yoko, who felt that she did not have any claim to her being *haafu* due to the lack of visible markers, Sakura says that people notice her mixedness through her language skills. Although she self-identifies as Japanese, her language skills cause others to believe that she is mixed. She explains that she has never intentionally hidden the fact that she is *haafu*, but will only say, 'Maybe I am half-Chinese' when her friends notice that she can speak Chinese. She is forced to reappropriate her identity as *haafu* and Chinese when her friends make a remark about her language skills. Again, this shows that identification is flexible, and depending on the context, both the self-identity and ascribed identity may change.

Sakura mentions another aspect of not covering, namely prejudice toward other Asian countries that exists in Japan. Sakura explains,

> Speaking loudly, [being] careless, and [acting] rough – these are images towards Chinese people in Japan. And when you see somebody like that or experience people acting like that, some people say, 'So, are they Chinese?' […] When I hear people say that, I just let the words pass.

Mei, whose mother is from Hong Kong, shares a similar experience to Sakura. Mei, like Sakura, does not intentionally hide her background, but she can pass as Japanese. Mei explains,

> Somebody that I am acquainted with but I am not close with mentions that there are too many Chinese people, and it is annoying when traveling [in Japan]. And I do care about these comments. I feel that this person does not have the best image toward Chinese people. I care about these comments because China and Hong Kong are alike. I have experiences feeling weird about these things, but they make these comments because they don't even think about me [that I am partly Hong Kongese], and I should be fine [because the comments are not directed toward me].

While Sakura and Mei both identify as Japanese, their words clearly show how they negotiate their identity and cover their mixed background when the context is negative.

Multiethnic interviewees who can pass as Japanese report that they sometimes experience a feeling of misrecognition, especially when they feel that they cannot claim their mixedness. They experience constraints in their claim to the non-Japanese side or mixed identity. This comes from not only phenotypical invisibility but also visibility through language skill or name. Moreover, even when they do not explicitly address a misrecognition between ascribed and self-identity, being invisible and able to pass as Japanese, whether intentional or unintentional, brings about constant negotiations and reasonings of their identity through interaction with others. The experiences of multiethnic interviewees also reveal how multiethnic Japanese sometimes prefer passing as Japanese because of existing prejudice toward those from other Asian countries. This confirms previous studies in the United States that show how ethnic options can be constrained not only by the visible characteristics but also by socioeconomic status, ethnic concentration, and the dynamics of ethnic labels and images. It is a way of coping with the negative image of their foreign background, and therefore, asserting Japanese identity can be understood as a way of covering.

'I, myself, think that I don't look Japanese' – A clear disparity in identifying as Japanese

Ashley was one of the multiracial interviewees who self-identified as Japanese but experienced a gap with her reflected appraisals. In a Skype telephone interview, a Swiss-Japanese Ashley, explains that, with brown hair and blue–green eyes, she does not look Japanese. She self-identifies as Japanese, because her home is Japan. She was born and raised in Japan and feels that her ethnic, cultural, and national identity is Japanese. However, because of her visible phenotypical characteristics, she experiences that people wonder where she is from. She explains,

> It can't be helped, I think. My physical appearance is [different]. If I speak Japanese and explain [my background to] the person, [then she or he] understands, so I have not thought so much about it.

She says that once people get to know her, she is accepted as Japanese despite the phenotypical differences. Nevertheless, she faces constant gaps and negotiations between her ascribed identity and her self-identity. According to Ashley, it is the visible phenotypical differences that people use to categorise her as *haafu* or foreigner, and thus, her ethnic option is constrained. However, through other aspects, such as Japanese being her native language and her cultural knowledge, she can negotiate her reflected identity and reclaim her Japanese identity.

Similarly, Ashley, Koh, and Shelly also self-identify as Japanese but experience that they are seen and treated as foreigners until people get to know them. Koh, whose mix is visible, says, 'I use the last name Maeda, but you know, this is how I look! People tell me I am very good at Japanese. I always tell them, "Oh yes, thank you"'. Koh copes with these comments by ignoring and not bothering to explain that he is Japanese, therefore pass as non-Japanese. Shelly shares her experience of people who are 'surprised' when they get to know her because she likes and prefers Japanese food and sweets, among other things. People around her expect her to prefer western things simply because of her phenotypical features. To others, she negotiates and claims her Japanese identity through showing her preference for Japanese culture.

There are also examples of how not only phenotypical differences but also other visible differences such as names or language skills matter in how persons with mixed backgrounds are identified by others. Anna, who has a Zainichi Korean and Japanese background, says that she is 'from Japan' and experiences that she passes as Japanese. However, when her Korean last name becomes visible, she experiences that she is seen as Korean. Her passport is also Korean, which is another visible indicator. For Anna, this was problematic because her father is a third-generation Zainichi Korean, and she grew up with no connection to Korea except that her father spoke Korean to her. She says, 'I am Japanese. Really Japanese, but not completely. I am definitely not Korean'. She experiences a clear misrecognition between how she sees herself and how society sees her. Therefore, it can be understood that her identifying as being 'from Japan' is a coping strategy for her to deal with the gap and misrecognition.

Yuuto's experience also highlights how one's name is an example of visibility playing a role in how people ascribe a categorical identity on a person. Yuuto, whose father is from Britain and whose mother is from Japan, identifies himself more as Japanese. He was the only multiracial interviewee who claimed that he could pass as Japanese; however, when he introduces his Anglicised name, Christopher, he experiences that people start asking, 'Are you *haafu*?' This shows how he can cover his British background, but he needs to negotiate his identity. Another example of how name can signify mixedness can be observed through Kana's story. Kana has a Palestinian father, but she self-identifies as Japanese. In Kana's case, the combination of her ambiguous phenotypical features (which can sometimes be interpreted as Japanese) and her foreign-sounding last name that make her *haafu* status visible. She explains that she would like to change her Arabic name, especially because she has recently started to work for a company related to the oil industry.

> I'm thinking of getting rid of my last name, Mohammad. I'm not sure, but I will probably deal with people outside the company. Then it's going to be troublesome, even more troublesome because of the preconceptions. Especially because I am in the oil industry. When it's revealed that I have an Arabic name and if people believe that I can speak Arabic, and I will be treated as a resource. I am not [a resource since I cannot speak Arabic], and I will be bothered.

From the analysis of those who experience a disparity between self-claimed identity and ascribed identity, it becomes clear that the visible differences become the basis for the categorical identity and reflected appraisal (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Morning 2018). Moreover, these examples show how pervasive the racialisation as Japanese/*gaijin* is and how multiracial persons fall into the category of *gaijin*. There is a constant negotiation to fill the gap between ascribed and self-claimed identity, and depending on the visibility of

their mixedness through phenotype and names, they experience certain constraints in their ethnic options.

'I am daburu, haafu, an international person' – identifying as mixed

A total of nine interviewees identified themselves as mixed. There were different ways of expressing their mixedness, such as identifying with the two nationalities of the parents or stating that she or he is *haafu*, a mixed roots person, or Asian. Examples of identification as mixed show that multiethnic and multiracial individuals are reclaiming their identity and challenging the existing dichotomy of Japanese/*gaijin*. However, it is arguable whether this claim is made outside of existing racial categories. All five multiethnic interviewees who self-identify as mixed experience that they are identified either as Japanese or *haafu*, while all four multiracial interviewees feel that they are identified as foreigner or *haafu* in Japan. Again, it is clear that the multiethnic interviewees can pass as Japanese and have fewer constraints in their ethnic options to claim their Japaneseness.

Tomoko, whose father is American and mother is Japanese, clearly says 'I am *daburu*, *haafu*, an international person'. Tomoko feels a gap between her identity as a mixed person and how people treat her as a 'foreigner'. She cannot pass as Japanese and faces a constant negotiation between her self-claimed identity and her ascribed identity. She shares her experience:

> A week ago, I visited the high school that I attended, and when the students passed by me in the corridor, I heard them say, 'There's a gaijin!' – and I was shocked because it was my own high school. I have already graduated, so I am an outsider [in that sense], but I was shocked by the fact that I was a person excluded from that space.

These repeated instances of misrecognition make her inclined to want to 'pass as American', which is contradictory to her claim of identity as a mixed person.

Reina is one of the few interviewees who did not grow up predominantly in Japan. Reina, states, 'It is my identity that I have [a] Philippine and Japanese blood tie'. Although born in Japan, she lived in the Philippines until she turned seventeen, and she experienced difficulties with the Japanese language. Because of her Japanese name and her mix being phenotypically invisible to many, she is expected to speak perfect Japanese. Despite her self-identification as mixed, most people treat her as Japanese. She states,

> For people around me, I am Japanese. My older sister has an anglicized name so that [non-Japaneseness] is taken into consideration. But [unlike me], she lived in Japan until middle school, so of course, she can [speak good Japanese]. So, this gap [between my name and the language ability] was kind of my complex. At one point, I thought I wanted to have an anglicized name like my sister.

Contrary to Kana, who was introduced in the previous section and who would like to get rid of her Arabic name in order to claim her Japaneseness, Reina wanted a non-Japanese name in order to claim her mixedness and foreignness. Reina's example shows how passing as Japanese and having the ethnic option also comes with a feeling of misrecognition and having to negotiate the gap between ascribed and self-claimed identity.

While Reina passes as Japanese, Ken, whose mix is phenotypically visible, is only recognised as Japanese among his friends, as he cannot easily pass as Japanese. Ken, who has a British father, is fluent in both Japanese and English. He considers himself as 'Japanese

when in Japan and British in Britain', and claims two identities. His changing identification, both self-identity and ascribed identity, shows again how identity is relational and dependent on the context. He shared his most recent experience of being misrecognised as non-Japanese in Japan: 'The other day when I was at a gym, a person told me 'push, push, okay?' And I answered, 'I get it' [in Japanese]'. Again, phenotypical differences become the basis of ascribed identity. Ken constantly negotiates the gap between his self-claimed identity as Japanese and British and the ascribed identity as a foreigner.

Yuki, who has a Korean mother, was raised in Japan but has lived in Korea for three years. He defines himself as Japanese because of his Japanese nationality, but claims his identity is more Korean and mixed. Yuki clearly states that he wants people to recognise him as Korean in Japan. As a reaction to how others perceive him as Japanese because his mix is invisible, he actively chooses to claim his identity as *haafu*.

> For example, when you introduce yourself, you say your name first, right? The next thing that definitely comes out from my mouth is that I am *haafu*. That is how important, how much it means, for me to be a *haafu*. Before I say that I do music, I say that I am *haafu*.

It is interesting to see how Yuki negotiates the gap between self-identity and ascribed identity by actively claiming his multiethnic background considering that the majority of multiethnic interviewees choose to pass as Japanese. Although Yuki insists that he is *haafu*, this does not mean that this is validated by others. He says that some people do not care about his *haafu* identity and was once told, 'I am not interested [in your background]'. Yuki's experience clearly shows that he cannot exercise his ethnic option and be validated as *haafu* in Japan. This example shows how passing as the majority Japanese, even though it might give certain privileges, can entail a feeling of misrecognition.

'I am forever a gaijin' – identifying as foreigner

Multiracial interviewees Daiki and Brittany, who both have a white American background, self-identify as 'more American' and actively passed as foreigners. They are both multiracial, and have visible phenotypical features; moreover, their last names are anglicised. Also, Daiki and Brittany are both bilingual and have previously lived in the United States – a place where they experience that they are treated as Americans. With their visible phenotypical features, last names, language abilities, and experiences in the United States, they feel that they have a choice to claim their American identity and that this identity is validated even in Japan. Thus, on the surface, there is no gap between their self-identity and their ascribed identity. However, the self-identification as American developed not only through their active choice but also through their experiences of being seen solely and constantly as a *gaijin* in Japan. Daiki explains, 'I have very seldom thought of myself as Japanese. It's easier for me to believe that I am American'. He continued, 'I can't really recognise myself as Japanese. It's sort of impossible, because others tell me that I am different … I am forever a *gaijin*'.

Brittany has had similar experiences of not having her claim of being Japanese validated by others in Japan. She says, 'When I am in Japan, I am treated completely as a foreigner'. She explained how difficult it is for people in Japan to accept that people can have multiple backgrounds. She says that because she respects both American and Japanese backgrounds, she does not care that others identify her as a foreigner: 'It's not that I look at

my Japanese roots lightly, and I love Japan, but if I am not considered as one [Japanese], that is fine by me, I feel'. Although Brittany states that she is fine with how she is seen by others, her words nevertheless reflect how she experiences constraints in her ethnic option to claim her Japanese identity. Self-identifying as American can be interpreted as a strategy to cope with the experiences of being constantly addressed as a foreigner and ascribed such an identity. In line with the work by Murphy-Shigematsu (2001), we argue Daiki and Brittany choose to pass as American because they find it easier to cope with the gap.

'I don't have any fixed idea about what I am' – identifying as a human being

Five interviewees described themselves without any reference to their racial and ethnic background, and instead, self-identify as a human being. Hiroshi and Takeshi, who both have a Korean background, define themselves as *individuals* even though they experience that they pass as Japanese. In contrast, three multiracial interviewees, Akira-Matthew, Shou, and Michael, who also identify as individuals, experience that they are seen as foreigners.

Takeshi describes himself as Asian[3] and a 'minority' and categorises himself as neither Japanese nor Korean, while he mentions that he passes as Japanese. He says that he does not want people to judge him as being only Korean or Japanese. He states, 'I don't have any fixed idea about what I am. If I am forced to answer, I say that I am Asian'. Hiroshi asserts his identity as 'flexible' and 'I am just a human being'. Given that Takeshi and Hiroshi can pass as Japanese, their self-identity as human beings give the impression that this is based on a universal claim and the reluctance to conform to existing categories of identity. However, the reasoning of the multiracial interviewees varies. Multiracial interviewees also resist the existing categories; however, the desire to not be defined by their phenotypical differences stands out. Akira-Matthew says that 'the possibility of others perceiving me as Japanese is very low', and in response to the question of how he defines himself, he states,

> I have no one fixed answer. If I decide on one answer, then I feel, *what about the other?* My answer depends on who I am talking to and in what situation I am in, but I basically think it doesn't matter what I am.

He stresses that it does not matter *what he is* but rather what matters is *who he is*. When I asked him how he would like to be recognised by the others, he answers, 'I would like to be seen and recognised as Japanese and Italian, and that's the minimum. I also rather want to be seen not with my nationality, but as Akira-Matthew Kato'.

Despite differences in the ability to pass, all the multiracial and multiethnic interviewees considered identifying as a human being as a way of resisting existing identity categories. However, for the multiracial interviewees, claiming their identity as a human being seems to be a strategy to cope with misrecognition and the gap between self-claimed identity and the ascribed identity that comes from the visibility of their mixedness. Because they would like others to embrace and accept their mixed background, they claim their identity as who they are.

Concluding remarks

This article aimed to analyse the ethnic options among multiracial and multiethnic Japanese and identify their abilities and limitations to pass as Japanese in Japan. It also analyses

how these individuals cope with, rationalise, and negotiate the gap between self and reflected identity. It found that individuals with multiracial and multiethnic identities face contextual shifts and are dialectically constructed through experiences with others, including other mixed persons (see contribution by Rodríguez-García et al. 2019; Song 2019; Chito Childs, Lyons, and Jones 2019; King-O'Riain 2019; and Rocha and Yeoh 2019 for similar results).

According to the 'conceptual model of mixedness' (see the introduction by Osanami Törngren, Irastorza, and Rodríguez-García 2019), the experiences of mixed individuals may relate to a greater or lesser extent with the members of the majority and minority groups depending on a set of individual and contextual factors. The 29 multiracial and multiethnic interviewees identify themselves in diverse terms, and many of them experience their reflected appraisals to be multiple as well. At the same time, the interview results show the resilience of the process of racialisation based on Japanese/*gaijin* binary. The emergence of the *haafu* and mixed categories can also be interpreted as the development of the triracial (Bonilla-Silva 2004). It became clear that the categories of Japanese, foreigner, and *haafu* are ascribed to both multiracial and multiethnic interviewees based on visible markers, such as their physical appearance, name, and language skills. Here we would still like to stress that one's language skills and name are usually only revealed when you get to know the person, whereas physical appearance is apparent at the first encounter, and thus, becomes an immediate marker for people to judge individuals as Japanese or foreigner. As a result, the majority of multiracial interviewees experience being ascribed with a foreigner identity, whereas multiethnic interviewees experience passing as Japanese. Multiethnic interviewees could often pass as Japanese, while multiracial interviewees experienced more constraints in ethnic options and in claiming their Japanese identity. However, the opposite can be said as well: While multiracial interviewees could claim their mixed identity and foreign background, multiethnic interviewees experienced more constraints in claiming their ethnic background and have the claim validated by others. As Song (2003) argues, this clearly shows that ethnic options should be analysed in terms of the different options individuals have available to them.

The interviews show how they actively challenge and sometimes confirm the binary of Japanese/*gaijin*. Many of the interviewees self-identify beyond the either-or identification logic, where they locate mixed identities outside of the binary. The interviewees who self-identified as individuals rather than mixed truly reflect the voice of being neither-nor, which locates mixed identities outside the prevailing racialized categories.

Whether or not Japan is on the way to being a triracial state, with resilient racial categories of Japanese, *haafu* and *gaijin*, remains to seen. What also remains to be seen is whether or not Japan will be able to deconstruct the dichotomy of Japanese/*gaijin* and go beyond the either-or opting and embrace the neither-nor logic. In any case, the Japanese context provides an interesting case for the future global understanding of multiracial and multiethnic identity.

Notes

1. Osanami Törngren's study was conducted in October 2015 and March 2016 and was partially funded by Japan Society for Promotion of the Science (JSPS) under Grant 15K03822. See more results in Osanami Törngren (2018). A total of 9 interviews were conducted by Sato

as part of her bachelor's thesis in July 2015 and November 2016, and one interview for her master's thesis in August 2017.
2. The term includes prefectures around Tokyo which are considered as wider Tokyo, such as Saitama, Kanagawa, and Chiba.
3. The term 'Asian' in the Japanese context refers to people from East Asian countries except for Japan.

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Disclosure statement

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Appendix

Appendix 1.

Name	Age	Employment	Father	Mother	Place of upbringing
Anna Park	24	Student	Zainichi Korean	Japanese	Yamaguchi
Shou Sato	21	Student	British	Japanese	UK, Tokyo
Daiki Smith	21	Student	American	Japanese	California, Tokyo
Michael Miller Suzuki	21	Student	American	Japanese	Japan
Keiko Tanaka	25	Working	American	Japanese	Osaka, Tokyo
Yuuto Christopher Ito	24	Working	British	Japanese	Miyagi
Jessica Johnson	22	Student	Australian	Japanese	Tokyo
Takumi Watanabe	24	Student	Japanese	Filipina	Philippines, Tokyo
Yoko Yamamoto	22	Student	Japanese	Singaporean	Singapore, Tokyo
Hiroshi Nakamura	21	Student	Korean	Japanese	Aichi, US
Ashley Williams	24	Working	Swiss	Japanese	Tokyo
Takashi Kobayashi	22	Student	Japanese	Filipina	Tokyo
Akira-Matthew Kato	24	Student	Japanese	Italian	Tokyo
Kazuko Yoshida	22	Student	Japanese	Filipina	Tokyo
Tomoko Yamada	19	Student	American	Japanese	Akita
Brittany Jones	23	Working	American	Japanese	Tokyo
Makoto Sasaki	22	Student	Thai	Taiwanese *Japanese	Tokyo
Amanda Brown	23	Working	Nigerian	Japanese	Tokyo
Akemi Yamaguchi	19	Student	Japanese	Chinese *Japanese	Tokyo, Middle East
Takeshi Nakamura	20	Student	Japanese	Korean	Tokyo
Ken Koizumi	19	Student	British	Japanese	UK, Sendai
Sakura Miyoshi	20	Student	Japanese	Chinese	Tokyo, Nagoya, China, Sydney
Mei Fujita	20	Student	Japanese	Hong Kongese	Tokyo, Indonesia, China
Nanyo Kanda	22	Student	Japanese	Thai	Tokyo
Koh Maeda	22	Student	Japanese	American	Tokyo
Shelly Endo	24	Working	Norwegian	Japanese	Tokyo
Kana Mohammad Hashimoto	23	Student	Palestinian	Japanese	Tokyo
Reina Shimizu	23	Student	Japanese	Filipina	Shizuoka, Tokyo, Philippine
Yuki Yokoyama	22	Student	Japanese	Korean	Tokyo

*Naturalized Japanese.