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Abstract

Even though the number of multiracial and multiethnic Japanese, socially recognized and identified as “haafu (half)” are increasing, their identities and experiences are seldom critically analyzed. How do they identify themselves and how do they feel that they are identified by others? Based on interviews with eighteen individuals who grew up in Japan having one Japanese parent and one non-Japanese parent, this article explores ethnic options and practices of covering and passing among multiracial and multiethnic individuals in Japan. The analysis shows that multiracial and multiethnic individuals possess different kinds of ethnic options and practice passing and covering differently.

Key Words

multiracial and multiethnic identity, Japan, ethnic options, passing

Bio notes

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Introduction

Only about 1.7 percent of the total population of 127 million are foreign citizens in Japan, and they are predominantly from other Asian countries. Although the number is still small, Japan has seen a significant increase in immigration the past several decades. Since 1975 the number of foreign nationals residing in Japan has tripled (Ministry of Justice 2015) and the immigrant population has grown especially after the reform of Immigration-Control and Refugee-Recognition Act in 1990. The increasing immigration is also reflected on the increasing number of intermarriages. Japan has seen 12.5 times more intermarriages over the course of the past four decades (Takeda 2013) and a total of about 140,000 foreign citizens, around 5 percent of all foreign citizens holding a residence permit in Japan, are currently holding a status of “spouse to Japanese citizen” today (Ministry of Justice 2015).

As a consequence of intermarriages, the numbers of children who have one Japanese parent and one foreign-born parent i.e. multiracial and multiethnic are also increasing. They are all too often seen literary as “half” and “the marginal man” (Park 1928; Stonequist 1935), having physiological and social problems of belonging neither to the majority or the minority. At the same time they are also celebrated as “double”, a bridge between the minority and the majority with cultural, racial and ethnic literacy. Moreover, the increase of mixed population is thought to contribute to the blurring of the racial and ethnic divide that may exist in society, to accelerate the post-racial and colorblind ideal (e.g. Ali 2003), and to enhance the attractiveness and marketability of the “Generation E.A. (Ethnically Ambiguous)” (La Ferla 2003).

Since the late 1960s, the celebration of “Generation E.A” can be clearly observed in the Japanese media portraying celebrities of mixed background and most recently with the emergence of “haafu-gao (multiracial and multiethnic face)” make-up trend (Okamura 2016; Want 2016; Yamashita 2009). Attentions were paid to the athletes with mixed background for their success in the most recent Olympic games (e.g. Schanen 2016). However, embracement of multiethnic and multiracial people in Japan came slow and varied reactions are seen throughout history. When their presence increased after the WWII, they were perceived differently from the majority Japanese population and were distinguished as “konketsuji (mixed-blood children)” or “ainoko (mixed breed children)” with negative connotations (e.g. Majima 2014; Murphy-Shigematsu 2012). The reluctance to see multiracial and multiethnic people as Japanese has not completely vanished today either. For example, when a multiracial Ariana Miyamoto with black American and Japanese background was chosen as Miss Japan in 2015, a surge of strong reactions were cast towards her not being “Japanese” (e.g. Fackler 2015).

Despite the increased presence of multiethnic and multiracial individuals in Japan, the number of published academic research in Japan concerning multiracial and multiethnic Japanese is limited (e.g. Iwabuchi 2014; Kamada 2010) and the focus has been put mainly on children born between a US military man and a Japanese woman (e.g. Carter 2014; Murphy-Shigematsu

2012; Welty 2014). Moreover, research concerning mixed identity is concentrated in the English-speaking context (e.g. Ali 2003; Aspinall and Song 2012; Edwards et al. 2012; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005), and this article will contribute to the field by examining the Japanese case.

More specifically, this article will explore whether there are *ethnic options* (Song 2003; Waters 1996; Waters 2001), a choice to claim a certain ethnicity, for multiracial and multiethnic individuals in Japan. Through the examination of ethnic options, the article will reveal the practice of *passing* and *covering* (Goffman 1990; Yoshino 2007) behind the choice of claiming certain ethnicity. Ethnic options of passing and covering among multiracial and multiethnic persons have not been systematically analyzed in the Japanese context. Multiracial Japanese who are visibly different from the majority may experience constraints in their ethnic option to claim to be Japanese, while multiethnic Japanese maybe able to pass as Japanese. Do ethnic options depend solely on the ability to pass based on physical appearance, or do multiethnic and multiracial Japanese exercise their options differently? Moreover when the choice is not available for multiracial Japanese, do they practice covering to be able to exercise their ethnic options? The article will not only analyze how mixed people exercise their ethnic options but also the process and reasoning behind their choice to pass or cover.

Overview of the context of Japan

Statistics on intermarriages and children of multiracial and multiethnic background

The statistics in Japan over the past decades constantly show that most intermarriages in Japan are interethnic rather than interracial. Three percent of marriages were conceived between Japanese and foreign nationals in 2014, where of two percent are between Japanese male and foreign female, and one percent between Japanese female and foreign male. Chinese, Filipina and Korean citizens represent the biggest number of foreign brides, while Korean, US and Chinese citizens represent the largest group of foreign grooms (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2014). The number of newborn babies in Japan shows the equivalent that there is a larger number of multiethnic Japanese than multiracial Japanese in Japanⁱⁱ. Around two percent of newborn babies born in Japan in 2014 have either a father or a mother who is of above mentioned citizenship (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2015).

Since Japan only registers nationality of the individuals in the census, it is difficult to count how large the multiethnic and multiracial Japanese population actually is. Moreover, it is not possible to track down the parents' citizenship in the Japanese census database unless the family members are registered within the same household. In other words, statistics only include multiethnic and multiracial individuals whose parents live together. Japan only allows people of mixed background to officially retain their dual citizenship up until the age of twenty-

twoⁱⁱⁱ and the majority of adult mixed people are registered only as Japanese. Because of all these, multiethnic and multiracial population is statistically ambiguous and partly invisible in Japan.

The idea of Japaneseness and being multiracial and multiethnic

The idea of Japaneseness and skin color was developed originally in Japan and embedded in the Japanese culture (Ashikari 2005; Wagatsuma 1967; Watanabe 2016), however the concept of race and whiteness from the Western perspective started to influence Japan in the middle of the 19th century, when Japan came into contact with the West. Contact with the West led to the feeling of racial inferiority, and to a certain level of admiration over being racially and ethnically “white” (Okamura 2016; Majima 2014; Ashikari 2005; Arudou 2015; Watanabe 2016). Fascinations with Western movie stars grew in the early 20th century which escalated the idealization of white women as attractive (Okamura 2016) and attempts to recreate Japanese female beauty by westernizing the subjects’ features with taller nose or enlarged eyes were made (Watanabe 2016). Mixed people, especially those who are of white European and North American background, are still today considered to be highly attractive because of their non-Japanese physical looks (Kamada 2010; Murphy-Shigematsu 2001).

How the Japanese consider themselves and how one “looks Japanese” today is still defined by the idea of skin color, facial features and behaviors (Ashikari 2005; McVeigh 2000; Yoshino 1997). The word “gaikokujin/gaijin (foreigner)” which literary signifies outsidership is the word commonly used in Japan today to refer to those who are visibly different in Japan and the binary of Japanese/foreigner is very salient in Japan (Kashiwazaki 2009; Arudou 2015; Wagatsuma 1967). Kashiwazaki writes that “typical foreigners” who have differing skin color, culture (such as language, behavior and ethnic name) would stand out as “gaijin” because of their appearance and behavior. Moreover they will be assumed to have non-Japanese nationality based on their physical appearance (Kashiwazaki 2009).

Multiracial Japanese especially slips into the category of “foreigner” because of the idea of Japanese based on visible differences (Murphy-Shigematsu 2001). Over the past decades, various terms emerged to address multiracial and multiethnic individuals. The term “haafu”, originally deriving from the English word “half”, is a well-established and recognized term with a positive connotation referring to multiracial and multiethnic population today (Arudou 2015; Iwabuchi 2014; Murphy-Shigematsu 2001; Okamura 2013). The term was originally an assigned term with a connotation of being “half white”, but now has turned into a self-claimed social identification, which embraces all mixed people (Murphy-Shigematsu 2012). Even though the term “haafu” still invokes the image of a multiracial rather than a multiethnic person, and white haafu still are seen as the ideal type of haafu (Murphy-Shigematsu 2001), the recent trend for multiethnic Asian “haafu” to “come out” as one, depicts the embracement of the term “haafu” as a social identification among all.

As the social awareness of multiracial and multiethnic population rose in Japan, alternative terms such as “kokusaiji (international children)” or “daburu” emerged as well. The term “kokusaiji” represented an attempt to shift the focus of “haafu” being “half white American” and positively redefine persons of multiethnic and multiracial background with their international and cultural quality (Murphy-Shigematsu 2001). “Daburu” originally deriving from the English word “double” emerged as an alternative and idealistic term compared to “haafu” especially from the media outlets, in the context of Okinawa with the US military presence, the Korean community in Japan, and the parents of multiracial and multiethnic children (Carter 2014; Kamada 2010; Okamura Forthcoming 2016). However, the term never became established among the multiracial and multiethnic individuals themselves, and they rather claim that the term “haafu” is more preferable than “daburu” (Lise 2010; Murphy-Shigematsu 2012; Yamashita 2009). Influenced by the North American discussion, “mixed roots” is a fairly new term that has been introduced to the Japanese language (Yamashita 2009), which is gaining more and more recognition.

Ethnic options, passing and covering

Before defining multiracial and multiethnic individuals, it is important to state what is meant by race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity are defined in various ways in different disciplines and traditions. In this study race should be understood as a socially constructed idea evoked by visible differences (e.g. Daynes and Lee 2008); race is something that exists not as a biological reality but as a social reality. Race is a social reality because the lives of the people who are categorized as different according to their visible differences are manifested through discrimination and racism. There are many different definitions of ethnicity, although what all different definitions of ethnicity have in common is the notion of shared culture (e.g. Cornell and Hartmann 2007; Fenton 2003). However, as Cattle (2005) argues, an ethnic difference may not explain a difference in culture, unless culture is treated and perceived as something fixed and essential to each ethnic group. Ethnicity can also be symbolic (Gans 1979) and people may pick and choose certain aspects of culture. Ethnicity should therefore be understood as an identification of cultural origin and heritage independent of if the individuals practice the culture or not. Many researchers conflate the meaning of race and ethnicity. However, the two are distinct in a way that race is visible while ethnicity is not always visible. Race is often an ascribed and assigned category, while ethnicity, compared to race, is often acquired and self-claimed by the individuals in the group.

Many scholars claim that the choice of individuals’ ethnicity and ethnic identity is limited according to individuals’ racial belonging. Eriksen (1993) states that it can be difficult for groups of people who “look different” from the majority or other minority groups in society to escape from their “ethnic identity”. This is because ethnicity is often ascribed to people who look non-Western and because the majority population do not often regard themselves as “ethnic” (Frankenberg 1993). Waters (2001; 1996) discusses the American case that while white

populations enjoy ethnicity as a choice, ethnic minorities do not have such a choice because of racial assignment. This *ethnic option* is formed by the nature and range of choices available to individuals depending on the labels, stigmas and stereotypes attached to the group individuals belong to, which means that some may have a wider range of choices and lesser constraint. Ethnicity as a self-claimed identity is one thing, but this does not mean that the claim will be accepted in different social contexts. Therefore, the ethnic option is achieved and it bears significance only when the ethnic identities asserted by individuals are recognized and validated by the wider society (Song 2003). While Waters focused on the fact that ethnic options are what white majority in the US enjoy, Song (2003) proposed, that non-white ethnic minorities indeed also have the ability to exercise their ethnic options. Drawing examples from the US and UK, Song argues that ethnic options should be discussed in terms of what kind of different options individuals have. For example in the US, socioeconomic status, ethnic concentration, and dynamics of ethnic labels and images do play a role in the extent to which ethnic minorities and mixed people can exercise their ethnic options (Aspinall and Song 2012; Fhagen-Smith 2010; Holloway, Wright, and Ellis 2012; Song 2003).

The choice and constraint of ethnic option are most obvious when you are racially mixed. By way of example Waters explains that if a person has an English and German background, that person can identify him- or herself as German and *pass* as German without being questioned. On the contrary if a person is of racially mixed heritage, e.g. with an African and German background, due to the social norms he or she will probably not be accepted and pass as German if he/she looks black (Waters 1996; Waters 2001).

The concept of *passing* was initially conceptualized by Goffman (1990). Racial passing is an act in which a person of one race identifies and presents oneself as something else, usually as the race of the majority population in the social context. Passing is an act of "deception" (Kennedy 2001), and only possible when the stigma is not visible. Therefore, as Water's example above suggests, passing as the majority population will be more difficult for someone who is multiracial compared to multiethnic. Passing is utilized because of the rewards and privileges affiliated with being considered "normal" (Goffman 1990). In the US under the Jim Crow era and the idea of restrictive one-drop rule, many multiracial black/white Americans have passed as white as a way of acceptance (Kennedy 2001; Khanna and Johnson 2010). Passing is thought to be morally unjustifiable since it reifies the existing structures of racial inequality, and through criticizing that someone is passing, the notion of blood quantum gets reinforced (Song 2003).

While passing can give privileges in certain situations, it can also lead to misrecognition and a potential gap in how one sees oneself and how others perceive one. Independent of whether individuals pass intentionally or unintentionally, passing may involve emotional and psychological dilemma. Song (2003) argues that the practice of passing for multiracial and multiethnic individuals should be conceptualized as an ethnic option, which they may or may not have control over (69). Studies in the US and UK show that someone of mixed black/white background experience more constraints in their ethnic options compared to someone of

mixed Asian/white background (Aspinall and Song 2012; Harris and Sim 2002; Song 2003; Tashiro 2002).

When passing is not possible or desired, individuals can engage in the practice of *covering*. Covering, also conceptualized by Goffman refers to a practice by individuals to tone down a disfavored identity (Goffman 1990; Yoshino 2007). Covering is a form of assimilation and it is a practice of “bowing to an unjust reality that required them to tone down their stigmatized identities to get along in life” (Yoshino 2007: x). Racial and ethnic covering can be achieved by changing names, clothing or behavior patterns. These are the ways to downplay the attributes that otherwise might become the center of attention (Goffman 1990).

There are very few studies that address ethnic options and practices of passing and covering among mixed people in Japan. Even though the studies do not specifically use the terms, studies on biracial identity construction in Japan show how mixed youth experiences of passing and covering and the constraints of ethnic options differ according to the family structure, living environment and whether they are multiethnic or multiracial (Almonte-Acosta 2008; Oikawa and Yoshida 2007; Oshima 2014) Takeshita (2010) specifically applies the word “passing” and argues that Japanese-Brazilian mixed children have a tendency to hide that they are Brazilian and pass as Japanese. Murphey-Shigematsu (2001) write that the recent spread of positive images of haafu enhance their quality of life, however multiracial and multiethnic individuals in Japan are still not given the ability to express themselves as persons of more than one ethnic background. He also writes the majority of those who can pass as Japanese attempt to cover their non-Japanese side, and those who cannot pass normally find it easier by passing as a foreigner. This article will specifically address the choices, ability and limitations for mixed people to express themselves as persons of more than one ethnic background, through analyzing the practice of passing and covering.

Method and data

Interviewees were recruited on the following basis: self-identify as mixed, having one Japanese parent and one parent who are of foreign background or non-Japanese citizens, and grew up predominantly in Japan and live in Tokyo. The age of the interviewees was set to between eighteen and twenty-five at the time of the interview. A total of twenty semi-structured interviews with mixed people (11 female and 9 male) were conducted in Tokyo during the period of October 2015 to March 2016. My analysis will focus on the eighteen interviewees who have lived in Japan for more than half of their upbringing (up until they turned 18); one third of them grew up in Tokyo^{iv}. Among those who were brought up in Japan, two spent some portion of their upbringing in their non-Japanese parent’s home country, and one spent some time in a third country. Twelve interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the rest were conducted over Skype or Facetime. The interviews were conducted in Japanese, English or in mixture of

both, and lasted from thirty minutes to one and a half hour. Detailed information about the interviewees can be found on Appendix 1.

I was acquaintance with three of the interviewees prior to conducting the research, and other interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling. Since the three initial interviewees were students in one of the prestigious universities in Tokyo, and also because of the age limit of the interviewees, all twenty interviewees were either currently attending well-known universities or newly graduated from such universities and working. Therefore this study only represents multiethnic and multiracial Japanese with a high socioeconomic status. The high socioeconomic status is also reflected in the fact that the majority of the interviewees spent their childhood vacations traveling to their non-Japanese parents' countries at least once a year or every other year. All eighteen interviewees were at least bilingual, although despite being bilingual, four interviewees could not speak their non-Japanese parents' native language. Moreover, more than half of the interviewees went to study abroad in North America or Europe for a year during their college education. The choice of the countries to study abroad did not always depend on their parental background.

Not only because of snowball sampling but also since participation in this study was voluntary, additional bias in the selection of the interviewees might be observed. For example, the largest number of intermarriages in Japan consists of one partner with Chinese, Filipino or Korean nationality and the number of mixed people in Japan shows this pattern. There are some interviewees with these backgrounds, however the majority of the interviewees are of white American or European background. Japanese statistics also shows that double as many Japanese male marry a non-Japanese compared to Japanese female, however more than half of the interviewees had a mother with a Japanese citizenship. The slight overrepresentation of interviewees who had mothers who were Japanese justifies the overrepresentation of interviewees with American background, since marriages between Japanese female and American male are the second most common intermarriage pattern.

Interviewees gave both oral and written consent to participate in the study. All interviews were recorded with the consent by the interviewees, transcribed and the transcription was sent to the interviewees to review. Almost all the interviewees in this study used the term "haafu" to describe themselves. When translating the interviews in Japanese to English, original terms such as "haafu" or "gaijin" the interviewees used are kept. The quotation marks around these terms are eliminated in the analysis as they reflect the word choices of the interviewees. All interview materials are treated anonymously and confidentially, and the names that appear in this article are pseudonymous.

Analysis

To the question how the interviewees identify themselves, eight interviewees answered Japanese (including those who said “more Japanese than anything else”), five identified as multiracial or multiethnic (using words such as haafu, mixed roots, daburu, Japanese and X), four as human being, two with the nationality of the non-Japanese parent, and one didn’t know how to answer. Studying the answers given to the question how the interviewees self-identify and how others identify them, the gap between self-claimed and ascribed identity become obvious for some. Seven interviewees stated that they are identified solely as Japanese by others, and all of them except one have multiethnic background rather than multiracial. Below Table 1 summarizes the responses.

Table 1. Summary of the interviews

Name	Self-identification	Ascribed identity
Anna	Japanese	Korean
Daiki	More American than Japanese	Foreigner
Michael	Human being	American or haafu
Chie	Japanese	Japanese
Keiko	Japanese and white	Foreigner
Yuuto Christopher	More Japanese	Japanese
Jessica	More Japanese	Haafu
Yoko	Japanese	Japanese
Hiroshi	Human being	Japanese
Ashley	Japanese	Foreigner
Takashi	Japanese, haafu	Japanese
Akira-Matthew	Human being	Foreigner or haafu
Kazuko	Japanese	Japanese or haafu
Tomoko	Daburu, haafu	Daburu or American
Brittany	More American than Japanese	Foreigner
Makoto	Don't know, maybe Asian	Japanese or haafu
Amanda	Mixed roots	Foreigner or American
Akemi	Chinese and Japanese, haafu	Japanese

Passing as Japanese

Passing is possible only when the stigma is not visible (Goffman 1990). The choice to pass as Japanese was almost solely observed among multiethnic interviewees. Chie whose mother is Korean and father is Japanese says that she considers herself Japanese but not as Korean. Chie claims that she does not feel the gap between how she defines herself and how she believes others see her, however the feeling of misrecognition is present as well. She says that her behavior and cultural background, nationality and her physical appearance make it not possible for people to notice that she is Korean, and says "I think people see me as real, 100% Japanese." As previous research shows, visible differences, culture and nationality seems to construct the idea of Japanese (Kashiwazaki 2009) and how Chie sees herself and believes others' base their opinion on. She adds that she will not be accepted as Korean because she does not have Korean nationality, does not "have an element of Koreanness" and does not know so much about Korea. She says that when she participates in the Korean community and talk to her close Korean friends, they don't consider her Korean. It is apparent that she believes that while she can pass as Japanese, she cannot pass as Korean and passing as Japanese does not come with any psychological dilemma. Chie explains that when she reflects on her identity, being Korean does have an influence on her. Chie's hesitation and feeling of misrecognition that she is 100% Japanese is clear in her words;

It's very difficult but I don't like to be considered as a complete Japanese, but I really don't want to be told that I am Korean either, but I sort of don't want to be treated as 100% Japanese. [...] I want to be basically the same, Japanese. I want people to understand that I am not Korean but I have some Korean background.

Yoko, similarly to Chie, says that she defines herself and her identity as Japanese because of her nationality, language ability and the way of thinking, and she believes that others recognize her as Japanese as well. Even when she lived in Singapore, where her mother comes from, she felt that other Singaporean saw her as Japanese. Here again, Yoko feels that she can pass as Japanese but not as Singaporean. As Chie the feeling of misrecognition can be observed; Yoko says she "choose" to be Japanese, and express the wish to be recognized as haafu and her mother is from Singapore.

If I claim that I am Singaporean, sometimes people ask me "Is it Singaporean you speak in Singapore?" [which is incorrect] but then they ask "Do you speak Chinese?" and I can't. Because I can't claim that I am Singaporean it comes back to my answer that it's fine if I am recognized as Japanese.

Takashi also says that he is not recognized and accepted as haafu or Filipino because of the lack of language skills. Even though the Filipino community has formed his life and it is with the Filipino community that he spends the most time with, Takashi feels that he is "different" from

the other Filipinos culturally and personality wise. Takashi never mentions that he is mixed, and says that it is enough that those that he cares understand his background. His physical appearance that enables him to pass as Japanese let him even take the side of Japanese. His words depict the privilege of passing and his mixed feelings in being able to pass.

I am on the side of those who joke about those who are darker [in skin color] and more obvious that they are definitely not Japanese. I'm the same really [as other Japanese], how should I put it. From the perspective of Japanese, they are darker [other Filipinos]. Then I stand completely on the Japanese side and joke about their skin color. On the way home from school I apologize that I am sorry, because I am actually the same [as those who are darker].

Akemi describes that she identifies herself as Japanese when she is in Japan and as Chinese when she is in China. Akemi was the only interviewee who claimed her ability to pass in two different countries. Passing as Japanese or Chinese for Akemi does not mean that she is not recognized as haafu either. She says that she still can be noticed as haafu and she is accepted as such, largely because of her language ability.

I don't tell people myself so often that I am haafu but it's rather that people around me notice that I am when I speak Chinese or when I do something that reminds them of China. Then they notice "Akemi are you Chinese?" Then I say I am not Chinese but I am haafu.

Hiroshi, who grew up with a Japanese mother and family with almost no connection to Korea after his mother divorced from his Korean father, says that he has never doubted nationality wise that he is Japanese, and he does pass as Japanese. He also wants to be identified as Japanese, however he stressed that it is not because he has a Japanese identity. For Hiroshi, being Japanese is about having Japanese blood-tie.

For me, to be recognized 100% as Japanese, and be valued as Japanese will mean that I can repay my gratitude to my mother and my grandmother. [...] I would like to be recognized as Japanese because my grandparents are Japanese. [...] It's rather that because the family I love is Japanese [I say Japanese], not because I have an identity as Japanese.

For interviewees who could pass as Japanese i.e. interviewees who had the ethnic option to claim that they are Japanese, passing entailed different constraints and choices. For Chie and Yoko passing as Japanese meant they could not pass as something else, which entailed some feelings of misrecognition. Akemi on the other hand felt that she could exercise her ethnic option fully as Chinese, Japanese and haafu and accepted as all of the three. For Takashi, the aspect of privilege in passing and active choice to pass came to surface and Hiroshi's words depict the gap between passing and his own identity.

Passing as gaijin (foreigner)

While multiethnic interviewees expressed that they could pass as Japanese, multiracial interviewees said that they are mostly treated as "gaijin" (foreigner). As Murphey-Shigematsu writes (2001), multiracial interviewees passed as foreigners when they could not pass as Japanese.

For Daiki, passing as foreigner made his life “easier”. He clearly stated that he never thought of himself as Japanese: “It’s easier for me to believe that I am American.” He says that he can never consider himself as Japanese because of the experiences of being treated differently. “I am forever a gaijin. Therefore, I will never feel that I am one of the Japanese people.” Daiki says that it cannot be helped that he is treated as a foreigner because Japanese still do not understand that there are multiracial Japanese. He also said that he never felt alienated due to being treated as a foreigner, because he chooses to pass as American. Brittany also feels that it is “easier” for her to pass as foreigner in Japan. She says;

When people don’t know anything about me and I say I am Japanese I have seldom been accepted as one. “No that’s not true”, “don’t joke about it”, “does Japan accept immigrants?” These are the comments that I get. So if I don’t want to be bothered I just say I am American.

Similarly to Daiki, she claims that it is ok that she cannot pass as Japanese but pass as a foreigner. She says “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.” Both Daiki and Brittany have lived in the US as well, which also makes them comfortable to pass as American.

Tomoko has a strong pride in her American identity, especially as a southerner, and has a desire to be recognized as American, even though she has visited the US only several times and never lived in the US. Her wish to pass as American seems to come from the fact that she has repeatedly experienced that she cannot pass as Japanese, similar to what Daiki and Brittany felt. However, compared to Daiki and Brittany who choose to pass as American, Tomoko’s desire to pass as American seems to be based more on the constant experiences of misrecognition by others of her as a foreigner, and contradicts to her repeated claim in the interview that she defines herself as daburu and haafu. She shared one recent incident that made her feel that way.

A week ago I visited the high school that I attended, and when the students passed by me on the corridor I heard them saying “There’s a gaijin!” and I was shocked since it was my own high school. I have already graduated so I am an outside of course, but I was shocked by the fact that I was a person excluded from that space.

Amanda who was the only black-Japanese interviewee with a Nigerian father and a Japanese mother, says that she can never pass as Japanese because of her physical appearance and always need to stress the fact that she is a Japanese national. She wants to be identified as “mixed race and having mixed roots” but most often treated just as “black”. She says “even when I put that emphasis [on mixed roots and Japanese nationality], people say that I am not as Japanese as they are or I am more black than Japanese.” Amanda sees her Nigerian father stopped by policemen often and even though she has never experienced it herself, she is constantly conscious.

I think just by being out and about in general on the streets, I grew up being stared at, being called gaijin by random strangers, which doesn’t happen recently but doesn’t mean it’s over. But I do feel that the stares coming from people and in that sense I really feel that I stand out.

Whether one can claim to be Japanese or not, largely seemed to depend on the visible differences. The practice of passing as foreigner for interviewees like Daiki and Brittany were intentional, in other words they could exercise their ethnic option in claiming that they are American. However for Tomoko and Amanda, passing as foreigner was simply because of the misrecognition by others, and having the constraints in claiming their ethnic option, Tomoko as daburu and haafu, Amanda as mixed roots.

Passing as haafu

Jessica says that her Japanese identity is stronger than her Australian one, considering her language ability, number of friends, and knowledge about the country such as culture and society. However, she is reluctant to choose sides and she chooses to pass as haafu.

It's probably difficult for others to define what I am country wise just by my physical appearance, but I feel that a lot of people think at least that I am haafu, or have somewhere [other than Japan] in me.

Akira-Matthew identifies himself as haafu, both as Japanese and Italian. He says that people recognize him as haafu or a foreigner, and he feels more comfortable to be seen and pass as haafu because then people identify the fact that he is partly Japanese. He also expressed that being identified as haafu by others is a positive thing for him. Like Jessica, Akira-Matthew also thinks that people cannot guess his Italian background just by the appearance therefore "it's enough for me that people recognize that I have Japan and the other half." How Jessica and Akira-Matthew pass as haafu is similar to what Khanna (2011) identified in her study, that because black-white biracial persons in the US experience constraints in passing as white, they exercise their white ethnicity symbolically in highlighting that they are "partly the same." For Jessica and Akira-Matthew, passing as haafu is positive and self-chosen which highlights and draws attention to the fact that they are Japanese.

Passing, however as analyzed earlier, is not always intentional and unproblematic. Michael also seems to feel that he does not fit to the category of "Japanese". He says; "[People have always regarded me] that I am haafu of American background and do not see me as a complete Japanese." He never says that he "is" Japanese because "others' don't look at me in that way". He experiences that people often see him only as American or foreigner and that the easiest for him is to be treated as haafu, because it embraces the fact that he is both Japanese and American. Jessica and Akira-Matthew and Michael all stress passing as haafu to draw attention to the fact that they are Japanese. The slight difference is that for Jessica and Akira-Matthews, passing as haafu is to be appreciated as partly Japanese, but for Michel he chooses to pass because he is denied as Japanese otherwise.

Similarly to Michel passing as haafu is the only possibility for her to be seen as Japanese for Keiko. Keiko feels that her identity is "80% Japanese and 20% American or white" and feels that her Japanese identity is stronger than her American one.

I want to say that I am Japanese first of all because I would like to tell that my physical appearance looks foreign but my way of thinking and behavior is more Japanese so don't worry, I don't bite, I am not a foreign entity, I am not an alien you don't have to worry. [...] Even when I am around Americans or people from other countries, my way of thinking is the closest to [that of Japanese]. I am Japanese. I want to highlight the fact that I am Japanese.

Keiko's parents got divorced when she was very young and she did not have a strong connection with her father and American culture growing up. She doesn't have a strong identity as American and being American is just about having a blood-tie and nationality. Despite the fact that she feels 80% Japanese, she never says that she "is" Japanese since she feels that she can never pass as Japanese due to her physical appearance. She repeatedly talked about the gap between how she feels inside and her physical looks. She says, "It happens that I look up at the reflection on the window and I see a gaijin and then I realize that it is actually me." Contrary to Michael, Keiko strongly identifies herself as Japanese. Because Keiko feels that she can never claim that she is Japanese but she still wants to stress the fact that she is Japanese, she would answer that she is left with the choice to pass as "half Japanese and half Caucasian".

Kazuko identifies herself as Japanese, and refers to herself as "mixed" but she never sees her as a Filipina. Contrary to what she is and thinks of herself, she often passes as haafu of white European background. She reasons that it is because of her appearance being "rather pale skin" and it doesn't go along with the popular image of Filipinos in Japan being "short and tanned".

I am often told that my appearance does not look typically Japanese and I get asked "You are haafu right?" I am asked, "Do you speak English?" as well. I am [half] Filipina but surprisingly a lot of people tell me that they thought I was a haafu of European background. I don't know what to think about it.

Kazuko's passing as haafu is based on a misrecognition and the stereotype of how someone of Filipino background should look like but also that haafu still are seen predominantly as having white European or North American background. Even though Kazuko's passing as haafu seems problematic, she reasons that this is something that only affects her first contacts with people and otherwise she can pass as Japanese because of her behavior and cultural background.

Makoto's mother is naturalized Japanese of Taiwanese decent who grew up in Japan and Makoto has no connection to Taiwan. Makoto has a strong connection to his father's side and Thailand. He said he would answer that he is Japanese when he is in Japan and Thai when he is in Thailand. He passes as Thai but when he claims that he is Japanese, he says that cannot pass as Japanese because of the way he looks, and passes more as haafu. He says he is not questioned whether he "really is Japanese" but rather get comments like "but aren't you haafu?" or "you look like haafu." Having a mother who is naturalized Japanese, Makoto actually feels the hesitation and "dishonesty" to say that he is Japanese, even though he has grown up in Japan and have Japanese citizenship. Makoto sees how his other multiracial and multiethnic friends who are partly Japanese can claim "I am Japanese" straightforwardly compared to him. The idea of Japanese blood-tie in being Japanese can be inferred here. Makoto sees his haafu status as unique and special and passing as haafu for him is not totally based on misrecognition. Rather it can be understood as an ethnic option since he feels that it is more honest to say that

he is haafu rather than Japanese. However at the same time it seems to make him feel that he does not belong to the idea of Japanese.

Passing as haafu is again an option for some and constraints for others. For Jessica and Akira-Matthew passing as haafu means that they feel that they can exercise their ethnic option. Similarly but differently, for Michael and Keiko, passing as haafu is the only option they have to address their Japanese side. For Kazuko passing as haafu is based on misrecognition, not being identified as Japanese or Filipina but as a white haafu. Makoto's passing as haafu is based on the fact that he feels the hesitation to and also that he cannot pass as Japanese.

Covering as Japanese

Having a Japan-born and raised Zainichi Korean father, Anna never felt that she was Korean. Anna says that when people notice her name, they see her just as Korean, not as mixed or Japanese. She also never says that she "is" Japanese, but she always says she "is from" Japan.

Since I was very young, whenever people ask my name, I answer "Anna Park" and then the answer is "Oh, Ms. Park. Your Japanese is very good". [...] I was thinking all the time that we were Japanese. I think I didn't like these comments. I was thinking that I was same as all the others around me and my dad is also from Japan. I had experiences from abroad as well so I tried to hide the fact that I was half Korean, and thinking I am different because of these [international] experiences, not because I am half Korean.

Anna has relatives in different parts of the world, which made it possible for her to frequently travel abroad and spend every summer at a summer school in Europe. She talks about how she made an active choice first to cover as "Japanese with international experiences" and then more actively and intentionally hide the fact that her father is Zainichi Korean.

When I was young I thought it was cool that I was different from people around me. I believe I was thinking, hey I am Korean! As I grew older I started to internalize the stereotypes and prejudices that exists. I realized that it's actually more beneficial to not mention it [that I am half Zainichi Korean] when I entered the university.

Above quote infers the possibility for her to pass as Japanese through covering, if people do not see her name or if she does not mention that she is Korean. Even though she is proud of her Zainichi Korean heritage, she seems to feel more comfortable in assimilating as Japanese by covering because of the stereotypes that exists towards Koreans in Japan.

Christopher is the only multiracial interviewee who states that he is seen as Japanese by others and pass as Japanese most of the time. However, when he introduces himself, his Anglicized first name stands out and make people notice that he has mixed background. Him passing as Japanese seems to stir some psychological dilemma. His words exhibit contradictions in how he says that the way he behaves is very Japanese, but he does not feel that he is Japanese. Analyzing his words, it becomes obvious that he tries to assimilate by covering as Japanese, rather than making an active choice to pass as Japanese: "When people tell me that I act as Japanese, I feel that there is a part of me that is acting as Japanese." He explains;

I've always felt that the surrounding expected me to be Japanese, and this expectation existed since when I was in elementary school. I act according to that expectation but people tell me "Christopher is very Japanese." I feel that that's what they wanted from the beginning.

Contrary to Christopher's experience of covering, Ashley's covering as Japanese comes from the fact that she cannot pass as Japanese. Ashley whose father is Swiss and her mother Japanese, identifies herself as Japanese. Even though she experiences that she is seen as a foreigner and cannot pass as Japanese because her physical appearance being "not at all Japanese" with "brown hair and blue-green eyes", she can cover as Japanese through her cultural background and social behavior as Japanese. Ashley explains that because she is aware of her outer appearance she feels extra strongly about identifying herself as Japanese. Covering as Japanese for her does not seem to reflect her wish to assimilate to the majority society. Rather she exercise covering with her choice, and being accepted as Japanese through covering gives her the option to claim that she is Japanese even though she cannot physically pass as Japanese. For her, covering as Japanese gives her the option to draw attention on her Japanese identity.

Judging from my outer appearance, the first impression and my physical appearance, I myself think that I do not look Japanese and I think that people around me think in the same way. So as the conversation goes and people tell me that even though I look like this I am really Japanese, I feel that my identity and my inner self are recognized.

Above examples shows that it is not always the case that people choose to cover because they cannot pass. For Anna and Ashley, covering is an alternative to passing, however for Christopher who could pass as Japanese, covering was exercised to fill in the gap between how they see themselves and what others expected. It can be understood that because being Japanese is defined not only by the visible features but also the cultural and behavioral aspects, Christopher feels the need to cover.

Is there an ethnic option?

Waters (1996; 2001) initially advocated that ethnic options are something that only the majority population in society can enjoy. Song (2003) proposed that ethnic options are not only exercised by the majority but also ethnic minority groups do exercise ethnic options differently, by actively participating in efforts to contesting and modifying the images associated with their ethnic identities. As passing is supposedly only possible when the stigma is not visible, covering may be practiced to tone down the stigma (Goffman 1990). Analyzing the interviews it becomes clear that physical appearance does play a strong role in the ability to pass as Japanese or not. However, at the same time, different kinds of ethnic options were exercised by the interviewees through the practice of passing and covering as foreigners and haafu.

Through interviews with twenty multiracial and multiethnic Japanese, as previous studies show (e.g. Kashiwazaki 2009; Yoshino 1997) the idea of Japanese being strongly centered on the visible features, including names was obvious which affected the ethnic option. For multiracial interviewees it was more difficult to pass as Japanese, and their ethnic options constrained, while it seemed easier for multiethnic interviewees.

It is important to note that even though the interviewees who have the ethnic option to claim that they are Japanese, passing entailed different constraints and choices. To pass as Japanese meant that there were privileges and choices but also there were misrecognition and gaps in self and ascribed identity, and that there was no option of passing as something else. The practice of passing as foreigner or haafu also reveals how the choice is intentional and self-chosen for some, while for others it was simply due to the misrecognition by others or because the interviewees had no other ethnic options.

Through the interviewees' words, it became clear that it is not always the case that people choose to cover because they cannot pass. Covering is an alternative to passing for some, a strategy to assimilate to the majority, however for some passing and covering occurred simultaneously because of the gap between the self and ascribed identity.

This article analyzed the practice of ethnic options, passing and covering among multiracial and multiethnic people in Japan, which is a field that is not well researched yet. The analysis shows, as Song (2003) proposes that ethnic options should not be discussed not only in terms of more or less but also in terms of different kinds of options. It also highlights that the importance in understanding the process and reasoning behind passing and covering, and the diverse practice are intertwined with the constraints and limitations of ethnic options that individuals possess.

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Appendix 1. Summary of interviewees

Name	Age	Father	Mother	Citizenship	Parents' Divorce
Anna Park	24	Zainichi	Japanese	Korean	No
Daiki Smith	21	American	Japanese	Dual	No
Michael Miller Suzuki	21	American	Japanese	Dual	No
Chie Takahashi	20	Japanese	Korean	Japanese	No
Keiko Tanaka	25	American	Japanese	Dual	Yes
Yuuto Christopher Ito	24	British	Japanese	Dual	No
Jessica Johnson	22	Australian	Japanese	Dual	No
Yoko Yamamoto	22	Japanese	Singaporean	Japanese	No
Hiroshi Nakamura	21	Korean	Japanese	Japanese	Yes
Ashley Williams	24	Swiss	Japanese	Dual	No
Takashi Kobayashi	22	Japanese	Filipino	Japanese	No
Akira-Matthew Kato	24	Japanese	Italian	Dual	No
Kazuko Yoshida	22	Japanese	Filipino	Japanese	No
Tomoko Yamada	19	American	Japanese	Dual	No
Brittany Jones	23	American	Japanese	Dual	No
Makoto Sasaki	22	Thai	Taiwanese*	Dual	Yes
Amanda Brown	23	Nigerian	Japanese	Japanese	No
Akemi Yamaguchi	19	Japanese	Chinese*	Japanese	No

Name	Place of upbringing	Frequent travels	Schooling**	Study abroad	Occupation	Language***
Anna Park	Yamaguchi	No	Japanese, International	Yes	Student	ENG, FRA
Daiki Smith	USA, Tokyo	No	Japanese	No	Student	ENG
Michael Miller Suzuki	Shizuoka	No	Japanese	No	Student	ENG
Chie Takahashi	Tokyo	Yes	Japanese	Yes	Student	ENG, KOR
Keiko Tanaka	Osaka, Tokyo	Yes	Japanese, International	Yes	Working	ENG
Yuuto Christopher Ito	Miyagi	Yes	Japanese	Yes	Working	ENG
Jessica Johnson	Tokyo	Yes	Japanese	Yes	Student	ENG, GER
Yoko Yamamoto	Singapore, Tokyo	Yes	Japanese	No	Student	ENG
Hiroshi Nakamura	Aichi	No	Japanese	No	Student	ENG
Ashley Williams	Tokyo	Yes	Japanese	Yes	Working	ENG
Takashi Kobayashi	Tokyo	No	Japanese	Yes	Student	ENG
Akira-Matthew Kato	Tokyo	Yes	Japanese	No	Student	ENG, GER, ITA
Kazuko Yoshida	Tokyo	Yes	Japanese	Yes	Student	ENG
Tomoko Yamada	Akita	No	Japanese	No	Student	ENG
Brittany Jones	Tokyo	Yes	Japanese	Yes	Working	ENG
Makoto Sasaki	Tokyo	Yes	Japanese	Yes	Student	ENG, THA
Amanda Brown	Tokyo	No	Japanese, International	Yes	Working	ENG

Akemi Yamaguchi	UAE, Tokyo	Yes	Japanese	No	Student	CHN
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*Naturalized Japanese

**Schooling in Japan

***Self-reported languages interviewees speak except for Japanese

Notes

i In this study the term multiracial refers to someone who has one parent of differing racial background (e.g. Japanese and black, Japanese and white) and multiethnic refers to someone who has one parent of same racial but differing self-claimed ethnic background (e.g. Japanese and Korean, Japanese and Chinese) independent of the actual cultural practice. The article also uses the term “mixed” to refer to both multiracial and multiethnic people.

ii These numbers only reflect those marriages convened and children born in the territory of Japan. Considering that there are significant number of Japanese nationals marrying and having children outside of the Japanese territory, the number might look different if summing up all the cases where one parent is a Japanese citizen and the other foreign citizen.

iii At the age of 22 dual citizens are obligated to report their intention to keep their Japanese citizenship while “making an effort” to leave the other citizenship. However, this rule is creating a new generation of dual citizens due to the ambiguity of what it means to make an effort to leave the other citizenship and the difficulty of disclaiming the nationality.

iv The term includes prefectures around Tokyo which is considered as the wider Tokyo, such as Saitama, Kanagawa, and Chiba.

v The term refers to ethnic Koreans whose family members and their descendants, settled in Japan during or soon after the end of Japan’s colonial rule of Korea. Read Sonia Ryang and John Lie, *Diaspora without Homeland: Being Korean in Japan* (Univ of California Press, 2009). for more details.