

# Japan's Place in the Cultural Debates of Globalization

Taner SABANCI\*

**Abstract:** When it is considered that Japan is homogenized as political and especially economical in the debates of homogenization and heterogenization of globalization, it is important to determine where Japan stands in the cultural dimension of globalization. Researchers tend to choose one of the cultural theories –cultural differentialism, cultural hybridization, and cultural convergence - that are often used to answer the research question. In this study, three approaches in the cultural debates of globalization have been analyzed to specify Japan's place in these debates. Rather than the existence of a single approach that is appropriate to Japan, these three seem to have a place in Japan. While making these discoveries, the history of Japan was examined in the light of the theories that existed in the cultural debates. Following the discovering of these examples in the history of Japan, examples from today's world were reached through the analysis of online documents. As a result, Japan can find its place in all of the cultural debates of globalization with examples that given both history and present.

**Key Words:** *Japan, Globalization, Cultural Differentialism, Cultural Hybridization, Cultural Convergence*

## Küreselleşmenin Kültür Tartışmalarında Japonya'nın Yeri

**Öz:** Küreselleşmenin 'homojenleşme ve heterojenleşme' tartışmalarında Japonya'nın politik ve özellikle ekonomik olarak homojenleştiği düşünüldüğünde, küreselleşmenin kültürel boyuntunda Japonya'nın nerede olduğunun belirlenmesi önemlidir. Araştırmacılar, araştırma sorusunun cevaplanmasında faydalanan kültürel kuramların –kültürel farklılık, kültürel melezleşme, kültürel birleşme- genellikle birisini seçme eğilimindedirler. Bu çalışmada, küreselleşmenin kültür tartışmalarındaki üç yaklaşım, Japonya'nın bu tartışmalardaki yerini belirtmek üzere incelenmiştir. Japonya'ya uygun olan tek bir yaklaşımın varlığından ziyade bu üç kuramın da Japonya'da kendine yer bulabildiği görülmektedir. Bu keşifler yapılırken Japonya tarihine,

---

\*Research Assistant, Cankiri Karatekin University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Sociology,

[tanersabanci@karatekin.edu.tr](mailto:tanersabanci@karatekin.edu.tr)

Gönderim Tarihi: 09 Temmuz 2019, Kabul Tarihi: 03 Aralık 2019

kültür tartışmalarında var olan kuramlar ışığında bakılmıştır. Bu kuramlara karşılık gelecek örneklerin Japonya tarihinde bulunmasının ardından, günümüz dünyasından örneklerle online dokümanların analizi ile ulaşılmıştır. Sonuç olarak Japonya küreselleşmenin kültür tartışmalarının hepsinde, hem tarihten hem de günümüzden verilen örneklerle, kendisine yer bulabilmektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Japonya, Küreselleşme, Kültürel Farklılık, Kültürel Melezleşme, Kültürel Birleşme*

## Introduction

Japan, which drew a relatively closed country profile until the second half of the nineteenth century, preserved its ossified social structure and management mentality until the Meiji Restoration (Jansen, 2002). Until 1867, when the first step towards modernization was taken, the using of Sonno jōi, which means respect for the emperor and expulsion of the barbarians (Henshall, 2012), clearly demonstrates the attitude of the Japanese people and government towards the foreigner. With the Meiji period, it can be stated that Japan was opened to the world. This decision has been made in order to protect Japan against non-Japanese, in line with nationalist feelings and foreign threat (Jansen, 2002; Henshall, 2012). In this direction, the new slogan, Wakon Yōsai, glorified the spirit of Japan while acknowledging the technical superiority of the West: the Technique of the West and The Soul of Japan (Matsusaka, 2007). As can be seen, Japan's different attitudes towards the non-Japanese before and after the modernization decision is clearly evident. In fact, the reflection of this attitude on Japanese politicians varies, and this situation caused many political conflicts in the first half of the twentieth century.

In the globalizing world, with the statement of Ritzer (2010), the fluid world in which people, knowledge, goods, and spaces can easily move, has left its fluidity to gasification and has gained an overly mobile character. Mobility in the world is the reason why so many things are intertwined. Life takes place in a world where goods, knowledge, and people are constantly moving. The displacement of people for various reasons constitutes a direct relationship with someone else. These reasons can be listed under main topics such as economy, politics, and education. As a result of

these reasons, Japanese society is in a relationship with the non-Japanese, both in their own countries and in many parts of the world.

When we look at the cultural debates of globalization, there are three basic views: cultural differentialism, cultural hybridization, and cultural convergence (Ritzer, 2010). In addition to the view that links the Western civilization - especially American culture - with cultural imperialism and that the world cultures are going towards homogenization; There are also arguments that cultures maintain their existence in global currents and that there is cultural heterogeneity in the world (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). In addition, there is also one more view called cultural hybridization which is defined as with the togetherness of local and global cultural differences to form another culture. Accordingly, external currents constitute the dominant global culture and internal currents constitute the weak local culture (Cvetkovich & Kellner, 1997). The main purpose of this research is to determine where Japan is located in these discussions.

## **1. Cultural Differentialism and Japan**

According to Huntington (1996), which classifies the history of civilizations under three main headings; between BC1500 and AC1500 is the first period in which almost no civilization was in relation with each other, the period between 1500 and the 2nd World War is the second period and the period from the end of the 2nd World War to the present day constitutes the third period. Contrary to this classification made in the center of Western thought, Japan, as mentioned above, had the image of a relatively closed country until the second half of the 19th century. In the period that used the slogan of *Sonnō joi* -Respect for the Emperor and expulsion of the barbarians-, it was seen that there was resistance towards the others in Japan. The reflections of this idea on society are clearly seen in some events. For instance, in the mid-century - before the Meiji Restoration - when the first steps of trade with Western countries began to take place, the presence of people who thought that the great fire in Tokyo was a divine answer to the trade agreement with foreigners (Süreyya, 2001). *Here it can be mentioned that there is an existing hatred towards foreigners, and it is desirable to preserve the purity of Japanese culture. This situation supports the notion of Cultural Differentialism in which continues to exist strongly in today's cultural debates. According to the idea of cultural differentialism,*

*the differences between cultures are unchanged in the interaction processes* (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). The most famous and controversial example of this paradigm is Samuel Huntington's work "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order". According to this, the fundamental values, perspectives and social relations of the civilizations existing in the world - Cynical, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Western European, North American, etc. - are different from each other and this difference creates tension between the existing civilizations (Huntington, 2015). Although this view was mooted at the end of the 20th century, it can be expressed that there was a tension between the differences in Japan in the 19th century.

It is possible to give examples of cultural differentialism from different periods of Japanese history. The corrupt Western influence in the country is shown as one of the reasons for the coup attempts in Japan in the 1930s (Large, 2007). Within the army, a group of people who called themselves Kodo-ha had defended that the Emperor should have more control over the country and revive traditions against Western influence (Crowley, 1962). These events in the history of Japan can be shown as evidence of resistance towards the other cultures. Thus, the reflections of the idea of cultural differentialism, and the idea that different cultures are in conflict are evident in the history of Japan.

The two examples given above from the Japan history show that the paradigm of cultural differentialism takes historically part. Similarly, there are movements in modern Japan to support this idea too. At the present time, it can be mentioned that there is a movement of thought similar to the Kodo-ha group formed within the army in the 1930s: *Koudouhosyu*. *Koudouhosyu* shares the view that non-Japanese should not exist within the country, and that any Western influence is a threat that will destroy Japan. The group aims to raise awareness among society by organizing the public demonstrations that express their thoughts and uneasiness about this issue.



Picture1. We don't want refugees



Picture2. Koudouhosyu's public demonstration



Picture3. If We Accept Refugees, Our Social Security Will Be Destroyed Just Like Happened in Germany. (保守運動, 2016; Koudouhosyu, 2017)<sup>1</sup>

Recent studies addressing the problems that arise as a result of the relationship of Japanese people living abroad with non-Japanese have stated that there are problems among Japanese such as depression, stress and inability to tie into the dominant culture (Tsuda, 2001; Togashi, 2007). Although Japanese living abroad who organized themselves in a community have similar problems, it is seen that they are involved in organizations such as educational activities and food meeting in order to protect their identity and the sense of belonging to their culture (Shiobara, 2004; Omori, 2017). The problems of Japanese people living abroad and the activities carried out by the Japanese communities for the protection of identity show the Japanese's resistance to the other cultures. It was mentioned above that there is a similar resistance to non-Japanese in Japan. It is stated that the Japanese create cultural resistance to non-Japanese and even to their own citizens who have been abroad for a long time and return to Japan, and that the others are exposed to discrimination and classification (Ishiwata, 2011; Tokunaga, 2011).

<sup>1</sup> Koudouhosyu's youtube account has been recently terminated due to violations of community rules.



As a result of the examples revealed from history and today, it can be seen that the paradigm of cultural differentialism that exists in the cultural debates of globalization has taken its place in Japan.

## **2. Cultural Hybridization and Japan**

In Japan, which was a relatively closed country until the restoration of 1867 Meiji, the slogan of Respect for the Emperor and expulsion of the barbarians has been replaced by *Wakon Yōsai* which means “The Technique of the West and The Soul of Japan” (Matsusaka, 2007). As can be seen here, there is the togetherness of two differences: the Knowledge of the West and the Essence of Japan. It can be claimed that the first example of the *Cultural Hybridization* paradigm presented in the cultural debates of globalization was encountered in this period. According to this paradigm, a different idea, world-view or style emerges as a result of the fusion of the dominant understanding and the local (Cvetkovich & Kellner, 1997). While the spirit of Japan combines with technical knowledge of West in line with the *Wakon Yōsai*, new ways of the progress have been discovered in Japan. Thus, as the cultural hybridization paradigm claims, it is seen in the history of Japan that two differences can lead to a different thought and path. This newly opened path has been the key to the modernization of the country without Westernization, to technologically and administratively come to the same level as others and, to participate in certain areas of world politics (Morton & Olenik, 2005; Mazrui, 2016).

It has been mentioned above that people move in the world due to various reasons. For these reasons, the reflections of Japanese interaction with non-Japanese in some parts of the world - often in Western countries - are generally expressed in line with the paradigm of “cultural differentialism”. Apart from the Western countries, it can be mentioned about the existence of the Japanese, which has for so long lived in Brazil and currently has a population of about 1 and a half million (Tsuda, 2001; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016). Although the Japanese living in Brazil are sometimes discriminated due to their different identities (Tsuda, 2001), it is a fact that the Japanese living here contribute to *cultural hybridization*. ‘*Saiko*’, which is the result of the combination of Japan's traditional drum called ‘*taiko*’ and Brazilian traditional dance ‘*samba*’, is one of the best examples of cultural hybridization.

This new style is interiorized by both Japanese and Brazilian dancers and musicians<sup>2</sup>. Two examples given above from the history and the present show that the paradigm of cultural hybridization has taken its place in Japan in the field of thought and art.

### 3. Cultural Convergence and Japan

Cultural convergence is the third main paradigm in the cultural debates of globalization. According to this view, globalization causes similarities all over the world and the world is in transformation and assimilation towards the dominant lifestyle (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2012). It is stated that the dominant culture in the current situation belongs to the West and this culture become globalized inherently with the help of the media (Giddens, 1990; Ayatollah, 2008). Those who express their thoughts by centering the paradigm of cultural convergence reveal the expansionism of Western culture by using the concepts of 'cultural imperialism, world culture, homogenizing, Westernization, Americanization, and McDonaldization' (Ritzer, 2010). Ritzer's McDonaldization concept, which uses Max Weber's concept of rationalization, states that the Western world is in the process of rationalization, as well as non-Western societies are entering this process (Ritzer, 2008). With the idea of McDonaldization, it is stated that fast food rules dominate many different institutions in the world, and the spread of these rules is occurred by emphasizing the ideal of the Western rational mind. Other concepts mentioned above contain similar ideas. For instance, the concept of 'world culture and homogenizing' and the spread of Western-centered global models have meant to bring about uniformitarianism throughout the world (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997).

### 4. Japan's Cultural Convergence Policy

With the ideas expressed under the concept of cultural convergence, the process in which Western culture is taken as a model and the expansionism of Western culture are mentioned. In this part of the research, it will be emphasized that how Japan shows

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDyf75bW8t4> Saiko Records as an Example of Cultural Hybridization

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7HL5wYqAbU> Traditional Japanese Taiko Records



itself as a model to the rest of the world rather than explaining how Japan is influenced by Western culture.

A foundation so-called "Cool Japan Fund" founded in 2013, which purposes to expand Japanese products and services in the rest of the world, aims to provide financial support to companies in designated areas under the leadership of the Ministry of Economy of Japan. While the local aim of this company is the growth of the existing economy in the country, the global aim is the spread of Japanese products in the rest of the world and the creation of new brands in this regard. The areas that will be supported by the organization, which aims to make the investment effective on a large scale, are determined by the Japanese government. The main areas of investment can be sorted as "Fashion, Kitchen, Traditional Materials, Japanese Lifestyle". Examples of the investments made so far could be listed as follows: Opening restaurants and cafes in the Middle East, Europe and America to spread Japanese food culture; The establishment of export companies abroad that sell Japanese traditional furniture and household goods; The establishment of TV channels broadcasting abroad to attract tourists to Japan; Opening stores in Europe and North America for the spread of Japan-based clothing fashion and so on (Cool Japan Fund, 2017).

In addition to the Japan Cool Fund, which has semi-official features, there are also government policies focused solely on cultural mobility. According to the report of this movement aimed at spreading Japanese culture, only the books of "One-Piece" and "Naruto" manga have been published over 135 million by 2015, and the films of these two mangas have been released in more than 120 countries; the number of Japanese restaurants available abroad increased from 24 thousand to 89 thousand from 2006 to 2015; the total value of Pokeman products reached \$ 36 billion (Cabinete Japan, 2017). This organization, which aims to introduce Japan culturally and increase its influence worldwide, tries to constitute "Voluntary Cultural Ambassadors" in the world. These ambassadors, each taking responsibility in a different field such as "Food, Culture, Fashion, Art, Tourism, Music, Media, and Sports", share information about Japan in their own countries and cities (Cabinete Japan, 2017).

Cultural convergence theory has been evaluated here as the spread of Japanese culture. In this respect, it is aimed to influence people in the center of Japanese culture.

## **Conclusion**

In the debates on globalization, which are dealt with on an economic, cultural and political basis, the situations of homogenization or heterogenization of these three different areas are evaluated (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2012). In this study, the different approaches that exist in the cultural debates of globalization - - cultural differentialism, cultural hybridization, and cultural convergence- were briefly introduced and then the reflections of these approaches in Japan were investigated. The existence of these three different approaches asserted in the cultural debates was examined on the basis of examples from today's Japan and Japanese history.

The reflection of the cultural differentialism in Japan has been revealed by the example of the past and present. Accordingly, Japan has shown its resistance to others with the using slogan *Sonnō jōi* in the late Edo period; *Kodo-ha* that was against the corruption of the West and aimed for more authority of the Emperor, attempted coups that aimed at reviving Japanese traditions from Western influence; Today, the group *Koudouhosyu* is organizing public demonstrations stating that the 'others' should not be in Japan and that any Western influence should be abolished.

Similarly, the cultural hybridization approach has been seen in Japan by means of the examples obtained from the past and the present. According to this; with the Meiji restoration, the *Sonnō jōi* slogan has been replaced by the *Wakon Yōsai* slogan which combines two differences on the basis of knowledge of the West and the essence of Japan. As it is understood from this example, Japan had accepted the existence of the differentness and tried to combine her with the Western under the slogan of *Wakon Yōsai*. In addition to this example taken from history, the cultural hybridization of Japan was tried to be elucidated with an example from today. According to this; the performance called "saiko" consists of with the combination of "taiko" and "samba".

In the last part of the study, it has been evaluated how the cultural convergence approach has taken place in Japan. In general, this approach expresses how Western culture shapes the rest of the world in the direction of its own worldview. However, during this study, it was tried to explained how Japan was shown to the world as a model. Accordingly, Japan is engaged in activities aimed at spreading Japanese culture around the world through government policies focusing on cultural mobility and a semi-official organization called Japan Cool Japan Fund.

## References

- Ayatollah, H. (2008). The Role of Media in the Threats and Opportunities of Globalization for Religion. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 7(34), 34-44.
- Cabinate Japan. (2017). Retrieved 12 05, 2017, from [http://www.cao.go.jp/cool\\_japan/english/index-e.html](http://www.cao.go.jp/cool_japan/english/index-e.html)
- Cool Japan Fund. (2017). Retrieved 12 09, 2017, from <https://www.cj-fund.co.jp/en>
- CROWLEY, J. B. (1962). Japanese Army Factionalism in the Early 1930's. *The journal of Asian Studies*, 309-326.
- CVETKOVICH, A., & Kellner, D. (1997). *Articulating the Global and Local: Globalization on and Cultural Studies*. CO: Westview Press.
- GIDDENS, A. (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- HENSHALL, K. (2012). *A History of Japan From Ston Age To SuperPower* (3. ed.). Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- HUNTINGTON, S. P. (2015). *Medeniyetler Çatışması ve Dünya Düzeninin Yeniden Kurulması* (14. ed.). İstanbul: Okuyan Us.
- ISHIWATA, E. (2011). 'Probably Impossible': Multiculturalism and Pluralisation in Present-Day Japan. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 10(37), 1605-1626.
- JANSEN, M. B. (2002). *The Making of Modern Japan*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Koudouhosyu. (2017). Retrieved 11 26, 2017, from Koudouhosyu: <http://koudouhosyu.info/index.html>
- LARGE, S. S. (2007). *Oligarchy, Democracy, and Fascism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- MATSUSAKA, Y. T. (2007). The Japanese Empire. In W. M. Tsutsui, *A Companion to Japanese History* (pp. 224-240). Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- MAZRUI, A. A. (2016). *Dünya Siyasetinde Kültürel Etkenler*. Ankara: Hece Yayınları.

- MEYER, J. W., Boli, J., Thomas, G. M., & Ramirez, F. O. (1997). World Society and Nation-State. *American Journal of Sociology*, 144-181.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2016). Retrieved 12 15, 2017, from <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/turkey/data.html>
- MORTON, W. S., & Olenik, J. K. (2005). *Japan Its History and Culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- OMORI, H. (2017). Eating Japanese food in diaspora as identity building: The case of a Japanese Canadian church. *Contemporary Japan*, 2(29), 148-161.
- RITZER, G. (2008). *The Mcdonaldization of Society*. CA: Pine Forge Press.
- RITZER, G. (2010). *Küresel Dünya*. İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- RITZER, G., & Stepnisky, J. (2012). *Çağdaş Sosyoloji Kuramları ve Klasik Kökleri*. Ankara: De Ki Basım.
- RITZER, G., & Stepnisky, J. (2014). *Sosyoloji Teorileri* (9. ed.). Ankara: De Ki.
- SHIOBARA, Y. (2004). The beginnings of the multiculturalization of Japanese immigrants to Australia Japanese community organizations and the policy interface. *Japanese Studies*, 2(24), 247-261.
- SÜREYYA, S. (2001). *Büyük Japonya*. İstanbul: Kitabevi.
- SYBERT, S. (2014, Mart 20). Taiko in Brazil: Japanese Cultural Diaspora and Hybridization Through Percussion Music. Retrieved 11 12, 2017, from <https://escholarship.org>: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8rc4w0d0>
- TOGASHI, K. (2007). Psychic pain as a result of disrupted narcissistic fantasies among Japanese immigrants: A self-psychological study of the stress and trauma of immigrating. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 16(3), 177-188.
- TOKUNAGA, T. (2011). 'I'm not going to be in Japan forever': how Filipina immigrant youth in Japan construct the meaning of home. *Ethnography and Education*, 2(6), 179-193.
- TSUDA, T. G. (2001). When identities become modern: Japanese emigration to Brazil and the global contextualization of identity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 3(24), 412-432.
- 保守運動, . (2016, 03 27). *youtube.com*. Retrieved 11 25, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmlAtSEW07E>