

The following section describes how Japanese YouTube commenters understand “diversity” as it relates to Japanese dialect, and how this is related to contemporary Japanese nationalism. It includes an explanation of certain salient issues in East Asian geopolitics.

aggressive pushback, which I will examine more closely in the next section.

In the next section, I will examine how the relative disparities in power seen here and the political conflicts the dialects are involved in affect how they are evaluated in terms of diversity and nationalism.

4.7. Diversity and Nationalism

In this final section, I examine the way the intersections between valorizations of dialect that mention diversity and or have nationalistic affect are related to the way different dialects are implicated in political conflict. For diversity, I coded for overt mentions of diversity as a concept or meta-pragmatic discussions of dialect usage. I then recorded whether these stances were in favor of diversity or dialect, or against it. Finally, I recorded whether these stances contained overt nationalism. The results are in Table 11 below:

Table 11. Dialect and Diversity

<i>Diversity</i>	Pro		Anti		Total
	Overt	Not	Overt	Not	
<i>Nagoya</i>	0	0	0	0	0
Kōshū	0	1	0	0	1
Hakata	0	3	0	1	4
Okinawa	3	1	0	1	6
Kansai	0	3	0	4	7
Aomori	2	7	0	2	13

I also analyze explicitly nationalist stance-taking, examining two types of stance. The first is a conciliatory false equivalency that paints conflict between dialect users and hyōjungo speakers as detrimental to Japan. The second is aggressive overt nationalism, sometimes in response to dialect,

sometimes in response to explicitly political issues. The results are in Table 12 below. I have listed them separately from Table 11 because the comments used in Table 12 included replies as well as top-level comments, since this was where the majority of explicitly nationalist stance-taking took place. As a result, the numbers are inflated compared to the other stance-taking tables.

Table 12. Explicit Nationalist Stancetaking (Includes Comment Replies)

	Conciliatory	Aggressive			Total
		Pro-Dialect	Anti-Dialect	Politics	
Nagoya	0	0	0	0	0
Kōshū	0	0	0	0	0
Hakata	0	0	0	0	0
Aomori	0	1	3	0	4
Okinawa	1	2	1	11	15
Kansai	8	6	4	5	22

4.7.1. Aomori

As the ‘safe’ dialect without contentious political connections, Aomori is by far the most receptive to actual diversity claims. Furthermore, the positive stances taken on Aomori dialect as representing diversity tend to be implicitly nationalistic, but are much less likely to be explicitly or aggressively nationalistic. An example would be this comment from *Nanbu vs Tsugaru: War*:

BURAKKU BOORU:

More than 10 years ago when I was in Aomori for work, I overheard two old ladies’ conversation in the supermarket food court, and I laughed because I understood almost nothing. **Japan is wide.**

*Jūnen ijō mae-ni Aomori-ni shigoto de itta toki, suupaa-no fuudo kotoo de tonari-ni ita ba-san futari-no kaiwa-wo nani ge-ni kaiteita ga hotondo imi fumei de waratta. **Nihon wa hiroi.***

BURAKKU BOORU’s reaction to seeing elderly women in Aomori talking in an incomprehensible dialect is to be impressed with Japan’s breadth, which is representative of most of the comments I’ve labeled as implicitly but not overtly nationalistic in the Aomori data. Another fairly clear example which more explicitly shows this comes from *Elderly women chat in Tsugaru-ben*:

IMPERIALSO: Losing the diversity of Japanese is sad (14 likes)
Nihongo-no tayōsei-ga ushinawareru-no wa kanashii na

This shows that the discussion of diversity tends to fall within an implicit Japanese nationalist framework, even when the dialect in question is not deeply implicated in political conflict. However, there are examples of dialect usage itself being valorized without any trace of nationalist sentiment, as in this example, also from *Elderly women chat in Tsugaru-ben*:

YAHLEN7:

Pardon my rudeness, but it seems to me that many people from Tōhoku who go to Tokyo end up discarding their dialect, but dialect is the culture and tradition of [one's] hometown. By all means, I hope they follow the example of Osakans and don't discard their dialect. (33 likes)
Shitsurei nagara Tōhoku-no hito wa jōkyō suru to hōgen-wo sutete shimau hito-ga ooi yō-na ki-ga shimasu ga hōgen koso kyōdo-no bunka de ari dentō. Zehi tomo Ōsakajin-wo minaratte hōgen-wo sutenai de hoshii mono desu.

Finally, a number of comments on the Aomori dialects argue against the necessity and usefulness of dialect, which can occasionally result in fairly high levels of hostility. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these are the places where the most overt nationalist sentiment flares up. Consider the following comment thread made in response to *Elderly women chat in Tsugaru-ben*:

H M: It's really sad that these beautiful dialects are being lost. As long as these grandmothers are still alive, we should take many more videos. (62 likes)
Konna kirei-na hōgen-ga ushinawareru-no wa kanashii na. Soba-ga ikiteru uchi-ni ippai bideo tottokeba yokkata.

GORAIASU GORAIASU:

HM No, no, these dialects make it hard to communicate between regions, so what's the point of keeping them around? (2 likes)
H M Iya iya, kore ja hoka chiiki-no hito-no komyunikeeshon torennee kara hōgen nante iranai nda yo

CHIKI CHIKI: Dialects are beautiful language. They're a treasure, and it's very sad to lose tradition. (19 likes)
Zettai kunshu[[?]] Hōgen wa utsukushii kotoba desu. Takaramono-no yō-na mono desu. Dentō-ga nakunaru-no wa kanashii.

SEN'ETSU NAGARA, MŌSHIAGERU:

Dialects are shit. If you won't unify the language shut the hell up. The point of language is to communicate your intention; consequently, the more people whose intentions a language can convey, the more valuable it is. It just makes sense to throw out the dialects and fucking speak hyōjungo. (1 like)
Hōgen wa gomi. Gengo tōitsu shinai to o-hanashi-ni naran. Gengo-no mokuteki wa ishi-no sotsū da. Sono ten kara ieba yori ooki-na ninju to ishi-wo tsutaeru koto-ga dekiru

genjo hodo kachi-ga aru. Tada betsu-ni hōgen-wo nakuse to itteiru wake de wa naku, hyōjungo wa shaberu yō-ni shiro to iu hanashi.

WATANABE YUKA:

Sen'etsu nagara, mōshiageru What the heck are you talking about man ^^; If we follow your logic, the Japanese of up to 120 million people is shit. Fuck off and go speak Chinese or English. (5 likes)

Sen'etsu nagara, mōshiageru Nani itte nda koitsu ^^; Omae-no riron de ittara washa kazu takadaka ichi oku ni senban-no nihongo mo gomi da yo. Chūgokugo ka eigo de mo shabettero

GORAIASU GORAIASU and SEN'ETSU NAGARA, MŌSHIAGERU both use the discourse of the need for language standardization, a common argument of Standard Language Ideology, which in the Japanese context has its roots in the original project to construct hyōjungo and unify the language for imperialist purposes. However, these more traditional anti-dialect stances receive much lower uptake than pro-diversity stances. While H M's original comment and CHIKI CHIKI's response in support of dialect tend more towards standard folklorization, WATANABE YUKA takes an emphatically nationalistic pro-dialect stance which goes to great lengths to normalize dialect use as a part of Japaneseness in itself. This seems to represent a maturation of pro-diversity ideology—the dialect use is itself framed as nationalistic and pro-Japanese, even being used to take a stab at China and the United States.

4.7.2. Okinawa

It appears to be more difficult to valorize the Okinawan dialect in terms of diversity, as there are fewer of this stance type than in the case of Aomori. Furthermore, the majority of the stances that valorize Okinawa as a part of Japanese diversity are much more explicitly nationalistic than the responses to Aomori. An excellent example was made in response to *Soon After Tears/Uchinā-guchi*:

KAMADAA1: I am *naichā* and can partially understand dialect words, but Uchinā-guchi is hard for me. **Dialect should be treasured as part of Japanese culture.** Next month, I'll be covering the **Senkaku Islands fishing rally**. The video will be posted on sencaku38. I'd be honored if you also watched the videos at kamadaa1 as well. *Naichā-no watashi wa, bubunteki-na hōgen tango wa, wakarimasu ga uchinā-guchi wa, muzukashii desu. Hōgen wa, nihon-no bunka de yoi mono node taisetsu-ni shitai desu. Raigetsu, Senkaku shotō-no tsuri daikai-no shuzai-ni sankā shimasu. Tōkō dōga wa, sencaku38 de UP shimasu. kamadaa1-no tōkō dōga-wo goran itadaki arigatō gozaimasu.*

Considering the possible cultural affinity between Okinawa and China, bringing up the Senkaku Islands in this context is extremely nationalistic. The Senkaku Islands, known as the Diaoyu islands in China and the Diaoyutai Islands in Taiwan, are the subject of a three-way conflict between China, Taiwan, and Japan over which country the islands belong to. While a ‘fishing rally’ may sound innocuous, deployment of commercial fishing fleets to Senkaku is a method the Japanese and Chinese governments are currently using to antagonize each other and test their willingness to project military force. Consequently, the sequentiality of this comment makes it appear that Okinawa is being used as a geopolitical tool, and demonstrates the close relationship between valorization of Okinawa and anti-Chinese nationalistic sentiment.

I would suggest that the reason for this is that it is more difficult to discuss the idea of diversity in the Okinawan context without risking causing offense. The battle over Okinawa’s identity goes both ways; valorizing Okinawan diversity from a Japanese perspective likely comes off as implicitly nationalistic and imperialistic, something that not all commenters are willing to do.

This can be seen in the implications of KAMADAA1 identifying themselves as *naichā*, the Okinawan word for ‘mainlander’; considering Schilling-Estes (1998) and Bucholtz and Hall (2005) this is clearly an attempt at expressing solidarity with Okinawans through linguistic performance and adequation, and would be fairly innocuous for most of the other dialects. However, given the clear political motivation it may come off as appropriative at best, and at worst is a rather imperialist act of manipulating the Okinawan language for Japanese political gain. There is simply no grounding for similar issues to arise in response to the Aomori dialects.

The more delicate situation of the Okinawan dialect can be seen in the few responses it receives arguing that dialect is unnecessary. Consider this reply to a thread started in response to [*Okinawa dialect*] *For the First Time in Forever Reprise [Frozen]*:

ARTHER TOKUBŌ:

d oaas Please forgive my indiscretion, but.
I think pushing hyōjungo is a good thing.
If everyone [stubbornly] insisted on using dialect, even in the same country we couldn’t understand each other, and a huge problem would be born..... (0 likes)

*d oaas Hontō-ni mōshiwake gozaimasen-ga.
Hyōjungo yori wa yoi koto da to omoimasu.
Minna-ga hōgen-wo koshitsu suru to kokunai demo ishi sotsū-ga dekinaku nari taihen
mondai-wo umidashimasu-no de.....*

While commenters on the Aomori dialects had no compunctions about virulently condemning Tōhoku-ben, ARTHUR TOKUBŌ is cautious and tentative, and they do in fact receive an angry response from D OAAS, the commenter they were addressing.

Finally, while Okinawa does attract extremely aggressive and explicit nationalist stances, they are usually in response to those claiming that Okinawan isn't Japanese, the implications of which I discussed in section 4.3. These comments take a much more explicitly political tone than the disagreements over Aomori, as in this one from *Subtitled: Arin Kurin Uchinā-guchi (Okinawa dialect) version Rassun gorera: Sanma Gōten:*

ZERO: +mina Kobayasi What's a foreign country, **dumbass?**
Study up [before you] open your mouth (1 like)
+mina Kobayasi Nani-ga gaikoku **furimun** ya
Benkyō shite mono ie yo

Here, ZERO uses *furimun* 'idiot, dumbass', an Okinawan word, to index an Okinawan identity while also taking the nationalistic stance of denying that Okinawa should be considered an independent country. This shows, again, that any kind of comment on Okinawa's diversity and cultural identity, even jokingly, is complicated by the ongoing political conflict around the island. While Okinawa may be the "true" Indigenous dialect of Japan, it is far less safe to discuss than the para-Indigenous Aomori.

4.7.3. Osaka (Kansai)

The comments on Kansai-ben do not contain any stance-taking discussing the importance of diversity in itself, which makes sense considering that it is no way endangered and does not evoke the sentiment and folklorization that characterize Aomori and Okinawa. However, despite this, and unlike the other three non-sentimentalized dialects, there are occasional valorizations of Kansai-ben or Kansai in

general, as in this comment from *Masaki Suda and Sosuke Ikematsu's hyper-surreal Kansai-ben conversation hits the bull's-eye!*:

SBYTHEWAY: I think that Ikematsu-san's Kansai-ben is a little uncomfortable since he's not from Kansai; I'm a Kansaier though. Of course there are people who are overreacting, but plenty of people saying "Kansaiers are boiling up" or "total overreaction" have come out against them. If someone is told their way of speaking is wrong, they stop wanting to speak it. I treasure my own dialect, so I wish those pushing hyōjungo wouldn't speak so lightly. Well, I'm sorry for the long post. Those two's back-and-forth made me laugh. (15 likes)

Kansai shusshin janai Ikematsu-san-no Kansai-ben-ga iwakan aru to omotte shimau-no ga Kansaijin. Tashika-ni gajō-ni henkō-ni suru hito datte oru kedo, sore ni taishite "Kansaijin-ga waiteru" toka "ichiichi henkō shi-sugi" toka iu hito-ga kekkō iru nato. Dare datte jibun-no tsukaetteru hōgen-wo machigaetta hanashikata saretari shitara, iitakunaru shi, sore dake jibun-no hōgen-wo daiji-ni shiteiru node, hyōjungo yori-no hito toka wa sonna fū-ni karuku iwanai-de hoshii to tsunedzune omou. Chōbun shitsurei shimashita. Futari-no yaritori warawasete itadakimashita.

SBYTHEWAY's comment clearly alludes to the reason for this—Kansai-ben comment sections tend to be filled with conflict between Kansaier upset over Kansai-ben being misrepresented and others accusing them of overreaction or arrogance. Even though the Kansai conflict is not political per se in the same way as Okinawa, as it pits the massive Kantō and Kansai regions against each other, it has a far more immediate impact on the majority of commenters. This is likely the reason for the somewhat surprising dominance of Kansai in terms of nationalistic stance acts, since explicit discussion of political conflict and the value of dialect tends to take place within a nationalistic framework.

It appears that the most popular type of nationalist response to the Kansai problem is a kind of 'both sides' conciliation that argues everyone is at fault and is harming Japan. A key example of this comes from *Mamuriton teaches genuine Kansai-ben!*:

COMFORT 700:

Those who say "hyōjungo is gross" or "Kansai-ben is gross" are the lowest of the low... (And arguments that [saying] the lowest dimension is too much can only go so far.) (These bastards aren't qualified to be members of society.) (They make light of all Japanese.) If we follow their example (as always), Japan will steadily decline... "Hyōjungo kimoi" "Kansai-ben kimoi" to itteru yatsu tte, teijigen ika da na... (Teijigen sugiru iiarasoi-ni mo teido-ga aru...). (Sonna yatsu wa, shakaijin toshite-no shikaku wa zero da na...) (Dōji-ni, nihonjin mo namereba ii) Konna teijigen ika-na koto-wo (itsu made mo) kurikaeshite-tara, nihon wa dandan suitai shite-iku ka mo na...

While COMFORT700 valorizes Kansai-ben, they construct a false equivalency that places hyōjungo on the same level as being equally maligned, as if hyōjungo were not unambiguously the prestige dialect of Japanese. They also frame the entire argument as being at the expense of Japan as a whole.

This is interestingly a form of adequation in itself. While it is very different from that seen in the cases of Okinawa and Aomori, it attempts to level the differences between Kansai-ben speakers and hyōjungo speakers by equalizing their grievances and appealing to their shared Japaneseness. That Kansai-ben is actually accorded equal status to hyōjungo is a testament to its massive prestige and power, but it also indicates that that power itself allows Kansai to be implicated in much more serious conflict. This is the flip side of the nationalist promotion of diversity seen with Aomori and Okinawa—powerless dialects can be enthusiastically promoted as symbols of specifically Japanese diversity, but the power of Kansai-ben, which threatens the hegemony of hyōjungo, must be tempered with appeals to the welfare of the nation.

The opposite of this conciliatory stancetaking comes in the form of anti-Kansai stances, which include explicitly racialized distinction that can only be made against Kansai, and Osaka in particular. This can be seen in this excerpt from a comment thread on *Blast of understanding: 7 ways to identify fake Kansai-ben*:

S&I: The way they look after their own and have too much pride is gross LOL
To me **Kansaiers and Chinese have exactly the same personality** (7 likes)
Maji nakama ishiki to puraido taka-sugite kimoi wa wara
*Ore-n naka de **Kansaijin to Chūgokujin-no kekkō wa mataku onaji***

YŪKI RAIKI: >>S&I Tokyoites need to stop thinking that Kansaiers = Osaka
There are various other prefectures in Kansai
This is my expression of independence. by refined Kyotoite (2 likes)
>>S&I *Tōkyō-no hito wa, sorosoro Kansaijin=Ōsaka de imeeji suru mikata yame yo ya*
Kansai tte hoka-ni mo iron-na ken-ga aru-n ya kara
Tandoku hyōgen de yoroshiku. by jōjin-na Kyōto-min yori

S&I: [Yūki Raita] I know
I'm not talking about refined Kyotoites, only Osakans seem Chinese to me (0 likes)
[Yūki Raita] Wakattooyo
yaken jōhin-na Kyōto-min de wa naku Ōsakajin dake ga Chūgoku ppoi tte omotta-no

Explicitly taking the stance that Okinawans, for example, are not Japanese, and doing so in a blatantly insulting and degrading manner, would be unthinkable, but here the outright predication of Chineseness to Osakans goes without censure and receives fairly high uptake, with 7 likes despite being buried deep in a lengthy comment thread.

There are two different interpretations that can be made here. The first emphasizes the relative stability of Osaka's prestige and power. Because Osaka is so self-evidently Japanese compared to Okinawa or even Aomori, it can afford to be attacked even in such starkly racialized terms. However, it could also be said that Kansai's outsize power requires outsized vilification. Simple insinuation is not enough to degrade Kansai-ben; it is only here that distinction can and must be made in extremely nationalistic and outright racist terms.

While the discourse on Kansai-ben is qualitatively different from that on Aomori and Okinawa, it again shows how debate over the value of dialect is often conducted in nationalistic terms that relate to the ideas of national identity and unity on both sides of the debate. This in itself shows how deeply the valorization of dialect, and hence diversity, has been tied into Japanese nationalism.

4.7.4. Summary

Kansai-ben, surprisingly, comes out in the lead in nationalistic stance-taking, largely due to the tendency of Kansai-related discussions to set Kansai and Kantō at odds. Okinawa follows, clearly due to the ongoing conflict over its place in Japan. Finally, while Aomori dialects occasionally result in nationalistic stance-taking, it is usually lower-key and tends to be oriented more towards the promotion of dialect and diversity, supporting my ultimate argument that the Aomori dialects, with their high covert prestige and low controversy, are the ideal staging ground for for safe, largely inoffensive valorizations of diversity and dialect.

In the following and final section, I conclude by synthesizing my findings to place each dialect in its social context.