

To Understand Japanese Society and Culture is to go "International": Emergence of 'Japaneseness' in Yaohan Hong Kong.¹

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Introduction

This paper is an investigation of how the consciousness of 'Japaneseness' is emerged among the Japanese expatriates in the Hong Kong subsidiary of a Japanese supermarket, Yaohan. Theoretically inspired by the work of Comaroff (1995) and Comaroff & Comaroff (1992) on ethnicity, I argue that 'Japaneseness' is not 'thing' but an ideological justification of the inequality between the Japanese expatriates and the local staff of the company. The substance of 'Japaneseness' is the counter images of the local staff, thus contingent on its differentiation from the collective 'other'. In other words, the content of 'Japaneseness' 'is wrought in the particularities of their ongoing historical construction' (Comaroff 1995: 249). That is why we can never use the abstract, static, and general concepts such as groupism to define 'Japaneseness' and apply such definition of 'Japaneseness' to describe the population of Japan. The question we should ask here is, to follow Comaroff (1995: 250), how the consciousness of 'Japaneseness' emerges, is essentialized and objectified in a particular context, and in this paper, in Yaohan Hong Kong?

To answer this question, I follow Deetz's (1992: 259-265) use of Foucault's conception of discursive formations, treating the dual personnel system adopted by the company, a series of company-sponsored activities among the Japanese expatriates, and ethnicity as discourses. I shall show how the dual personnel system as a discourse establishes the categorical differences between Japanese expatriates and local staff and the difference in power, opportunity and benefits. I shall also show how the categorical differences and inequality are routinized in a series of company-sponsored activities and further naturalized by the discourse of ethnicity. These three sets of discourses mutually define and support each other and form a discursive formation.

The discursive formation in turn produces ethnic identity for the subject as a Japanese expatriate, and the person as an object with power within the company. I shall show how ethnicity emerges to justify the inequality between Japanese and local employees. I shall also point out that the content of 'Japaneseness' emerged here is the counter image of local staff, thus does not necessarily include the typical aspects of 'Japaneseness' such as groupism.

Once established, the discursive formation allows certain kinds of action and closes off others. I shall show how ethnicity is objectified as a general social principle in the everyday life of the company by the 'approved' strategies adopted by individual local staff for their career development.

All these are not new and have already been said (Comaroff 1995; Comaroff & Comaroff 1992; Deetz 1992). Perhaps there are two things that make this paper seem worthwhile. Firstly, this paper can serve as a critique of some cross-cultural management studies which tend to use several 'unique' aspects of 'Japaneseness' including groupism, emphasis on consensus and social harmony,

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to name but a few as the basis for cross-cultural comparison and/or as major independent variables explaining Japanese management practices (Wong 1999: 3-5). The second is the collective 'other' in this case study. To study the emergence of 'Japaneseness' in a Chinese cultural context can come up a completely new content of 'Japaneseness'. The 'unique' features such as the principle/actuality (*tatemaie/honne*) distinction have become not so unique to Japanese cases because they, as will be shown below, are also found in Chinese corporate management as well.

Yaohan

In December 1930, Wada Ryōhei, funded by his father-in-law, Tajima Hanjirō, the founder of Yaohan, opened a branch store in Atami, a hot spring resort town 50 miles west of Tokyo. At that time, Ryōhei's branch was just a village grocery store that delivered groceries to customers in bamboo baskets slung from the ends of a shoulder pole (Wada 1988: 35-6). However, it was this branch that grew into an international conglomerate over the next 60 years.

During the first 30 years, overall management was divided into three spheres: general management (finance, administration, accounting, and employment), operational management (sales), and merchandising management (purchasing). These spheres of management were taken up by immediate Wada family members. As more Wadas joined the company, it expanded to include product lines other than groceries. Kazuo, Ryōhei's eldest son, joined the company as the company's buyer in 1951. In 1957, having worked in a bakery shop for one year, Ryōhei's second son followed Kazuo and helped to establish the company's bakery business (Wada 1988: 220-3). At the same time, the company changed its name from the *Yaohan Shōten* (Yaohan Store) to the Yaohan Food Department Store. The name was changed again to the Yaohan Department Store when Ryōhei's third son became a member of the company and helped to set up the fish, textile, and houseware sections, thereby turning the company into a general merchandise store in 1962. At almost the same time, the company started to formalise its managerial system. In 1959, a Board of Directors was established, with all places occupied by the Wadas.

In 1961, as senior managing director, Kazuo went to the United States to survey the supermarket business there. Returning from the trip, he advised his father to convert the company into a modern store. Convinced by his son's arguments, the latter appointed his eldest son company president, and himself became chairman. Kazuo then started to build a supermarket chain within Shizuoka Prefecture. He managed to open ten stores from 1962 to 1970 (Wong 1999: 20-21).

Yaohan and Seichō-no-Ie

At almost the same time, Kazuo formally announced that the teachings of *Seichō-no-Ie*, a Japanese new religion in which the Wadas were devoted believers, had become the company's management philosophy, believing that employees could be motivated to accept economic and physical hardships by the teachings. Kazuo had even established a complete set of employee training programs including *chōrei* (morning gathering) and *shinsōkan* (meditation to visualize God) introducing the religion's teachings. This set of programs remained unchanged in the 1990s, and continued to be used by the company both in the stores of Yaohan Japan and other overseas subsidiaries. From that time onward, every Yaohan employee had been required to be a "believer" in *Seichō-no-Ie* (Wong 1999: 26-29).

Yaohan Going to Overseas

In 1971, Kazuo started Yaohan's first overseas store in Brazil with the support of the local branch of *Seichō-no-Ie*. Although the company was forced to close its Brazilian business in the second half of the 1970s, it continued to open stores in other countries. In 1995, the company was operating 57

| Country | No. of Stores | Year of First Operation |
|------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Singapore | 4 | 1974 |
| Costa Rica | 2 | 1979 |
| Hong Kong | 9 | 1984 |
| U. S. A. | 9 | 1985 |
| Brunei | 2 | 1987 |
| Malaysia | 5 | 1987 |
| China | 19 | 1991 |
| Thailand | 3 | 1991 |
| Macau | 1 | 1992 |
| Canada | 1 | 1993 |
| U.K. | 1 | 1993 |
| Taiwan | 1 | 1994 |
| Total | 57 | |

Table 1 Number of Yaohan's overseas stores, 1995 stores in twelve countries and regions (see Table 1)(Wong 1999: 22).

Yaohan Hong Kong

Yaohan established its first store in Hong Kong through its subsidiary, Yaohan Hong Kong, in 1984. Over the next eleven years, the company increased the number of outlets to ten, one in

| Year | Stores |
|------|--------------------|
| 1984 | Shatin Store |
| 1987 | Tuen Mun Store |
| 1988 | Hunghom Store |
| 1991 | Tsuen Wan Store |
| 1992 | Yuen Long Store |
| 1992 | Lam Tin Store |
| 1992 | Macau Store |
| 1993 | Tin Shui Wai Store |
| 1994 | Junk Bay Store |
| 1995 | Ma On Shan Store |

Table 2 Chronicle of Yaohan Hong Kong's store opening

Macau and the others in Hong Kong² (Table 2)(Wong 1999: 201-202).

In 1990 Kazuo moved Yaohan's headquarters to Hong Kong and changed Yaohan's organizational structure according to the *zaibatsu* multisubsidiary system which, as Morikawa has argued, is the most conducive to the strategy of diversification (Morikawa 1992: xxiii). In Hong Kong Kazuo established a private company called Yaohan International as the group's holding company, through

which he controlled the three newly-created groups: the Hong Kong, China, and Macau group; the Yaohan Japan group; and a group which ran operations in all other countries. This third group was headquartered in Singapore. The original Japan operation was turned into a subsidiary, and its name was changed from the Yaohan Department Store to the Yaohan Japan Corporation, in October of 1990 (Wong: 1999: 23).

In 1991, there were 28 Japanese expatriates (26 men and 2 women) working in Yaohan Hong Kong. These 28 Japanese expatriates occupied the top management positions of Yaohan Hong Kong. The president, four directors and heads of major departments were all Japanese. Not unlike other overseas Japanese companies, these 28 Japanese expatriates and the 2,000 local staff were put into different rank, promotion, and compensation systems.

Discursive Formation

Dual personnel system is a general phenomenon in Japanese companies which employ non-Japanese staff (Kidahashi 1987; March 1992; Sumihara 1992; Trevor & White 1983). For example, March reports that employees of Japanese subsidiaries abroad are split into two classes: locals and Japanese expatriates, the latter tending to see themselves as superior to the locals (March, 1992: 88). This two-class system is reflected in job security, material rewards, and promotional chances (March 1992: 121). Trevor & White also discovered that there was a dual personnel system for expatriate and local staff in two Japanese banks and one trading company in the City of London, with separate conditions of service for the members of the two categories. They even suggested that this dual personnel system could be found in all Japanese firms in the City (Trevor & White 1983: 97).

The same dual personnel system was also adopted in Yaohan Hong Kong. The 28 Japanese expatriates and all other local staff were placed into different ranking, salary, and promotion systems, with the former enjoying more economic benefit, higher social status, and more discretionary power over personnel arrangement than the latter do (Wong 1999: 89-119). Scholars, especially those of management science, tend to understand the dual personnel system of Japanese subsidiaries abroad 'as a typical concomitant of the process of adjusting to the host country, a process commonly called "localization" (or Americanization," if the host country is the United States.)' (Kidahashi 1987: 2-3) I argue, however, that such dual personnel system can be conceived as a discourse, which constitutes personal identities, interests, and experiences of Japanese and local staff. By putting Japanese expatriates and local staff into different ranking, salary, and promotion systems, the dual personnel system produced objects (Japanese expatriates and local staff), classified the whole population of Yaohan Hong Kong into two categories (Japanese expatriates and local staff), and posited a set of relations (Japanese expatriates are not only different from, but also superior to, local staff for the former enjoy more economic benefit and corporate power than the latter.) Certainly, it was not the only possible position in Yaohan company politics. It would have been equally possible to utilize the distinction of competent and incompetent employees to classify the population of Yaohan Hong Kong to reward them accordingly. However, a series of discursive practices-including activities organized by *Seichō-no-Ie*, farewell parties, welcome parties (*kangei kai*), end-of-the-year parties, New-Year parties, and important management meetings-routinized this arbitrary position (Wong 1999: 159-160).

Shinsōkan

The Japanese employees of Yaohan Hong Kong were required to practise *shinsōkan* together, usually once at the beginning of every month, starting about one or one and a half hours before work. They had to bring the bible of the religion. In addition to the monthly meditation, special meditations were held on the days of grand openings of new stores. Usually, Kazuo would lead these special meditations. All Japanese employees were required to attend and pray for the success of the new stores.

Particular stores occasionally held a meditation to ward off evil. For example, at the beginning of 1993 a local female employee of the Tuen Mun store was raped and killed on her way home at night. On March 5 1993, the management decided to hold the monthly meditation in the Tuen Mun store, instead of at headquarters, to protect the store from further harm. Finally, all Japanese employees of the whole Yaohan group were required to attend the New Year meditation in the office of Yaohan International to pray for the success of Yaohan in the coming year.

All these meditations were exclusively for Japanese employees. Neither were the local employees invited to attend the lectures organized by the religion in Hong Kong. The religion's Hong Kong branch would invite lecturers of the religion from Tokyo to speak on various topics every year. The head of the branch usually required the company to 'encourage' its Japanese employees and their wives to attend. However, the Japanese employees did not always go, especially after they had confirmed that Kazuo would not attend. The head of the Department of Personnel and General Affairs had to ensure that 'enough' employees attended the lectures; otherwise he would be blamed by the company's president. He usually exerted pressure on junior Japanese staff, as they could not refuse a request from their superior. However, local employees were not invited to lectures even if and when an insufficient number of Japanese employees were attending. Nor were they required to join the religion. Around July or August every year, the company would issue a company memorandum asking all Japanese employees to renew their memberships. In the same memorandum, those whose wives and children had not yet joined the religion would be reminded to have them to do so. However, local employees were not invited to join the religion. If the Wadas wanted both the labour and the souls of their employees, the souls of local employees were not needed (Wong 1999: 160-161).

Welcome and Farewell Parties

The company also organized parties both to welcome Japanese employees recently sent to Hong Kong and to say farewell to those who had been transferred back to Japan. The head of the Department of Personnel and General Affairs arranged these parties, which were usually held in the Yaohan group's restaurants. During the parties, the audiences would hear messages stressing the basic unity and identity of the assembled gathering. At one welcoming party, the president delivered the opening speech, explaining to the newcomers the role of Japanese expatriates as core members who had to bear the real responsibility for running the company, as the local employees were just peripheral assistants with no management importance; and encouraged them to work hard to perform their roles properly. The newcomers then spoke in turn to voice their determination to work hard, and asked their seniors and management for assistance and guidance.

In the case of farewell parties, the president, on behalf of the company, expressed his gratitude for the contributions made by the departing staff towards the prosperity and perpetuation of the company, and wished them the same success in their new assignments in Japan. The departing staff reciprocated with speeches thanking the management, their seniors and colleagues for their support and assistance.

Following the speeches were dyadic exchanges of toasts which came to encompass the whole party. Such exchanges of toasts, as Ben-Ari argues, can be seen as 'a ritualized means for expressing a sense of solidarity between party members' (Ben-Ari 1993: 9). The president was usually placed with the newcomers or the departing employees. Directors mixed with other employees. Thus, the solidarity expressed in the exchanges of toasts was not confined to employees of the same rank, but provided a base for creating a collective entity. Local employees-no matter how senior they were in the corporate hierarchy-were not invited to attend these parties, and the company never organized such parties for its local staff. That is to say, local employees were not accepted as members of this collective entity (Wong 1999: 161).

End-of-the-year Parties and New Year Parties

The end-of-the-year parties and New Year parties were other occasions to cultivate a family atmosphere among Japanese employees. The president, as the 'father' of the 'Yaohan Hong Kong family', was responsible for organizing such parties. At the end of 1991, it was said that he invited all Japanese employees to attend the end-of-the-year party held at a Korean restaurant. All 28 Japanese employees were present. Each member of the 'family' was asked to give a speech, reflecting what he or she had achieved or failed to achieve in his/her work during the year. Plenty of Korean wine was provided to make the junior members relax so that they would be able to talk freely in front of their superiors. As the party went on, employees gradually overcame the barriers which separated them from their superiors in the everyday workplace and showed their intimate feelings towards their superiors. One Japanese expatriate, for instance, reportedly came to his direct superior, and talked to him in an informal style of Japanese, as if he were talking to a colleague or junior. After several exchanges of toasts with his superior, this Japanese expatriate took the intimacy even further and started to scold his superior. He complained that the superior was stupid and could not understand his problems. While he was complaining, this Japanese expatriate even wanted to beat his superior up, but was finally stopped by other employees. What he was doing did violate conventional manners and even pushed the limits of what was acceptable at parties. However, such a violation was used to display what Lebra calls 'social nudity' in which Japanese employees take away their social masks and reveal much about themselves (Ben-Ari 1993: 10). Social nudity, as Ben-Ari argues, works to create a feeling of solidarity and mutual participation (Ben-Ari 1993: 11-2). In our example, the social nudity was not confined to this Japanese expatriate but occurred in every corner of the party. When the party was over, all, including female employees, were drunk except the president, because the 'father' had to pay the bill.

The New-Year party was even more family-like. In January 1992, for example, it was said that all the Japanese staff had gone to the president's house for dinner. The staff of the company's Food Arcade made *sushi*, the two Japanese women staff helped serve and clean up, senior employees prepared games, and the 'father' paid for the food. The president asked everyone to make a speech

and tell other fellow Japanese the targets (*mokuhyō*) of their personal lives and work for the coming year. He then, like a father, encouraged all staff to work hard to achieve their wishes and plans. As one Japanese women staff member said,

Yaohan is a family. All of us (Japanese employees) are brothers and sisters of this family. I really feel that way, especially when I welcome newcomers or see old members off at the airport and when I attend the New-Year party in our president's home.

It was in the above series of discursive practices that the Japanese expatriates/local staff classification and the position of 'superior Japanese expatriates' were routinized. As one Japanese women expatriate told me,

In 1991, I was transferred to work in Headquarters of Yaohan Hong Kong as an executive officer. Theoretically, I was under a local senior executive officer. However, I could attend the All-Japanese Meeting which she could not; I was informed about the personnel arrangement six months prior to when she was told. More importantly, while senior local staff who are in manager grade or above are sometimes invited to attend the company-sponsored gatherings. I, as a Japanese expatriate, am definitely invited, although I am not a manager. All these things make me feel that we Japanese are superior to local employees no matter which grade we are.

Obviously, such a positioning was political. It valued the distinction between Japanese expatriates and local staff over other possible distinctions and used the distinction in treating Japanese and local staff differently. For example, local employees, even those in managerial positions, were not allowed to attend important meetings in which vital corporate information was conveyed. In these meetings, the management announced important information such as promotions and transfers or conveyed vital messages to the Japanese expatriates.

Take, for example, the meeting held on 4 November 1991. In this meeting, the president reported that the company's sales for the fiscal half ending 31 October 1991 were not satisfactory. He said that sales and profit figures were affected by the poor performance of the company's new Tsuen Wan store, ever rising expenses, and the sluggish retail market. However, he hastily added that some other Hong Kong retailers were still able to report a 20 to 30 per cent rise in profit. He implied that the company had lost its competitive edge in the retail business. He then challenged the 28 Japanese employees to try their best to work hard to increase sales in the second fiscal half. He believed that they could succeed because human potential, according to the teachings of *Seichō-no-Ie*, is infinite. The president then announced the new personnel arrangements for 1992. He ordered the Japanese employees not to leak the information to the local staff because that might undermine the organizational operations of the company.

The president gave out two kinds of information. The first is what I call the 'Japanese-only-information.' In this case, the poor performance of Yaohan Hong Kong was an example. Only Japanese employees were told about the real situation of the company. The second is the 'Japanese-first information.' The local employees would not be told the new personnel arrangements until April 1992, although the information had already been passed to the Japanese expatriates in November

1991, half a year prior to the formal announcement. The differential access to important corporate information further fostered the personal dependence of local employees on their Japanese superiors, thus establishing the superiority of the latter (Wong 1999: 161-164).

Emergence of "Japaneseness"

More importantly, the Japanese expatriates/local staff classification and the 'superior Japanese expatriates' position were further naturalized by the discourse of ethnicity, seemingly making it inevitable and necessary. Both the Japanese expatriates and the local employees experienced and justified the dual personnel system within the company by ethnicity. However, their ethnic consciousness was different. The ethnic consciousness of the dominant Japanese expatriates took on an ideology that protected their privileged position by denying similar privileges to local employees on putative cultural grounds and by questioning their shared humanity to legitimize their control over the company. For example, when a Japanese women employee worked in the Hunghom store in her first year in Hong Kong, the general manager of the store taught her that she could treat and use the store's local employees 'like machines'. Moreover, Japanese expatriates were sometimes even reminded by the company's president that local employees were 'dogs'. The same Japanese women employee recalled that when she was transferred to work in the headquarters as a trainer, the president advised her that she should train the local employees as she would train a dog, and freely order them to do whatever she liked.

Inequality within the company was also justified on putative cultural grounds. The Japanese expatriates tended to think the worst of their local employees, even feeling intimidated by them. They tended also to agree easily with one another that local employees were irresponsible, lazy, incompetent, unreliable, prone to complain, unwilling to teach new staff members, and unlikely to stay long with the company.

The local employees, as a subordinate group, reciprocated by calling into doubt the humanity of the Japanese. They called the Japanese employees 'radishes' because the Japanese liked to eat radishes. A Japanese anthropologist who had done fieldwork in a village in Hong Kong ten years before told me that when he wore a red jacket, the villagers called him 'carrot'; when he was in green clothes, they called him 'green radish'. The local employees also referred to the Japanese employees as '*ka tsai*', a Cantonese equivalent of the English term 'Nips'. Some even called them '*pak ch'i tsai*' (idiot), or '*sei p'uk ka*' (go to hell) behind their backs. The ethnic identities of the Japanese expatriates and local employees 'entailed the complementary assertion of the collective self and the negation of the collective other; it may call into question shared humanity; and its substances were likely to reflect the tensions embodied in relations of inequality' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 53).

We can see that these three sets of discourses mutually define and support each other. The formal dual personnel system based on the ownership right institutionally established the categorical difference between Japanese expatriates and local staff and the superiority of the former; a series of social activities routinized such difference and superiority; and the ethnicity discourse naturalized them. But it goes without saying that these sets of discourses do not necessarily follow the sequence, the actual temporal relations are always more complex.

The discursive formation that brings together these sets of discourses produced ethnic identity

for the subject as a Japanese expatriate, and the person as an object with power within the company. The substance of this ethnic identity was the counter image of local staff. For these Japanese expatriates, 'Japaneseness' includes elements like being responsible, hardworking, competent, reliable, willing to teach new staff members, and loyal to the company and therefore, Japanese are intrinsically superior to Hong Kong Chinese. Consequently, it was natural for the president to preach repeatedly to the Japanese staff that Hong Kong Chinese, unlike Japanese, were not competent or reliable enough to be involved in the management of the company. Therefore, the role of the Japanese staff was to make corporate decisions and check whether their decisions were properly and efficiently implemented by the local employees, while the local employees were simply required to follow closely their Japanese superiors' orders. It was equally natural for individual Japanese expatriates to assert that local employees should not be granted any decision-making power. As one Japanese expatriate explained,

Hong Kong Chinese always exaggerate their ability. If they say they can achieve 100 per cent of the sales target, you should discount what they claim by 70 per cent. On the contrary, we Japanese tend to downplay our ability. When we say we can achieve 50 per cent of the sales target, we actually have the competence to fully achieve the target. Therefore, we cannot trust Hong Kong Chinese. Japanese should monopolize corporate decision making power.

Moreover, since Hong Kong Chinese were considered to be unreliable, Japanese expatriates believed that only they were really in charge of the company. When the Japanese senior executive officer of the Tsuen Wan store was told that some expensive merchandise had been stolen, he reported the theft to the Japanese store general manager, who at that time was on leave. When I asked him why he did not inform the local deputy store general manager who, according to the organizational chart, was supposed to be in charge of the store, he explained that Japanese were the truly responsible persons, and therefore he did not inform the local manager.

It was also natural for local staff to accept the superiority and privileges of Japanese. They thus neither engaged in collective confrontation to eliminate structured inequality nor found their way to disprove the imposed ethnic stigma as legitimization of socio-political differences whenever they perceived it possible to alter the existing order. Instead, ambitious local employees sought upward mobility at the individual level by building patron-client relationships with Japanese expatriates and 'proving' that they had become sufficiently like the Japanese expatriates through 'presentation of self'. We shall see that both of these strategies, whether successful or not, only reinforced the superiority of Japanese expatriates.

In light of the above discussion, we can see that the workforce of Yaohan Hong Kong was divided into two distinct ethnic strata. The upper stratum consisted of a small number of Japanese who filled the managerial and supervisory positions. The subordinate, larger stratum consisted of local Chinese employees who occupied most of the junior positions. Within the company, the Japanese were unmistakably 'superior' and the locals 'inferior' (Wong 1999: 164-66).

Building Relationship with Japanese Expatriates

Local employees knew clearly that, not only their promotions, but also how much corporate

power they could wield when they were promoted, very much depended on relations with the Japanese expatriates. They also understood that whether they could successfully perform their job duties depended on cooperation and support from the Japanese expatriates. Therefore, viewed from within such a social context, building and maintaining good relationships with the Japanese could not but be understood as the principal means for local employees to develop their careers within the company. For, at the experiential level, it did seem to be the relationship with the Japanese expatriates which facilitated promotion and secured corporate power.

The first step in building relationships with the Japanese was to be able to communicate with them. The 28 Japanese expatriates generally had inadequate linguistic skills. Only three could speak English well enough to communicate with local employees. Deeply influenced by the teachings of *Seichō-no-Ie*, which stress the importance of 'spirit' in human communications, Kazuo did not make the knowledge of local languages an essential requirement for overseas assignments. Therefore, only one employee, who had studied in Hong Kong for two years during college, could speak Cantonese before being sent to Hong Kong. No Japanese expatriates except the two women employees were willing to learn Cantonese. To further complicate matters, not many local employees could speak English well enough to communicate in that language either. Therefore, linguistic skill in Japanese became an important asset for local employees hoping to establish relationships with Japanese expatriates. Many senior local staff were learning Japanese when I was doing research in the company in 1992.

To be able to speak Japanese was not enough, however. Successful local employees also had to be able to provide services for Japanese expatriates. First, the Japanese expatriates depended heavily on the support of some local employees to operate the stores. Second, Japanese expatriates relied heavily on local employees to deal with governmental agencies and with legal matters, and also with other local firms. Finally, local employees also provided non-work-related services for the Japanese expatriates and their families. Local staff, in return, received consistently favorable evaluations of their 'performance' and the rewards this entailed (Wong 1999:167-169).

Presentation of Self

Developing a consciousness and calculative 'presentation of self' to Japanese expatriates is another important strategy for ambitious local staff, as they were well aware that their Japanese superiors did not understand Cantonese and often had to rely on their eyes alone to evaluate the local employees. It was the 'performance' the local employees manifested in everyday encounters with the Japanese expatriates which was monitored, evaluated, and linked to how they were treated by management. Therefore, local employees found it necessary to develop a strategy of manifesting properly compliant behavior and attitudes. The proper compliant behavior and attitudes had to be what a Japanese expatriate would display or what the Japanese expatriates thought they should display. Since Japanese expatriates protected their exclusive cultural identity, and with it material and social power, by stressing ideologically the contrasts between themselves and the local employees, the local employees, at least from the actor's perspective, could remove these contrasts by showing that they had 'become' sufficiently like the Japanese expatriates (Wong 1999: 174-175). This can be confirmed by a list of what local employees should and should not do, which was given to me by a senior local employee. According to him, local employees should show to their Japanese

superiors that they were hardworking by not taking any annual leave. Second, they should never take sick leave to show their loyalty to the company. Third, local employees should not go home until they had finished all their work in order to show that they were responsible and reliable. Finally, they had better speak Japanese.

The points mentioned are exactly the elements entailed in the content of 'Japaneseness' outlined above. In other words, the major reason ambitious local staff succeeded in ascending within the company's hierarchy is that they had, at the experiential level, become sufficiently 'like' Japanese expatriates. More interestingly, the Hong Kong Chinese staff here adopted the same Japanese technique of *tatemaie/honne* distinction to advance their own interests.

We can see that local staff sought upward mobility at the individual level either/both by building patron-client relationships with Japanese expatriates or/and adopting various strategies to show to their Japanese bosses that they had become sufficiently 'like' the latter. All these made ethnicity/'Japaneseness' an important factor in determining local employees' career development within the company. However, it should be stressed that a relationship with Japanese expatriates/a display of becoming 'like' Japanese was not just a means to the goals of promotion and corporate power. It became an end in itself, because a close relationship with the Japanese/a display of becoming sufficiently 'like' Japanese marked a distance from other local employees. The local symbolic proportion-successful local employees were to ordinary local employees as Japanese expatriates were to local employees in general-meant that successful local employees could be differentiated from ordinary local employees by their closer relationships with Japanese employees/displays of becoming 'like' Japanese. Any sign indicated such relations/displays-such as co-dinning, knowing about the Japanese expatriates' private lives or personal biographies, acquiring objects and attitudes exclusive to the Japanese expatriates/Japanese linguistic skills, not taking any annual leave and sick leave, etc.-became prominent sites of interest and action. That is to say, ethnicity had become a general social principle in the everyday life of the company.

Conclusion

I have examined how the discursive formation that brings together three sets of discourses produced 'Japanese expatriates' and 'local staff' as objects, the Japanese expatriates/local staff classification, and the superiority of the Japanese expatriates over the local staff in Yaohan Hong Kong. These objects, classifications, and relations were then routinized in a series of company-sponsored activities and further naturalized by ethnicity. In other words, ethnicity here should be considered as a form of ideological justifications, functioning to hide the arbitrary nature of existing power structure and suppress alternative power arrangements in the company. That is to say, contrary to the so-called 'primordial' thesis, the emergence of ethnic identity should be treated as 'a response to (historical specific) practical circumstances on the part of a given population' (Comaroff & Stern 1995: 5). The collective consciousness of 'Japaneseness' was a response of the Japanese expatriates of Yaohan Hong Kong to the categorical difference between Japanese and local staff and the difference in power, opportunity and benefits established by the discursive formation within the company, rather than 'an intrinsic awareness of their collective being-in-the-world - i.e., an identity' (Comaroff & Stern 1995: 5).

More importantly, the substance of ethnic identity of the Japanese expatriates were the counter

images of local staff such as being responsible, hardworking, competent, reliable, willing to teach new staff, and loyal to the company, most of which were not the typical items of *nihonjinron* (discussions of the Japanese) or of *nihonteki keieiron* (literature on Japanese style management) (Yoshino 1992: 173). The content of 'Japaneseness' is contingent on its differentiation from, and, varies with, the collective 'other', rather than the empirical description of Japanese people. The contingent nature of 'Japaneseness' makes any decontextualized, static, and stereotypical concepts of 'Japaneseness' such as groupism and their use in cross-cultural comparative research problematic.

I have also described how the discursive formation, once established, closed off certain alternatives of action such as a directly collective effort of local staff to totally eliminate structured inequality or to 'prove' that ethnic indices are irrelevant, and approved certain strategies for the local staff such as building good relationship with, or, presenting themselves to, the Japanese expatriates. However, these strategies ironically reinforced the importance of ethnicity and reproduced the superiority of Japanese expatriates because they were pursued as if Japanese ethnicity was the key to the structure of inequality. Consequently, ethnicity not only was an ideological justification of inequality between Japanese expatriates and local staff but also became an independent variable in, or a 'primordial' base for, explaining social behavior within the company. Therefore, ethnicity and the social conditions that give rise to it, as Comaroff & Comaroff has pointed out, enter into a dialectic relation, each cannot exist without the other (Comaroff & Comaroff 1992: 60).

Finally, once individual Japanese expatriates were constituted as being responsible, hardworking, competent, reliable, willing to teach new staff, and loyal to the company, they automatically performed the role embedded in the position of 'the superior Japanese expatriates' as core members who had to bear the real responsibility of running the company by meeting the highest behavioral standards of the company. They then became more supportive of company policies, more responsible in managing local staff, and more hardworking in carrying out their job duties before local staff, as if they are culturally programmed to do so, in order to differentiate themselves from the local staff and thus provide grounds for their superiority over the latter and for their monopoly of corporate power. This accounts for the Japanese expatriates, as discovered by Ben-Ari (1994) and Nakano (1995), behaving in more 'Japanese' way than they did in Japan (at least from an observer's point of view). Therefore, to paraphrase Ben-Ari, in order to understand Japanese society and culture there is a need to go 'international' (Ben-Ari 1994: 1).

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² Yaohan Japan went bankrupt in September 1997 and the group decided to close all its Hong Kong stores in November of the same year.