# THE MAKING AND MARKING OF THE 'JAPANESE' AND THE 'WESTERN' IN JAPANESE CONTEMPORARY MATERIAL CULTURE

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We can easily now conceive of a time when there will be only one culture and one civilization on the entire surface of the earth. I don't believe this will happen, because there are contradictory tendencies always at work – on the one hand towards homogenization and on the other towards new distinctions.

(Lévi-Strauss, 1978: 20)

***Abstract***
This article uses the analysis of sets of contemporary Japanese cultural materials in order to explore the dynamics of the significant process of making and marking of the 'Japanese' and the 'Western' in contemporary Japanese culture. Through the observation of material culture – mainly food and clothing – in its public presentational arenas, it aims at reaching a better understanding of the processes in which the foreign and the local interact in this so-called era of globalization. Both the 'Western' and the 'Japanese' are illustrated as cultural constructs. The distinction between them is not based on objective classification. Their cultural making and marking is described on the background of the formation of the modern Japanese culture and cultural identity.

***Key Words*** ◆ cultural marking ◆ food ◆ formal wear ◆ globalization ◆ Japan

### INTRODUCTION

> The reason Japanese people are so short and have yellow skin is because
> they have eaten nothing but fish and rice for two thousand years . . . If we
> eat McDonald's hamburgers and potatoes for a thousand years we will
> become taller, our skin white and our hair blonde. (Den Fujita, president of
> McDonald's Japan from Love, 1987: 426)

As serious people of science we of course know that changing food and
consuming habits can never make Japanese or any other Asian people's
hair blonde, at least not naturally. However, theories of globalization –
often nicknamed McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993, 1998) – tend to empha-
size the relations between the growth of the Western-dominated world
economic system and the growth of a Western-dominated world cultural
system (Hannerz, 1987, 1992).

Theories of globalization can be largely divided into globalization-
as-homogenization and globalization-as-heterogenization (Featherstone
and Lash, 1995: 4; Pieterse, 1995: 62). Serious questions have been raised
concerning the Americanization-McDonaldization homogenizing process
leading to a 'global village' (Appadurai, 1996: 17; Featherstone, 1990;
Pieterse, 1995). Alternative explanations that have recently gained
'favored concept status' (Shaw and Stewart, 1994: 2) underline the
mixing of cultures in concepts such as cultural hybridization (García
Canclini, 1995a; Pieterse, 1995), creolization (Hannerz, 1987, 1992) and
pastiche.

In this article I attempt to reach a better understanding of the pro-
cesses in which the foreign and the local interact in this so-called era of
globalization. My argument is that both homogenization and cultural
hybridization explanations are unable to fully explicate the complexities
of these processes. Critics of globalization theories have emphasized the
counter forces of indigenization (Appadurai, 1990: 5), or the complex
reciprocal relationship between the global and the local as in the concept
of 'glocalization' (Robertson, 1992: 173–4, 1995). Through looking at sets
of cultural materials (Cook and Crang, 1996: 148), I will explore the
dynamics of the processes of cultural making and marking of the
'indigenous' and the 'foreign' in contemporary Japan.

In my analysis of cultural materials I follow the route of anthro-
pologists who take 'objects seriously' (Thomas, 1991: 204), like Mary
Douglas who regards material objects as 'carriers of meaning' (Douglas
and Isherwood, 1996: 49) and Daniel Miller (1987) who emphasizes pro-
cesses of objectification in which objects are constructed as social forms
(Cook and Crang, 1996: 132). Douglas and Isherwood (1996: 50–2) have
suggested that we treat goods as markers in the sense of classifying cat-
egories in their public and not in their private use. It is precisely this

quality of material culture as the 'opportunity for the expression of the categorical scheme established by culture' (McCracken, 1990: 75) that is emphasized here. By looking at the public consumption, construction and presentation of objects of material culture in Japan I will show the significance of the cultural marking of the distinctions between the 'Japanese' and the 'Western'. These distinctions are certainly not based on any 'objective classification' (Befu, 1984: 62). The 'Japanese' and the 'Western' or the *wa* and the *yō,* as they are referred to in Japanese, are both cultural constructions made by the social actors themselves in an active ongoing process of cultural production and cultural play.

## THE 'COFFEE TABLE' QUESTION

'How can we understand the presence of indigenous crafts and vanguard art catalogs on the same coffee table?' asks Nestor García Canclini in *Hybrid Cultures* (1995a: 2). In his grand question García Canclini attempts to epitomize the contradictions and failures of modernity that have created such a state of disorder in the unsolved combinations between the indigenous and the vanguard, the traditional and the modern. I attempt to challenge this hegemonic culture expert's point of view that in an attempt to confirm its totalizing postmodern paradigms takes apart 'practices and identities which are phenomenological realities for those who use them' (Shaw and Stewart, 1994: 23). Alternatively, I suggest to look closely at the cultural construction of material objects by the social actors themselves.

While García Canclini (1995a: 3, 1995b) is skeptical about the advantage of anthropology in dealing with this puzzle, I suggest that the anthropological perspective is extremely fruitful in treating it. I am referring mainly to the strength of the interpretive approach (Bruner, 1984a, 1984b; Geertz, 1973, 1983; Turner, 1986) that takes seriously both the interpretations of the 'natives' themselves and those of the ethnographer as well as the intriguing relations between them. The ethnographic texts I will use here are diverse and include both 'classic' ethnographic materials based on participant observation and printed materials. The latter vary from food catalogs and restaurants' menus, to promotional materials of both commercial enterprises such as kimono schools or fashion designers as well as more institutionalized materials. The example I begin with, of the official exhibition titled 'Japan Style' at the Victoria and Albert museum in London in 1980, 'aimed at providing an experience of Japanese objects in their social and cultural context', is an illustration of the representational nature of these materials and their 'public' role in the construction of the 'Japanese' and the 'Western' and the distinctions between them.

## JAPAN: 'THE PROPER MEETING GROUND FOR EAST AND WEST'?

> It is interesting and instructive on the one hand to see what the Japanese have made of those features of Western material culture that they have borrowed, and on the other hand to identify the aspects of their life today that are purely Japanese in origin.

This unidentified citation decorating the cover of the elegant pictorial book that complemented the 'Japan Style' exhibition (Yoshida et al., 1980) summarizes a recurrent idea in contemporary presentational materials of Japanese culture. This is the notion of Japanese culture as a mixture of two aspects: the traditional that always stands for the Japanese, and the modern that always stands for the West. Japan is thus portrayed as an hybrid culture 'a synthesis of dualities, whose uniqueness meri[t]s the designation "Japanese Style"' (Yoshida et al., 1980), and the 'variety of [Japanese] material culture' is recapitulated in this duality. In fact, it is hard to find the sense of this dual variety in the chosen items of material culture (Yoshida et al., 1980: 34–148). The categories that divide the large pictorial section which follows the short 'essays' section (pp. 6–33), fail to capture this duality with titles such as 'Japan', 'Elegance', 'Simplicity, 'Compactness'. These categories, and the majority of their contents: cherry blossoms; girls in kimono in their graduation ceremony; naked men in a festival; wooden container for cooked rice or lacquer tea-caddies, are all enveloped in the atmosphere deemed proper to what is usually considered by Japanese and Westerners alike as 'uniquely Japanese'. While the rhetoric is about a unique duality, the final image is of the eternal Japanese traditional past that exists side by side with the modern-Western, which is characterized by a relatively few modern art as well as technological items.

The image of a hybrid culture is, however, deeply rooted in contemporary Japanese self-presentations. The successful Japanese national travel bureau (JTB) has chosen as its motto the slogan: 'Where the Past Greets the Future' and Mazda, a leading car company has included in its series of quasi-academic books on Japanese culture the title *The Hybrid Culture: What Happened When East and West Met* (Yoshida et al., 1984). The hybrid image portrayed through these and similar cultural presentations of Japanese material culture aimed mainly at the foreign Other, is a kind of harmonious hybridity that praises the Japanese 'openness to Other' and its ability to 'merge' and 'harmonize' Japanese tradition with Western values (1984: 111). Such an image suits well not only general views of hybridization based on the cosmopolitan 'bird's-eye views' of culture experts that have been critically coined 'intellectual imperialism' (Ekholm-Friedman and Friedman, 1995: 134; Shaw and Stewart, 1994: 22–3), but also Orientalistic views that see Japan as 'the

proper meeting-ground of East and West' (Miner, 1958: 271). In both views, characterized by an essentialistic view of culture, the representatives of the Eastern world, i.e., the Japanese, are basically viewed as recipients of imported cultural objects in the process of globalization. The alternative perspective I offer here, which is underlined instead by a dynamic view of culture (cf. Bruner, 1994: 407; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 27; Jackson, 1995), illustrates a more complex and dynamic picture of Japanese culture.

## CONTEMPORARY CUISINE: MARKING THE JAPANESE AND THE WESTERN

The appetite for the Western and the seemingly indistinct combination of food styles is typical of Japanese contemporary eating habits just as it is in the cases of many of their contemporaries in other parts of the world. However, I am not interested here in private eating habits of contemporary Japanese, what interests me is the cultural marking of 'Japanese' and 'Western' foods. As Douglas and Isherwood (1996: 51) suggested, there may be private marking, but it is the public use through which goods are endowed with value – and I would add, cultural meaning. Wedding feasts seem to be ideal cultural arenas for my initial inquiry into the nature of this public cultural marking of the 'Japanese' and the 'Western', the 'traditional' and the 'modern'. The presentational aspect of this marking is well observed in the elaborate and beautifully arrayed 'Wedding Ceremonial Food' (*gokonrei riyōri)* catalog of one of the leading Tokyo wedding parlors, the Meiji Kaikan, the wedding parlor of the famous Meiji shrine.

The main courses presented in this elegant catalog that carries also the English title 'Genteel Bridal Collection', are as follows: French cuisine, a Japanese and French combination and Japanese cuisine. Each of the cuisines is elaborately presented including pictures portraying the array of dishes, the full list of menus and their full descriptions. Each section begins with a descriptive text printed on the background of a representative symbol. Japanese cuisine (*nihon riyōri*) is graphically presented by the calligraphy of *wa* (Japanese) painted on the eternal Japanese symbol, the red sun (Figure 1). A Japanese-style tray with beautifully arrayed tea ceremony food adds to the perfect Japanese image. The printed text only intensifies the same image of unique Japanese spirit that has been developed in modern Japan (Dale, 1986) by referring to 'our own country' (*watashi tachi no kuni*) that takes pride in 'the heart of Japanese food' (*nihon riyōri no kokoro).* The word *kokoro* is a significant 'keyword' in contemporary Japan, 'that could stand for Japaneseness' *vis-à-vis* Western technology (Moeran, 1984a: 260). This same heart and spirit of unique traditional Japaneseness is manifested in the

**FIGURE 1** Japanese cuisine presented by the calligraphy of *wa* (Japanese) painted on the eternal Japanese sun

names of the Japanese menus on offer. These, do not only always appear in Chinese characters, but are also closely related to Japanese tradition, in titles such as *kagura* that stands for sacred (Shinto) music and dancing and *utai*, meaning chanting of a *no* drama text.

Such traditional Japanese arts have become so 'alien and exotic' in contemporary Japan (Kurita, 1983: 131) that in fact they portray no less exotic image than 'Aphrodite', 'Coral', 'Espoir', or similar unintelligible titles of the French cuisine (*furancu riyōri*) in the same catalog. Cuisine Française as the complementary foreign title suggests, is evidently a Japanese cultural construct of French food that however includes all the requisite paraphernalia, that is, the proper elegant porcelain and cutlery as well as all the accepted dishes including coffee and cake or dessert, which are absent as a rule from the Japanese food in the same elegant catalog.

In what seems to be a thoroughly well-thought of and planned catalog, the mixed menu is put just between the French and the Japanese styles. This menu carries the English title 'Fusion' and a Japanese title *furansu kaiseikizen,* which is primarily descriptive, i.e. food composed from French food and Japanese tea ceremony cuisine (Figure 2). The accompanying text emphasizes the distinct quality of each of the styles as portrayed by the Japanese title. 'The delicateness of French food and the atmosphere of Japanese food have been combined to create the original Meijikaikan Furancu-Kaisekizen . . . These two traditions, [these] arts, add a gorgeous color to the celebration table.'

The marking of the 'Japanese' and the 'Western' is very obvious from the food offered. The Japanese and the Western in the menu are two exaggerated forms of Westerness and Japaneseness. The Japanese style is presented by the cuisine for the tea ceremony, which is considered as a prototype of Japanese cuisine but is in fact a conspicuous contemporary 'invention' of Japanese culture from which contemporary Japanese are expected to 'learn' what Japanese cuisine is about and thus reaffirm their

collective self (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993: 107–8). The Western-style is presented by French food considered as the ultimate mark of luxury and Westerness in contemporary Japan (Jeffry Tobin, 1992).

The distinct marking of the Japanese and Western styles is very typical of such food combinations offered in public events like weddings. Typical of these combinations is that the Japanese cuisine is served in Japanese style bowls and special lacquer boxes and is accompanied by Japanese chopsticks. Moreover, it is also always separated from the French food by being placed on a special Japanese-style black and golden tray. These combinations usually carry the more common name: 'Japanese and Western combination' (*wayō setchu*), a term used also for Japanese-Western eclecticism recently popular in housing and internal design. As a leading



フランス懐石膳

FUSION

**FIGURE 2** 'Fusion' – the French–Japanese combination

wedding parlor manager related in an interview, they initiated the Japanese and Western 'mix' around the beginning of the 1990s. As he explained, 'knife and fork' food had been 'of course' (*yappari*) already offered at hotels – which are considered more prestigious wedding venues – but in his wedding parlor chain they still found that the customers were reluctant (*nigateiru*) to use fork and knife. Japanese people, he added, were also not accustomed to buffet style. However, in their continuous attempt to adapt to fashionable trends, usually led by the more prestigious wedding venues and especially by the media, they created a new style by putting into the 'traditional' Japanese-style menu 'some meat and the like'. He concluded by saying that this food, which is basically 'their own' (*jibun-no*) Japanese-style with some Western ingredients, has recently become very popular especially by the young customers who now give the tone.

The food presentation in the 'original (*orijinaru*) Meiji Kaikan Furansu Kaiseki' is more daring than the usual. Japanese-style lacquer boxes and even the characteristic Japanese-style tray are not used at all. Moreover, while most dishes are separated into distinct Japanese and

Western style tableware, there is a certain blurring of distinctions as for example in putting Japanese food in a Japanese bowl but placing the bowl on a Western-style plate, or in placing a pair of elegant chopsticks and a set of fork and knife on the same chopstick (or cutlery) stand.

This mixing of cultural styles lies at the heart of the hybrid coffee-table puzzle. The question is thus: is this combination a display of an immanently unsolved disorder? I suggest that what is presented in this case is a new cultural construction, in fact a new style which is characterized by an imaginative, creative and playful approach to 'Japanese' and 'Western' cultures, but which certainly does not neglect their distinctiveness. Posing the English title 'fusion' vertically in the catalog whereas the Japanese word *furansu-kaisekizen* is posed horizontally (see Figure 2) is a clear switch of deeply rooted cultural images of the West as horizontal and Japan as vertical (Dale, 1986: 44). To eat a 'horizontal meal' usually refers not only to a Western diet but also to an adjustment to Western life-styles (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993: 107). The only adjustment I can observe here is that to the taste of the customers, who, like in other parts of the contemporary world, constantly demand new styles, among them the popular fusion style. The cultural production in which the imaginative chef responsible for this new endeavor is involved is very similar to that of the chef of the Japanese–French restaurant in Hawaii described by Jeffry Tobin (1992). Just as the chef in Hawaii used shoyu (Japanese soy sauce) in the kitchen with a wink as a sign of sophistication (Jeffry Tobin, 1992: 172), so did our chef place a Japanese-style golden origami paper on a Western plate before posing a Japanese bowl on it. In both cases Japanese and French cuisines gave the chefs the opportunity to play with their 'own Japaneseness' (Jeffry Tobin, 1992: 171) or with their own cultural identity. In both cases the 'Japanese' and the 'Western' do not create a simple indistinct mix, but, instead, their playful constructions only highlight the cultural marking of the two.

## 'DANGEROUS LIAISONS': GREEN TEA AND SANDWICHES

A recurrent scene from my fieldwork in Japan: While opening the plastic bag containing my lunch for the day which I usually bought at the nearby Lawson 24-hour supermarket, one of my female Japanese co-workers waits by the kettle to see what it is that I carry this time. Her interest is not the product of utter curiosity; the choices are in fact not numerous: a sandwich or a set of sushi packed in a plastic box. For her, it is a practical question, should she prepare Japanese tea (*ocha*) or coffee (*kohi*) for my lunch. The green tea to accompany my sushi will then be served in the appropriate Japanese-style cup and the coffee in the correct mug. There is no way to mix between the two. Japanese tea cannot be

served with a sandwich and coffee is undrinkable with sushi. This metaphoric 'dangerous liaisons' quality is again related to the public and presentational sphere of life. In other words, I am not arguing here that such mixes cannot be found at home. However, in the context of the beauty shop in charge of producing 'Japanese' and 'Western' brides and grooms, as we will shortly see, and especially when serving a foreign anthropologist studying Japanese culture, such mixtures are indeed almost 'dangerous'.

The role of the Japanese language in observing and maintaining such firm distinctions between the Japanese and the Western in relation to food is illuminating. The *wa* (Japanese) and *yō* (Western) categorization is a very powerful linguistic as much as cultural division. While Japanese cuisine is termed *washoku*, Western food in Japan is referred to as *yōshoku*. While Japanese food is written using Chinese characters, Western food is always delineated in *katakana*, which is a different syllabary used to write about things Western in Japan (Stanlaw, 1992).

The distinction between Japanese and Western food styles is paradoxically well observed in places that have a Western or international image such as popular family restaurant chains. These 'American'-style restaurants usually carry foreign names typically written only in roman letters. Names such as Royal Host, Volks and Joyfull are not always intelligible in English or any other foreign language, but serve the role of giving the impression – which is often false (Creighton, 1995: 156) – of



FIGURE 3 Kids 'international' menu in one of the popular family restaurants

**FIGURE 4** Japanese and Western 'sets' in their proper containers

a deep understanding of the foreign world. A careful look at many of the 'grand-menus', as one of these restaurants carrying the name Gusto describes their typical oversized pictorial menu, shows an over-use of English titles. This is true both for the categories, such as 'Morning and Healthy', 'Dessert and Drink' or 'Kids' (*kizzu*) and for the names of specific dishes like chiffon cake, cookie tree and tropical ice tea, appearing in roman as well as in *katakana* letters (Figure 3).

All these menus include Japanese-style as well as Western-style food and very similarly to the wedding menu described earlier, these styles cannot be mistaken. They are not only divided into clear categories appearing on separate pages, but also they are always served in the right containers. While Japanese food is served in Japanese bowls and is always bounded by the proper Japanese-style tray, Western food is served in Western porcelain. Moreover, even those dishes, mainly steaks, served on a hot plate, which seems to be an almost 'neutral zone' that ascribes the food on it of neither clearly Western nor clearly Japanese quality, are typically served with a choice between a Japanese or Western 'set'. It takes one visit in any of these restaurants scattered all over Japan to know what each of these sets includes. It is rice, miso soup and pickles for the Japanese and a choice of rice or bread and corn soup for the Western. These sets are not only served in different containers, but the same sticky white rice is called *gohan* when it is served in a bowl, and *raisu* (the English word rice in Japanese pronunciation) when it is served on a plate and is consumed by a fork (Figure 4).

The significance of food as a marker of cultural identity has been long noted by anthropologists (Douglas, 1966; James, 1996: 78; Lévi-Strauss, 1962), Japanese rice 'as self' (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993) is thus not

an exception. Japanese food and the art of its presentation are among the widely admired facets of Japanese culture (Kumakura, 1999: 39). Other kinds of food have gained the aura of 'authenticity' in Japan. Sukiyaki and tempura, both usually served by kimono-clad waitresses often on special occasions and in rooms adorned with Japanese-style atmosphere, have become such symbols of authentic Japanese cuisine. The fact that they were both taken rather recently from Europe; whether in the intro-duction of meat to previously mainly vegetarian Japanese cuisine as in the case of sukiyaki, or in the case of tempura that was introduced to Japan by the Portuguese, is irrelevant. In the Japanese popular imagin-ation it is now difficult to conceive of Japanese traditional food without sukiyaki and tempura. This is very similar to the way in which Italian food cannot be conceived without pasta and tomato paste and traditional Provençal cooking cannot be imagined without olive oil, in spite of the fact that these 'traditional' ingredients are actually very recent in origin (Goody, 1982: 36). That pasta became Italian and sukiyaki and tempura became 'Japanese' is 'the essential culture producing process' (Fried-man, 1995: 74) and not the factuality of their real historic origin. In the case of Japanese food, Japanese-style special bowls, the arrangement of the table and even the room décor and clothing (i.e. kimono and not Western dress) add to the aura of 'traditionalism' (Bestor, 1989: 10). Such 'formal paraphernalia and ritualized practices' are significant in any case of the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm, 1983: 3).

## JAPANESE ATTIRE, WESTERN ATTIRE: DISTINCT DRESS, DISTINCT CULTURES

Modern Japanese usually wear *yōfuku* (Western wear*). Wafuku* – or Japan-ese attire is seldom worn. Kimono nowadays is worn mainly on special occasions including life cycle rites such as weddings, funerals and the coming of age ceremony celebrated at the age of 20. In all these occasions it is predominantly women who put on kimono while men appear in what is considered formal Western attire (Goldstein-Gidoni, 1999). The dis-tinction between Japanese and Western attire has become much more than a distinction in dress. Kimono has become a very significant marker of Japaneseness. It has become a requisite in the décor of any Japanese-style activity, such as tea ceremony or a formal Japanese meal.

Modern Japanese women are usually ignorant in the secrets of kimono dressing. Since the 1970s kimono schools, which are special institutions designed for teaching these women the lost art of kimono dressing, have flourished all over Japan. The aims of these institutes are much wider than passing on dressing techniques. They are very much involved in promoting the kimono as part of the unique Japanese spirit and aesthetics:

> *Wabi, sabi*, the way of art (*gei no michi*), history shines, studying devotedly the way of kimono with all one's heart (*kokoro*).

This is the first verse of the anthem of one of the largest kimono schools in Japan, sung in any of the school formal meetings and graduation ceremonies. The association between *wabi* and *sabi* – the aesthetic pair symbolizing the combination of rustic simplicity with the patina of the old and regarded as the most characteristic expressions of Japanese aesthetic principles (Haga, 1989: 195) – and the 'way of art', which directly relates to other 'ways' of Japanese aesthetics and spirit such as the 'way of tea', is very clear to a Japanese audience.

This large institution that runs 80 schools throughout Japan with over 30,000 students describes its activities in terms of 'setting the site for understanding the beauty of Japanese tradition – kimono', and as having as its aim to introduce kimono to everyday life'. Most of the association's publications are aimed at Japanese. They do, however, have some international activities, an example of which is the short booklet, which was published both in Japanese and in an (amateur) English, titled 'The friendship bridge between people and culture'. In this, like in other publications, Japanese kimono is described on the background of Japanese uniqueness in phrases such as: 'Kimono is a Japanese traditional costume, which is famous for its beauty and tradition. Kimono is also known for its strict and complicated rules based on the idea that Japanese nature, climate and lifestyle are deeply connected.' Finding a complete fit between kimono and the Japanese climate, as well as its people's mentality, heart and spirit is also very typical of more general writings about kimono like that of Kiyoyuki Higuchi (1974). A recurrent idea in such writings is the clear distinction between the busy way of life that is the result of Western influence and the contradictory 'elegant, 'noble' and 'calm' feeling that 'seeing or wearing kimono makes us somehow feel'. This distinction was clearly explained to me an interview with the kimono school owner:

> There is a great difference [between Western and Japanese attire]. When I wear Western dress like today, I [come to] have a feeling of activity and moving (*katsudō teki ni narimasu*), kimono, on the other hand gives one a feeling of calmness (*yuttari to*) and an urge to quit work. Life now is very busy in Japan, but when a girl wears kimono it gives her the opposite feeling.

This same distinction is found in other popular and quasi-academic writings like that of Norio Yamanaka, a distinguished figure in the world of kimono who writes that in order to understand the role of kimono in Japanese culture, it is important to understand the West as a *suru bunka*, a culture that does things, whereas Japan is a *naru bunka*, a culture in which things become (Yamanaka, 1986: 7). Western culture is depicted as calculated and having utilitarian goals, whereas Japanese culture is

described as one which prizes love, admires beauty, respects courtesy and fosters harmony with nature. This harmony, regarded by the Japanese as a unique characteristic of their culture (Dale, 1986: 42–3; Kalland, 1995; Kalland and Asquith, 1997), is directly related to their love of kimono.

Dressing up in kimono means much more than wrapping the body with kimono itself, it includes not only the proper hair setting and accessories as well as the right stockings and shoes (*tabi* and *zōri*), but also the appropriate demeanor. Kimono schools thus include advanced courses in manners in Japanese attire (*Wasō manā*). These courses are clearly distinguished from courses in manners in Western clothing (*Yōsō manā*). While the latter are concerned only with practicalities such as how to sit on a chair or enter a car and require much shorter time, manners in Japanese attire are always related to deep values in Japanese society. For example, the booklet read by all students in one of these courses, is abundant with phrases such as: 'The kimono figure (*sugata*) in a Japanese style room is the Japanese virtue.' This kind of discourse that suits well that of the *nihonjinron* (discourse on being Japanese) vast literature on Japanese uniqueness, has vastly diffused in the world of kimono and can be found also in popular and advertising slogans such as 'The beauty of kimono is the heart (*kokoro*) of Japanese people'.

## THE CONTEXTUAL SHIFTING OF DISTINCTIONS

Wearing *wafuku* or *yōfuku* seems to be conceived as a total experience in contemporary Japan. The two are seldom mixed. Clearly fixed distinctions are very evident in ceremonial events such as the coming of age ceremony (*seijinshiki*) in which as a rule, young women put on expensive kimono while young men participate wearing formal Western suits (Goldstein-Gidoni, 1999). In this case there appears to be a fit between dress in the public event and general cultural distinctions that tend to characterize Japan as feminine and the West as masculine (Dale, 1986: 40–6).

Distinctions in wedding costumes supply us with another illuminating example of the relationship between Japanese and Western attire. Costumes constitute a very significant aspect of contemporary commercial weddings as manifested in the central role of costume changes (*ironaoshi*) in the wedding, as well as in the high portion of costumes in wedding costs (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2000: 42). The bridal couple performs in both Japanese and Western attire. Both styles of costumes are very elaborate inventions of the prosperous wedding industry (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2000). All wedding parlors in Japan include beauty shops in charge of dressing wedding participants, thus the beauty shop I studied closely is not an exception. Japanese and Western styles of dress are clearly distinct in the beauty shop's work. While some of the workers

may have expertise in both Japanese and Western make-up and attire, there is clearly a division of labor as well as hierarchy between the two. While Western dressing is usually discussed in professional terms of efficiency, Japanese-style dressing employs a different vocabulary. It is sometimes defined as a work of art. The most visible distinction between the Japanese and the Western is in the different atmosphere in the dressing rooms. The atmosphere in the room where Western-style dressing is conducted is usually characterized by extreme efficiency, together with some air of lightness typical of hairdressers' shops in Japan (Hendry, 1990: 26). However, when Japanese-style dressing is conducted, especially that of the bride, the work is carried out silently and an atmosphere of seriousness permeates the room. It is the same severe (*kibishii*) atmosphere and silence that permeates other locations of the production of the traditional Japanese, like the department of Japanese sweets described by Dorinne Kondo (1990: 232).

Japanese-style costume, like Japanese-style traditional sweets, has higher prestige mainly due to the fact that it has become a loaded symbol of 'tradition' (Kondo, 1990: 231–2). However, the ladder of hierarchy is in fact much more flexible than it may seem. For example, in the wedding parlor context, while for the dressers, the Japanese always has higher prestige; this is not necessarily the case in other contexts and other circumstances and times. This has become very clear to me in my re-visit to Japan in the late 1990s. The recent growing popularity of the chapel service over the Shinto service – in 1998 53.1 per cent of urban Japanese had chapel services and only 32.3 per cent held Shinto ceremonies as compared to over 90 per cent having Shinto services in 1991 (Sanwa, 1991; Sanwa, 1998. See Figures 5 and 6) – resulted in more brides beginning their day in Western outfit and then changing into Japanese outfit. As an outcome, while it was very clear that much longer time was required for preparing the Japanese appearance until the early 1990s, now, things were reversed. The beauticians invest more time in preparing the bride in Western attire when it is the attire in which she attends the marriage service. Moreover, since the Japanese outfit has in some cases become secondary, the industry has managed to produce various new accessories such as pre-prepared obi ties that have made the preparation in Japanese attire, once thought of as the masterpiece of the day, an 'instant' procedure.

More brides nowadays prefer to give up the heavy kimono for two Western dresses. One of the main reasons for this is their initial decision to have a chapel wedding. As more than one bride told me: 'kimono somehow does not suit a chapel wedding' (*nan-to-naku awanai*). The association between Western attire and a chapel service is certainly not new. Already in the early 1990s wedding parlor owners built on the growing popularity of the Western dress and that of chapel weddings, which were relatively rare at that time (Goldstein-Gidoni, 1997: 142).

**FIGURE 5** Until the early 1990s over 90 per cent of the Japanese had a Shinto service

Now that chapel weddings have become very popular, the distinction between a Japanese attire for a shrine and a Western dress for a chapel has become unmistakable. A leading parlor manager assured me in an interview that there are no cases in his experience of Japanese attire being worn in a chapel. He also emphasized the seeming clash between

**FIGURE 6** In 1998 53.1 per cent of urban Japanese had chapel services

**FIGURE 7** Kimono on the background of a unique Japanese nature scene (taken from the catalog of Nostalgic Japan)

kimono and the chapel saying that 'when you look at it looks unsuitable, the image does not fit'.

This example of the shifting hierarchies of Japanese and Western attires is extremely significant in our attempt to examine the complexities of the relationship between the so-called indigenous and the foreign. My argument is that in this case, like in similar cases in Japanese material culture, the ladder of hierarchy is not so clearly cut and what we observe is in fact contextually shifting hierarchies. These shifts are clearly influenced also by changes in dominance among the social actors themselves. The growing popularity of the Western-style ceremony and the Western-style dress is related to the changing relations between the previously powerful industry and the increasingly emerging powerful young customers. In an interview with a very experienced wedding parlor manager in the late 1990s, he explained that young customers' taste and desire were taking the lead. And he concluded: 'We now adjust ourselves to [young] customers' plans'. This young generation's ideas, as he and others explained, are very much a product of the influential public media conveyed through newspapers, magazines, TV and the like. Bookshops in Japan tend to have a large section of books and magazines related to weddings. Young Japanese, and especially young women, who eagerly look through these materials, can rarely find there any Japanese-style brides. Like in recent commercial wedding catalogs, the leading images are of Western-style brides – and fewer grooms – all dressed in Western-style

'individual' (*kosei-teki*) and 'original' (*orijinaru*) outfits. Not rarely are the models themselves fair-haired Westerners. These young people, I was told, end up demanding from the industry: '[We] also want to become like this'.

### THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE 'JAPANESE' AND THE 'WESTERN'

While the wedding industry has been recently building its appeal to its young customers mainly by promoting a Western image, the 'traditional' image has not been forsaken. Taking into account the reciprocal inter-action between the processes of production and consumption (D. Miller, 1987, 1995) we cannot forget that while the 'demand' – defined as a 'socially regulated and generated impulse' (Appadurai, 1986: 32) for the Western has been rising, that for the 'traditional-Japanese' has not died. Even in the darkest predictions of the wedding industry they tend to agree that in the foreseeable future Japanese costume and ceremony will not go under 30 per cent.

In fact, a new market for 'nostalgic' products has been recently developed in Japan. Ivy (1988: 27–8) describes the line of products known as 'nostalgia products' (*nostarujii shohin*) as part of a Neo-Japonesque mode that refers to the revived interest, in things Japan-ese, particularly among those she calls Americanized young. The nostalgic style that varies from cosmetics to candies is promoted for example by designers like Ichiro Tsuruta who in 1991 launched a line of fashion products including kimono, handkerchiefs, scarves, post-cards and telephone cards, which carry the name Nostalgic Japan (*nosu-tarugikku Japan*. See Figure 7). In one of the company's elegant catalogs that carry the same name, poetry-like phrases appear side by side with the introduction of the Nostalgic Japan's line of products and similar commodities:

> In the large and long flow of time
> we are chasing the fundamental rules of things,
> today, we turn the moment of now into tradition,
> the journey is continuing infinitely.

This reproduction of tradition relates also to specific material products of tradition. For example, a traditional Japanese sweets con-fectionary in Kyoto is introduced under the following lines:

> While routinely
> practicing routine things
> we feel the dignity and newness of tradition.

This 'dignity' of tradition is believed to be found in traditional cities like Kyoto or in countryside locations to which Japanese urbanites tend to send Western anthropologists (Martinez, 1990: 105; Smith, 1995: 29). In such 'real Japanese' locations the past is 'always already there' (Harootunian, 1988: 416).

This kind of unique 'Japanese past' has been massively constructed as a symbol of 'a distinct and unified Japanese culture' (Vlastos, 1998: 11). Japanese society has been massively involved in re-producing Japanese genuine tradition. This can be observed as early as the 1950s in governmental projects such as the designation of individuals and groups of craftsmen as 'human' or 'national' treasures (Moeran, 1984b: 167). Later on, mainly from the 1970s, a great concern has been given to the revived interest in things Japanese and in *dentō* (tradition). (cf. Ben-Ari, 1992; Bestor, 1989; Ivy, 1988, 1995; Kelly, 1986, 1990; Moeran, 1984b; Robertson, 1987, 1991).

The constant process of reproducing emblems of unique Japanese tradition has yielded symbolic productions like that of printing the calligraphy of the Chinese character *wa* on the background of a red Japanese sun in the wedding parlor food catalog described above. This kind of 'self-exotification' produced for the Japanese market has been observed in other cases. For example in 'promoting women divers (*ama*) as prototypes of 'real Japan' (Martinez, 1990) or in using figures of kimono-clad women as symbols of Japan in advertisements and other promotional materials (Goldstein-Gidoni, 1999; Moeran and Skov, 1997: 195). This kind Japanese-made Orientalism (Said, 1978) has in fact two channels: on the one hand, it pertains to the tendency of treating things Japanese by Japanese themselves at almost the same 'Orientalizing impulse' (Robertson, 1995: 974) that the West has practiced on Japan and thus was referred to as 'reverse Orientalization' (Roy A. Miller, 1982: 209–11). On the other hand, it also applies to the monolithic and abstract way in which the West is perceived (Moeran, 1990: 9; Mouer and Sugimoto, 1986: 32).

The abstract West is everywhere in Japan. It can be found in unintelligible names of family restaurants or in new wedding-reception room names such as Windom. One of the by-products of this process of imagining the general West is the production of frozen-like images. Clothing and especially formal attire is a fertile land for such an imaginary production. Wedding costumes, which include extremely old-fashioned morning suits (*mōningu*) for male guests, and 19th-century European Bourgeoisie style dresses with crinolines and bustles for brides, create such symbols of an abstractly imagined West. The West and its agents, the foreigners (*gaijin*), tend to be stripped of any individual character (Creighton, 1995: 155). This tendency surely applies to promoting Western food in Japan. Take for example the famous 'Ka-neru oji-san' mannequin posed at the door of each Kentucky Fried Chicken branch in

Japan. While the origin is probably the legendary Colonel Sanders, what is left as the popular description of this good old American uncle, is 'uncle Ka-neru'. While Ka-neru is a specific Japanese pronunciation of colonel, it is now popularly regarded just as a proper name. The case of another fast food chain, Taco Time, in which the mannequin of its own president Kent Gilbert, a boy-scout-looking Californian American, greats the customers in fluent Japanese, is another example of this abstract attitude towards foreign food as much of the appeal of this Mexican food chain is attributed to the fame of this tall fair-haired American attorney who has become a media figure in Japan (Danziger, 1989).

Processes of self-definition usually involve the dramatizing of the difference with the Other (Carrier, 1995: 3; Said, 1978: 55), which in the case of modern Japan has obviously been the West (Roy A. Miller, 1977, 1982). However, the cultural construction of the West that typically characterized this process as we observed, has been coupled with a parallel construction of the 'Japanese' and the 'traditional'. These parallel processes of cultural construction are another manifestation for the relative flexibility with which the so-called local and the foreign interact.

## CONCLUSION

Lévi-Strauss's prediction from the late 1970s as quoted at the beginning of this article seems to have been realized at least in the case of Japanese material culture as it has been presented here. Japanese contemporary culture surely cannot be described as any model of any kind of 'one culture and one civilization on the entire surface of the earth.' There have been constant contradictory tendencies especially since the formation of modern Japan at the Meiji period (1868–1912), on the one hand towards so-called Westernization and on the other towards new distinctions between the Japanese and the Western. The relationship between these two opposing directions has led to the significant process of the making and remaking of the 'Japanese' and 'Western' as marked cultural categories.

'One of the most important ways in which cultural categories are substantiated is through the material objects of culture' (McCracken, 1990: 74). In this article I aimed at exploring the complexities and dynamics of the cultural categorization of the 'Japanese' and the 'Western' in contemporary Japan by looking at objects of material culture, mainly food and clothing, and by exploring the 'classifying project to which they are recruited' (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996: 50).

The migration of goods within the world market has gained labels such as McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993, 1998) and Coca-colonization (Hannerz, 1992: 217). It has also been more clearly defined as 'cultural imperialism' regarded as the spread of modernity, and considered as a process of cultural loss (Tomlinson, 1991: 173). Notions such as cul-

tural imperialism or cultural colonialism (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993: 135) highlight the inequalities between self and the Other. Colonial power relations also lie at the core of any discourse of hybridity (Young, 1995). My emphasis on the contextually determined relationship between the Japanese and the Western poses a question regarding the relevance of such a colonial discourse that assumes a fixed hierarchy between the traditional and the modern (García Canclini, 1995a) in the case of Japan. I have shown how both the Western and the Japanese are cultural constructions. Instead of treating the Western in Japan in overused terms such as 'Westernization' and 'modernization' that have preserved the passive image of processes of cultural borrowing (J.J. Tobin, 1992: 4), I have stepped a step further than Tobin's 'domestication' in emphasizing the active aspects of the production of the Western in Japan.

I have emphasized the role of cultural marks and cultural distinctions in this process of the production of the Western and the Japanese cultural categories. This distinction should not be merely understood in the straightforward manner of the Japanese attempt 'to prove their *distinction* (emphasis in text)' (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993: 135) in a defense against the invading West, but in a much more dynamic manner that emphasizes the constant shift of hierarchies of the 'Western' and the 'Japanese'.

### Acknowledgements

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