

## Japan Studies Graduate Student Seminar Series

panel presentation & discussion:

### **Contested “Japaneseness”: (Re)Negotiating Nikkei and Buraku Identity**

Thursday Nov. 4, 2004  
3:00-4:30pm  
Tokioka Room (Moore Hall 319)

University of Hawai‘i graduate students **Christopher Bondy** (Sociology), **Asuka Suzuki** (East Asian Languages and Literatures) and **Eric Ishiwata** (Political Science) will examine the contested negotiation of ‘Japanese’ identity in three different sites: the education system of a Buraku community in Japan, a panel presentation at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii, and media representations of Nikkeijin in Japan (see abstracts below).

### **“Hide and Seek: Gaining a Buraku Identity and the Process of Passing”**

Christopher Bondy (PhD Candidate, ABD)

The protective cocoon created by a school and community helps to create a sense of security for all youth. This is especially true in the town of Takagawa, where the protective cocoon fosters a strong Buraku identity. Yet the structure of the Japanese education system means that these youth will have to leave the cocoon and interact in a broader social world, a world that does not embrace Buraku issues at the level of their experience. This paper begins with an overview of the centrality of Buraku issues in the town of Takagawa, and specifically within the junior high school curriculum. The openness of Buraku issues in Takagawa meant that the Takagawa youth were socialized to have pride in being Burakumin, despite being told of what this openness would mean in majority society. However, once these youth moved on to high school and interacted with students from different backgrounds, students who were not Burakumin, the Takagawa youth were forced to reassess their open interaction as Burakumin. The openness with which they interacted in the protective cocoon did not provide the same sense of security. Despite having been socialized to be open in being Burakumin, because they were told of the discrimination they would face as Burakumin, the Takagawa youth found it easier to pass into majority society, though not without great personal strain.

### **”Are we ‘Japanese’?: Construction of Ethnic Identity”**

Asuka Suzuki (PhD Candidate)

It has been increasingly recognized that identity is not something static, but rather negotiated and constructed through interaction (e.g., Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998; Hester and Eglin, 1997; Ochs, 1993; Sacks, 1979). For instance, recent studies concerning Asian American identity (Reyes, 2002; Lo, 2000) investigate how identity is interactionally achieved. Following this line of thought, this study, using a micro analytic approach, examines the construction of identity with specific reference to the use of terms associated with ethnic categorization in interaction. The data was taken from the discussion section of a panel presentation that took place at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii in March, 2003. The purpose of the panel was to bring together people in the community for a public discussion, particularly from the

perspectives of Sansei (third generation of Japanese Americans) and Yonsei (fourth generation), and to question such issues as what it means to be Japanese Americans in contemporary multiethnic Hawaii. There were three panelists of Yonsei in Hawaii and a moderator (Sansei) and approximately 60 audiences including researchers, journalists and the general public from various ethnic backgrounds. In the discussion that immediately followed the panelists' presentation, various terms (e.g., local Japanese, Japanese nationals, Issei, Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei, and Shin-Nisei) emerged.

In this presentation, I will discuss the way in which such ethnic categories are interactionally associated with cultural practices as well as spatial and temporal references, which gives the categories more distinctive meanings. Moreover, I will also investigate how participants interactionally position themselves and others through the use of indexicals within the ethnic categories, and how that way of positioning is also linked with the conversational structure and turn-taking organization that were affected by the participation structure. By doing so, I hope to demonstrate the way in which ethnic identity is not simply constructed, but elaborated, negotiated and contested through interaction in order to illuminate the dynamic and complex nature of identity.

#### **“RE-MADE IN JAPAN: Nikkeijin Disruptions of Japan’s Ethno-spatial Boundaries”**

Eric Ishiwata (PhD Candidate, ABD)

Working to envisage a more hospitable Japan—one that can responsibly accommodate difference through acts of tolerance, plurality, and non-violence—this paper seeks to reformulate the nation’s ethno-spatial hierarchy. By interjecting Deleuze and Guattari’s “minoritarian” position into the majority/minority dialectic, a move instantiated by the incommensurability of Japan’s Nikkeijin populations (i.e. neither resolutely “foreign” nor essentially “native”), this paper works to loosen the ubiquitous uchi/soto (“inside/outside”) distinction in a manner that moves beyond the barriers typically encountered by conventional approaches to Japan’s minority issues. Insofar as the investigation is advanced through a series of engagements from a variety of genres—SMAP’s 2003 “MIJ” advertising campaign, Akira Kurosawa’s 1991 film *Rhapsody in August*, and NHK’s 2002 asadora (“morning serialized drama”) *Sakura*—the analysis will not only demonstrate how popular fictions participate in the dramaticization of the nation’s ethno-spatial boundaries, it will also afford new ways of thinking about and interceding in Japan’s so-called immigration “problem.”