“Reimagining the Multiethnic Nation After Disaster: *Japan Sinks 2020* and Fukazawa Ushio’s *Green and Red*”

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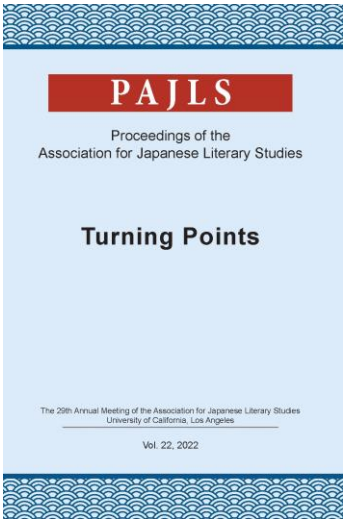

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REIMAGINING THE MULTIETHNIC NATION AFTER DISASTER: *JAPAN SINKS 2020* AND FUKAZAWA USHIO'S *GREEN AND RED*

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This essay explores Heisei Japan as a turning point or rather as a cluster of moments of transition, some more dramatic than others. The individual transformations I am interested in are rising immigration, the concomitant rise of anti-immigrant hate groups, and the 3.11 disaster. Amid this context, I examine *Japan Sinks 2020* (Nihon chinbotsu 2020), a Science SARU anime series that revisits the much-adapted novel by Komatsu Sakyō from 1973, and Fukazawa Ushio's *Green and Red* (Midori to aka), a coming-of-age novel about a young *zainichi* Korean woman that explicitly addresses late Heisei hate speech. *Japan Sinks 2020* rethinks Komatsu's novel through the lens of a multi-cultural family. In *Green and Red*, the memory of the 1923 Kantō earthquake and the subsequent Korean massacre leads the protagonist to question her position as a *zainichi* Korean in Japan. Both reflect the changes occurring throughout Heisei and portray the moment of their production as a time of transition. Ultimately, *Japan Sinks 2020* imagines what that future might look like when the archipelago has mostly sunk into the sea and *Green and Red* hopes for a future where *zainichi* Koreans are welcomed.

The Heisei era was a time of transition in terms of the foreign-born population of Japan. By 2019, the end of the Heisei era, Japan's non-Japanese resident population had almost tripled since the start of the era in 1989 to about 2.9 million (see figure 1).[2]

Until the Heisei era, Japan's largest registered foreigner population was Korean, a legacy of Japan's imperialism. This population, called *zainichi* Koreans or Koreans "residing in Japan," grew slowly throughout

[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4873-2740. Portions of this essay first appeared in "Outsiders in Disasters: Racism, Rumours, and Fiction in post-3.11 Japan," *Japanese Studies* 43, no. 2 (September 2023).

[2] Population data from "Population Statistics of Japan 2017" (Tokyo: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2017), https://www.ipss.go.jp/p-info/e/psj2017/PSJ2017.asp and "Zairyū gaikokujin tōkei (kyū tōroku gaikokujin tōkei)" (Statistics of Foreign Residents (Formerly Registered Statistics of Foreign Residents)), Seifu tōkei no sōgō madoguchi, accessed February 3, 2023, https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&toukei=00250012. There was a brief dip after the financial crisis until 3.11, but numbers soon rebounded.

Figure 1: Japan's foreign resident population between 1950 and 2019 by country of origin

the postwar era until peaking in 1991.[3] Since then, the number of *zainichi* Koreans has been declining but immigration from elsewhere has increased significantly. Young immigrants from other Asian countries are a large part of the increase and in 2018 almost 6% of the population of people in their twenties were immigrants.[4] These new immigrants are more visible, leading to greater public attention to immigration.

Concomitant with this growth was a rise in anti-immigrant demonstrations. The most notorious group is the Association of Citizens against the Special Privileges of the *zainichi* (*Zainichi* tokken o yurusanai

[3] In 1950 *zainichi* Koreans accounted for 91% of the registered foreigner population. In 1988, 72% of the registered foreigner population was Korean. By 2015, the share of Koreans declined to 22%.

[4] "Gaikoku hito saita no 249 mannin, Tōkyō wa 20-dai no 1-wari jinkō dōtai chōsa," *Nihon keizai shinbun*, July 11, 2018, https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO32872510R10C18A7EA2000/.

shimin no kai), known mostly through the abbreviation Zaitokukai.[5] In 2009, this group held widely criticized protests targeting a Filipino family who had overstayed their visas and a *zainichi* Korean school.

We also see anti-immigration sentiment in cultural texts. The 2005 anti-Korean manga *Hating the Korean Wave* (Manga kenkanryū) emphasizes imaginary phenotypical differences between ethnic Japanese and Koreans. As others have noted, the manga clearly differentiates ethnic Japanese characters, drawn in typical manga style with soft features and big eyes, and the Korean characters, who are often shown with prominent cheekbones and narrow eyes.[6]

This anti-immigrant sentiment was evident following the March 11, 2011 triple disasters in the Tōhoku region: earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown. The following tweet from March 17 seems to have specifically been designed to stir up anti-immigrant sentiment:

> At the Sendai Sanjō middle school shelter, Chinese are doing as they please. They spit out tomato skins and dirty the gym floor. They kick the elderly out of the way and hog the heaters. This is an SOS from my grandma. I'm taking a wooden sword and heading that way, who will join me?[7]

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[5] The 'special privileges' that the *Zaitokukai* are concerned about include the right to be treated almost the same as Japanese when they return to the country and go through immigration, the ability to use a Japanese name, and the right not to be deported to a country they have never lived in; see Tom Gill, "The Nativist Backlash: Exploring the Roots of the Action Conservative Movement," *Social Science Japan Journal* 21, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 175–92. https://doi.org/10.1093/ssjj/jyy023., 2018.

[6] See Rumi Sakamoto and Matthew Allen, "'Hating "The Korean Wave"' Comic Books: A Sign of New Nationalism in Japan?," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 5, no. 10 (October 1, 2007), https://apjjf.org/-Rumi-SAKAMOTO/2535/article.html; Raffael Raddatz, "Hating Korea, Hating the Media: *Manga Kenkanryū* and the Graphical (Mis-)Representation of Japanese History in the Internet Age," in *Manga and the Representation of Japanese History*, ed. Roman Rosenbaum (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 217–33; Nicola Liscutin, "Surfing the Neo-Nationalist Wave: A Case Study of *Manga Kenkanryū*," in *Cultural Studies and Cultural Industries in Northeast Asia*, ed. Nicola Liscutin, Chris Berry, and Jonathan D. Mackintosh, *What a Difference a Region Makes* (Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 171–94; and Itagaki Ryūta, "Kenkanryū no kaibōgaku: gendai Nihon ni okeru jinshushugi-kokuminshugi no kōzō," in *"Kanryū" no uchi soto: Kankoku bunkaryoku to higashi Ajia no yūgō hannō* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 2008), 99–113.

[7] Ogiue Chiki, *Kenshō Higashi Nihon daishinsai no ryūgen dema* (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 2011), 50–51. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

It was first shared by someone who goes by the Twitter handle @mizubasyo who remains active in a nativist movement that wants to keep pandas out of the Sendai Zoo.[8]

The long-term transitions of rising immigration and accompanying anti-immigrant sentiment along with the dramatic turning point of the 3.11 disasters provide the context for the two works I discuss here.

Japan Sinks 2020 is an obvious case-study in the intersection of immigration, multiculturalism, xenophobic nationalism, and disaster.[9] This 2020 animated series was adapted from the 1973 novel *Japan Sinks* (Nihon chinbotsu) by Komatsu Sakyō. In both the novel and the 2020 serial adaptation, a series of earthquakes leads to the archipelago of Japan sinking into the ocean. This adaptation takes the concept from the source material but creates a completely updated story. Whereas the focus in the original novel and most of its adaptations is split between a submarine pilot exploring undersea subduction zones, scientists, and politicians, the 2020 series is centered on one family, the Mutōs, and their struggle for survival. This departure from the source material is perhaps more striking for its multicultural approach. The Mutōs are a multi-ethnic family. The father, Kōichirō, is Japanese, and the mother, Mari, is a Filipina immigrant to Japan. Their two children, Ayumu and Gō, speak both English and Japanese.

Questions of nation and nationalism are a common thread through all versions of this story. What is a nation if its territory disappears from the earth? Komatsu's novel and the adaptation that immediately followed it (1973, directed by Moritani Shirō) are what Susan Napier calls "[elegies] to a lost Japan' that mourn 'the passing of traditional Japanese society."[10] Both acknowledge the inevitability of cultural change but are steeped in nostalgia.

Jessica Langer sees the 2006 film adaptation, directed by Higuchi Shinji, as more nationalistic than the book and its first film adaptation. In this version, Japan does not completely sink because it is saved by a

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[8] Mizubasyo, "Sendai ni panda wa iranai! Matome Burogu," accessed August 17, 2021, http://blog.livedoor.jp/sendaipanda/. Initially, pandas were scheduled to be loaned to the zoo as a gesture of goodwill following the disaster, but diplomatic conflict over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island dispute halted the talks. See also Mark McDonald, "Even Panda Diplomacy Isn't Working," *IHT Rendezvous* (blog), September 26, 2012, https://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/26/even-panda-diplomacy-isnt-working/.

[9] *Nihon chinbotsu 2020* (Japan Sinks 2020), Science SARU and Netflix, 2020. I quote from the translation provided in the English subtitles.

[10] Susan J. Napier, "Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from Godzilla to Akira," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993): 335.

sacrificial hero, played by Kusanagi Tsuyoshi of SMAP fame.[11] One of the ending scenes shows the hero's mother wearing a kimono and welcoming birds back to her Japanese-style house. The film suggests that saving this idyllic image of Japan is what the sacrifice was for. As a result, the film affirms the continuation of a conservative view of Japan. As Langer notes, the versions from the seventies suggest that Japanese identity may be transformed by the diasporic experience, but in Higuchi's film, the loss of the Japanese islands is "so egregious as to be unfathomable."[12]

The Japan that must be preserved in *Japan Sinks 2020* is notably different from its predecessors. To the memories and artifacts preserved in the 1970s versions of the story, *Japan Sinks 2020* adds a digital archive with images and videos of Japan and its people. Like the previous versions, the digital archive includes the traditional and beautiful, such as the Ginkakuji temple in Kyoto, and even people in traditional clothing like the 2006 version, but it also includes Cosplayers in Akihabara, street dancing in Harajuku, and a run-down pornographic movie theater, aspects of Japan that were not eulogized in earlier versions, suggesting that Japanese culture is more than just the ancient traditions and religious architecture; it is both positive and negative, but above all, dynamic.

Positive and negative attitudes toward Japan are explicitly dramatized near the end of the series when the survivors in the party rap to express how they are feeling. Gō, the young son of the Mutō family, is unhappy with his life in Japan. This dissatisfaction stems from discrimination he has faced. Unlike his sister, or even his Filipina mom, Gō cannot pass for Japanese due to his darker coloring. In the rap, Gō complains about everything he dislikes about Japan: its insularity, lack of individualism, and particularly the way Japanese people "treat you like a freak if you are different." Haruo, a neighbor who has been traveling with the group from the beginning, defends Japan by highlighting its best qualities, including concern for others' feelings and helpfulness. Ayumu concludes the rap battle by saying that it is "nonsense" to determine what someone is like based on what country they are from. She raps that, no matter the country, "there are good people and bad people, and people that are neither." The idea that nations and people are complicated is a central theme of the series.

Although one member of the party is overtly nationalistic, the most extreme example of nationalistic anti-immigrant rhetoric is in episode

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[11] The hero dies in an almost *kamikaze*-like suicide mission in a submarine.
[12] Jessica Langer, "Three Versions of Komatsu Sakyō's *Nihon Chinbotsu* (*Japan Sinks*)," *Science Fiction Film & Television* 2, no. 1 (March 2009): 56.

seven. The group meets up with a barge claiming to be "Japanese territory" that will never sink. It is run by a nationalist group who specify that only pure-blooded Japanese people can board. The members of the group seem to have missed or overlooked the lighter-skinned Ayumu's mixed-race heritage, and even Mari seems to have passed as Japanese, but a man stops Gō from boarding. At this, the mother reveals she is not Japanese, but that her children are and asks them to save her children. Seemingly out of spite, the man suggests, illogically, that, as "half" ("hāfu"- a term for mixed race Japanese people), only one of the children may board. The mother is arguing about citizenship, but the man defines Japanese only through the racial concept of blood. Faced with this obstacle in definitions, the Mutōs and their party curse the group and let the racist boat go but are rescued by a friendly Japanese fisherman. Soon afterwards, the nationalists' barge runs aground and explodes, something some viewers experienced as schadenfreude. It is a not very subtle metaphor suggesting that outmoded conceptions of the nation based on ethnic purity are doomed.

This display of anti-immigrant attitudes of the Japanese is very different from previous adaptations of *Japan Sinks*. In both the 1973 and the 2006 film adaptations, many countries are hesitant or refuse to accept Japanese refugees (who are shown to be mono-ethnic). This is particularly true of the 2006 version in which the Japanese are shown to be victims of anti-Japanese and anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the world. Fictional news footage shows massive protests in other countries against accepting refugees from Japan. As Langer writes, the 2006 version is "not a story of Japan's exile *into* the world; it is a story of Japan *against* the world."[13] This dramatization of the world's rejection of Japanese refugees seems to encourage the nationalist idea that Japan must rely on itself and indeed keep its nation intact and monoethnic to survive in a hostile world. The idea that perhaps Japan itself should be more welcoming of refugees is absent in the 2006 version, but the barge in *Japan Sinks 2020* suggests that welcoming outsiders is necessary for survival.

Some right-wing commentators online characterized the series as anti-Japanese propaganda, particularly noting the scene of the nationalist barge sinking. One of the more influential voices was Fukada Moe (under the Twitter handle @fukadamoe). Unsurprisingly, Fukada selectively uses this scene to paint *Japan Sinks 2020* as Japan bashing rather than look at the more frequent examples of kindness and understanding. In her complaints against the series, Fukada links the diversity of the studio to the views expressed in the series. She writes "When I looked at the credits, I saw that

[13] Langer, "Three Versions," 54.

Chinese people remade *Japan Sinks* into story about the extermination of the Japanese people."[14] In this, Fukuda ignores the strangely triumphant nationalism in the series, though its conception of the nation as multi-ethnic may not align with her views of national homogeneity.

In the 2020 series finale, Japan has sunk, but has also begun re-emerging. This prompts reflection on the meaning of nation and what it should be when the territory returns. Eight years in the future, Ayumu and Gō appear as representatives of Japanese diaspora in the 2028 Olympics. And unlike the dire suggestions of the 2006 version, the refugees from Japan seem to have been welcomed. As she looks back on her disaster experience and the people who helped her, Ayumu muses that people helping each other in a community are what constitutes the nation. Over the images of her companions throughout the disaster, including foreigners and Japanese, she says "I am here thanks to the foundation laid by the blessings of the wise people I encountered during that time. You could say they were family, a group, or in more general terms, the nation (*kokka*)." Images of Ayumu's "wise people" appear as she speaks and include an Estonian YouTuber, a Yugoslavian magician, and the nationalistic Hikata Kunio. The word for nation she uses, *kokka*, combines characters for country and family, and calls to mind the family-state ideology of imperial Japan, which imagines the nation as a family with the emperor as the father. With this conclusion, *Japan Sinks 2020* attempts to replace the patriarchal idea of the nation as a blood-related family with the idea of nation as a multi-ethnic found family.

In the new diasporic Japan imagined by *Japan Sinks 2020*, multi-ethnic people like Gō and Ayumu are national representatives. Tsuchida Masaaki notes that Ayumu's promise as a track star echoes the sports success of mixed-race Japanese athletes like Hachimura Rui and Ōsaka Naomi.[15] The real-life showcasing of these athletes in the 2021 Tokyo

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[14] See "*Nihon chinbotsu 2020* Fukada Moe san 'saitei anime deshita. Nihonjin wa atama ga kurutta karuto ga okane no tame ni jūgeki…,'" *Share News Japan* (blog), July 12, 2020, https://sn-jp.com/archives/2308. It is unclear who exactly Fukada is referring to, and there are many non-Japanese names in the credits, but other commentators from the "internet right" on Twitter and elsewhere remarked on Choi Eunyoung's participation. Choi, one of the co-founders of the studio, is Korean. Fukada and others were part of a Twitter debate that drew the attention of the mainstream news media as well. See Fujita Naoya, "'Nihon chinbotsu' = 'hannichi' no kansōron," *Asahi shinbun dijitaru*, July 25, 2020, https://www.asahi.com/articles/DA3S14562982.html.

[15] Tsuchida Masaaki, "Netflix Nihon Chinbotsu 2020 wa Nihon heito ka mata wa gensaku e no bōtoku," *Deirii Shinchō*, July 16, 2020, https://www.dailyshincho.jp/article/2020/07161200/.

Olympics shows that Japan and the Japanese government want to project the image of Japan as part of our multicultural world. Nevertheless, as Ōsaka's case also shows, that presentation is more aspirational (or, cynically, more of a public relations move) than authentic welcoming. Japanese policies remain less immigrant friendly than other peer nations and there was significant nativist backlash against Osaka when she was eliminated from medal competition.[16] *Japan Sinks 2020* is also aspirational. Through portraying the disaster experiences of minoritized people in Japan, it hopes for a future where people of all kinds are welcome.

Fukazawa Ushio's 2015 novel *Green and Red* (Midori to aka) focuses on the more invisible minority of *zainichi* Koreans. It is a coming-of-age story set against a backdrop of anti-Korean hate and Korean pop culture fandom in Japan. It is focalized through five characters, but the central one is Chie, also known as Jiyoung, a young *zainichi* Korean college student who was raised entirely in Japan. Chie is an unusual *zainichi* protagonist. She is unaware of her Korean heritage until her 16th birthday.[17] At first, after she learned that she was Korean, Chie was not very interested in her heritage. The narrator remarks that she usually forgot she was Korean, but when she encountered a mention of Korea in her daily life, "she felt an extreme discomfort about being Korean and shut it out completely."[18] The reason for this rejection was that she didn't want to feel 'different' from the friends and classmates around her (9). Soon after the novel begins, however, she begins to come to terms with her identity as she deals with friends and a budding romance.

The title is a reference to the colors of the passports from Korea and Japan, and the English title makes the emphasis on nation and nationality clear: *The Color of her Passport*. In Chie's case her identity crisis begins when she has to get a passport for a planned trip abroad with a friend. This

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[16] Motoko Rich, "Critics Pounce on Naomi Osaka After Loss, Denting Japan's Claim to Diversity," *The New York Times*, July 27, 2021, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/27/world/asia/naomi-osaka-olympics-loss.html.

[17] Fukazawa, a naturalized Japanese citizen of Korean descent, did not initially raise her children with an awareness of their Korean heritage and has said that her own son was shocked when he was told in middle school. See Honda Ken, "Watashi no sōten: 2014 Shūin-sen/ 9 Tome 'zainichi' arinomama ni hokori Nikkan shūfuku, tagai o mitomete," *Mainichi Shinbun*, December 12, 2014, morning edition, https://web.archive.org/web/20150507064752/http:/senkyo.mainichi.jp/news/20141212ddm041010127000c.html.

[18] Fukazawa Ushio, *Midori to Aka* (Shōgakukan, 2019), 9. Subsequent page numbers are in parentheses.

civil action forces Chie to confront her *zainichi* identity in a way that she seldom has previously and prompts her to "out" herself to her friend.

As she begins to proactively embrace her identity, Chie decides to learn more about Koreans in Japan, "checking out books about *zainichi* Koreans and Korea from the library" (257). It is there that she encounters traumatic events in the history of the *zainichi* community, the most significant of which is the massacre of Koreans in the aftermath of the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake. As Chie confronts the history of Japanese violence against Koreans in the city she saw as home, the xenophobia of the Taishō era blends with the xenophobia of the late Heisei. This combination impacts Chie and culminates in a panic attack that leads to symptoms of major depressive disorder and anxiety. Andre Haag has explored this aspect of *Green and Red* as part of his survey of *zainichi* Korean authors engaging with the Korean massacre. He writes that the novel "foregrounds the dialogic dynamics of positioning oneself, while at once being externally positioned, in inherited narratives of the past and present."[19] This is not merely a personal journey for Chie as her identity is circumscribed by the nation and its history of xenophobic nationalism.

Green and Red has a much more ambivalent stance toward the nation than the triumphant final episode of *Japan Sinks 2020*. When asked by her friend whether she likes Japan, Chie thinks it is complicated, but mutters a non-committal "un." She wonders what Japan is. "This 'Japan' seemed vague to her. Is it the people, the land, the nation (*kokka*), the government. Or is it all of that jumbled together" (250). Chie's *zainichi* boyfriend has naturalized and calls himself a Japanese of Korean descent. To him, nationality is not a defining character and he tries to separate people and nation: "There is no connection between me and the nation (*kokka*). People and countries are different things" (49). Ayumu in *Japan Sinks 2020* redefines the nation to be equivalent to the multiethnic people she encountered, but Chie's boyfriend tries to separate the two entirely. Both approaches are unrealistic. Nations are people, but they include those who support their fellow members who may differ from themselves and those who advocate for an imagined purity by excluding people with different colored passports.

What *Green and Red* does differently is that it suggests that creating a more welcoming nation is a struggle between these different forces, protesters like the Zaitokukai spreading hate speech and counter-protesters

[19] Andre Haag, "The Passing Perils of Korean Hunting: Zainichi Literature Remembers the Kantō Earthquake Korean Massacres," *Azalea: Journal of Korean Literature and Culture* 12 (2019): 299.

pushing back. It shows the conflict inherent in what Michael Omi and Harold Winant term "racial projects." Omi and Winant define "racial projects" as "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines."[20] *Green and Red* dramatizes that struggle by showing the traumatic impact of the Zaitokukai and the anti-hate speech work of the counter protesters.

Chie struggles with the weight of her identity and emerges, not whole, but capable of moving forward. As she learns to cope with her depression and anxiety, Chie reflects on encountering hate speech and muses, "I wonder if we will be able to reach a time when *zainichi* Koreans can live without sorrows" (283). She recognizes that the world cannot change easily, and that it is important for her to be strong. "She knew she had to be strong if the state of the world would not change overnight, but it didn't appear that she was going to be able to do so easily" (283). In this statement she also recognizes that this burden of change falls disproportionately on her and others like her. At the same time, counter-protesters give her hope. "She recalled the people raising their voices to drown out the words of hate in Shin-Ōkubo. She felt hope that the world was not just filled with malice. She thought they might be saved" (283).

Both of these works take the moment of their creation as a turning point, a point from which Japan can become a better, more multicultural and welcoming place. At the end of *Japan Sinks 2020*, multicultural nationalism is accepted in a new, imagined, post-disaster Japan. In *Red and Green*, work toward acceptance is an ongoing battle, but the novel asserts that change is possible if we continue to welcome diversity and champion rights for those who are minoritized.

[20] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Third edition. (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015): 125.