A stunning portrait of diversity?
Gender, race, and nation in Miss Universe Japan 2015
Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to study how gender, race, and nation are represented in Miss Universe Japan 2015. I investigate how the top five participants are represented in relation to Japanese ideal femininity and what these representations contribute to. Furthermore, I examine how global ideals have impacted the outcome of the pageant. The material consists of recordings of the Miss Universe Japan 2015 pageant, which is available on YouTube. The material is analyzed using a context focused textual analysis. Stuart Hall’s theories of representation are used to understand how representations work. Judith Butler’s theory of performative gender and Floya Anthias’ and Nira Yuval-Davies’ theories of how gender relates to nation are used to understand how the construction of the nation intersects with the construction of gender. Michael Billig’s theory of banal nationalism is used to illustrate that beauty pageants are nationalistic practices. Lastly, theories of whiteness, both in the West and Japan, are applied to understand how race and national values interact. The top five participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015 are analyzed one by one and their representations are contrasted to the ideals of the Japanese woman. Moreover, the impact of global ideals on the pageant is discussed. I find that the representation of the top five participants both reproduces and challenges the ideal femininity in Japan, thus widening the limits for the Japanese womanhood. On the other hand, these challenges, and also the reproductions, largely follow global ideals, which leads to an essentialization of global beauty.

Keywords
Miss Universe Japan, Ariana Miyamoto, Japanese femininity, Beauty pageants, Japan, Whiteness, Nationalism, Race, Gender
Remarks

Quotations in Japanese are written in Latin characters using the modified Hepurn system. For detailed information see Lindberg-Wada et al. (2006: 45-47).

All translations from Japanese into English are made by the author.
# Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1

Aim and research questions ................................................................................... 2

What is a beauty pageant ......................................................................................... 3

Outline ...................................................................................................................... 4

Literature review ..................................................................................................... 5

Beauty pageants ....................................................................................................... 5

The ideal Japanese woman ....................................................................................... 7

Methodology ........................................................................................................... 10

Material .................................................................................................................. 10

Method .................................................................................................................... 12

Theories .................................................................................................................. 14

Representation ...................................................................................................... 14

Performative gender ............................................................................................... 15

Nation and nationalism ......................................................................................... 16

Whiteness .............................................................................................................. 17

Analysis .................................................................................................................. 20

The homogeneous and diverse beauty pageant ....................................................... 20

Miss Aichi ............................................................................................................... 22

Miss Nagasaki ....................................................................................................... 25

Miss Tokyo ............................................................................................................ 29

Miss Oita ............................................................................................................... 32

Miss Chiba ............................................................................................................ 34

The ideal Japanese woman meets the world ......................................................... 36

Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 42

Literature ............................................................................................................... 47
List of Tables

Table 1. Number of views of the material ............................................. 11
Table 2. Number of views of Miss Universe Japan 2012-2015 ........ 12
Introduction
In 2015, Ariana Miyamoto became the lucky winner of Miss Universe Japan, one of the biggest national beauty pageants in Japan. (Ariana Miyamoto is hereafter called Miss Nagasaki because she represented the Japanese prefecture Nagasaki.) To be coronated the most beautiful woman in a nation is always special, but for Miss Nagasaki it was particularly special because Japanese people always had seen her as a foreigner (Fackler 2015; Lies 2015). The reason for her being seen as a foreigner is that she has inherited her father’s black skin. Miss Nagasaki is not only the first woman in Japan of mixed-race heritage to win a big national beauty pageant where the aim is to represent Japan, she is also the first black woman in Japan to do the same.

In all nations, there are norms for how the ideal woman should look and behave (Yuval-Davies 1997: 67), which are displayed in, for example, beauty pageants. In Japan, one important norm is to be ethnic Japanese (Iwabuchi 1994: 53), and since Miss Nagasaki is mixed-race, her victory was widely discussed, both nationally and internationally. Many people in Japan were critical of the decision to choose a mixed-race Japanese woman as a representative of the nation. There were, for example, numerous messages written about Miss Nagasaki’s victory on the social media platform Twitter (sbkazu-san 2015). One user wrote: “Misu yunibāsu no ken, semete nihonjin kao no hito ni shinai to nihon daihyō no imi nakune? Sabetsu toka ja nakute” (ibid). (Regarding Miss Universe, if the representative of Japan does not at least have a Japanese face, there is no meaning to it. It is not discrimination or anything.) On the other hand, many people, including Miss Nagasaki herself, saw her victory as a message that Japan is changing, and viewed her as an advocate for both mixed-race and black people in Japan (CNN.co.jp 2015; Fackler 2015; Lies 2015).

Depictions of minorities in media, like this of Miss Nagasaki, can have changing effects on discourses, but only if the depictions are non-stereotypical (Hall 2013b: 259; Murphy-Shigematsu 2008: 301; Stoeltje 1996: 28). Another word for depiction is representation, and this is usually what depiction is called in Cultural Studies. Stereotypical representations of immigrants can, for instance, make the Japanese people believe that integration does not only work, but is necessary, because the images they get are either those of integrated, well-functioning minorities who act like ethnic Japanese people, or maladjusted minorities who act different from Japanese people. What is needed is non-stereotypical images of immigrants and minorities, as well as of ethnic Japanese people, to show that everyone has similarities and
Several studies of representations of minorities and foreigners in Japanese popular culture and media examine texts which at first sight seem inclusive and norm-breaking, but which, in fact, reproduce stereotypes of the Japanese people, minorities, and foreigners (Hambleton 2011: 40; Iwabuchi 2005: 201-211; Ko 2010: 37, 83, 166-167; Ko 2014: 643; Rivas 2015: 725; Takeyuki 2003: 298; Watarai 2014: 672). This is not to say that more nuanced representations of foreigners and minorities do not exist. They are fewer, but Fellez (2012: 350), Ko (2010: 91), and Takeyuki (2003: 301) have found examples of it among music performers, in films, and in news programs.

The victory of a mixed-raced Japanese person in a national beauty pageant is a deviation from the norm, and thus, could have an impact on the national image of race, as well as on other ideals for Japanese women. That is, as shown above, if the representation challenges prevalent stereotypes about Japanese and mixed-raced people. What I am investigating in this thesis is therefore, how Miss Nagasaki is represented in Miss Universe Japan 2015. Does her representation challenge existing discourses about ethnicity and race in Japan? I will contrast her representation to the other four contestants who also made it to the top five in the pageant, to see if she is represented differently than them. I will also contrast them all to ideals for Japanese women, to see if the top five participant’s representations differ from the national norm, and if Miss Nagasaki challenges the same or other norms than the other top five contestants.

**Aim and research questions**
The aim of this study is to investigate how gender, nation, and race are represented in Miss Universe Japan 2015. This will be done by asking the following research questions:

- How do gender, nation, and race interact in creating the representations of the top five participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015?
- How is the ideal Japanese woman represented in Miss Universe Japan 2015?
- How do the representations of the top five participants in Miss Universe Japan contribute to challenge and/or reproduce the image of the ideal Japanese woman?
I also ask a fourth question at a more extratextual level, which is not only about the material itself:

- Which mechanisms enabled Miss Nagasaki’s victory in Miss Universe Japan 2015?

**What is a beauty pageant**

There are numerous beauty pageants all around the globe, and while they all vary in form, they all display values for the group which is being represented in the pageant (Cohen et al. 1996: 1-2). I categorize beauty pageants as popular culture because they, like other forms of popular culture, are entertainment for the masses (Banet-Weiser 1999: 4). However, that beauty pageants are entertainment does not mean that they do not have impact on society. Banet Weiser (1999: 4) argues that: “Because of their emphasis on public spectacle and display, their gestures toward monarchy and medieval pageantry, and their relentless articulations of dominant norms of femininity, beauty pageants are clearly situated as a particular kind of cultural practice and, as such, call for a deeper intellectual attention.” Thus, beauty pageants are more than just entertainment.

The first registered beauty pageant was held in the US in 1880. However, beauty pageants can be traced back to Greek mythology (ibid: 3-4). First the pageants were held on a national level and the first global beauty pageants was not held until 1951, when Miss World was created. A year later Miss Universe was founded. Miss World and Miss Universe are still the two largest beauty pageants in the world (ibid: 5). In Japan, the first beauty contest was held in 1931 (Robertson 2001: 3).

Today, national beauty pageants are often the climax of many months of contests on a more local level (Banet-Weiser 1999: 49-50; Gilbert 2015: 508; Ochoa 2014: 116). This is also how Miss Universe Japan works. On Miss Universe Japan’s official YouTube channel recordings of some of these pageants on the prefectural level are uploaded (c.f. Miss Universe Japan 2014a-c). The winners of the national Miss Universe and Miss World pageants are then sent as representatives for the nation to the international pageants.

Most often a jury decides who should be the winner of a beauty pageant (Banet-Weiser 1999: 53-54; Sierra Becerra 2017: 77; Teilhet-Fisk 1996: 189; Wilk 1996: 226). In the Miss America pageant the judges are often from the entertainment or communication industries (Banet-Wesier 1999: 53). Unfortunately, I have not found who the judges of Miss Universe
Japan 2015 were. Neither have I found exactly what is judged in the pageant, more than a short statement on the official Miss Universe Japan homepage saying that Miss Universe Japan wants to appeal to the world with the Japanese women’s magnificence (Miss Universe Japan 2016a).

**Outline**

I start this thesis by introducing previous studies investigating beauty pageants, both in Japan and other parts of the world. Then, I consider the literature on the ideals of Japanese women. Following this, Miss Universe Japan 2015 and the top five participants is presented briefly, and the method – textual analysis – is described. After that, the theories are explained. I use the theory of representation to understand how the participants and the ideal Japanese woman are depicted in the pageants. I also use theories concerning gender, nation, and race to show how notions of gender, nation, and race intersect in the representations of the beauty pageant contestants. Subsequently, the analysis is offered. The analysis first discusses the diverseness of the pageant, then the representation of the top five participants, one by one. I analyze their characteristics, behavior and appearances. Lastly I discuss if global ideals have had an effect on Miss Universe Japan 2015. Finally, I conclude that the top five participants both reproduce and challenge ideals of the Japanese woman, and that Miss Nagasaki won because she was a good global representative.
Literature review

Beauty pageants

Beauty pageants are often seen as a simple form of entertainment, a belief which obscure or disguise their political effects (Stoeltje 1996: 18-19). However, as political events, beauty pageants can also be seen as an example of a practice where women are reduced to symbols of the nation (Banet-Weiser 1999: 7; Mattsson & Pettersson 2007: 237-238), like many feminist scholars claim women often are in nationalist discourses (Germer et al. 2014: 6; Yuval-Davies 1997: 46). At the very least, the contestants can be said to be reduced to symbols for the ideals they are measured against (Stoeltje 1996: 18). Thus, it becomes clear that beauty pageants are more political than they might appear to be at first glance.

Most of the studies of beauty pageants consider these issues of the construction of femininity, nationalism and nation building, race and ethnicity, and/or beauty ideals from several viewpoints. Among the numerous studies there are also themes, such as child beauty pageants (Kelly & Garmon 2016; Wolfe 2012), transgender inclusion (Bialystok 2016), and transvestite pageants (Johnson 1996). Since the present study concerns gender, race, and nation, it is the studies which raise these subjects that will be used in my essay.

One of the most comprehensive studies made on beauty pageants is Sarah Banet-Weiser’s (1999) investigation of national identity in Miss America. She brings up issues of class, the body, race, and nation, including a discussion of the first black Miss America in 1984. She argues that the first black Miss America fit into the discussion of diversity which existed in the US when she won, and therefore did not challenge any discourses about race (ibid: 20, 132).

Not all researchers have found that the pageants reproduce prevalent structures. The anthology Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power (1996), includes several articles about gender, race, and nation in beauty pageants, out of which, some show the contrary. Two studies in the anthology investigate beauty pageants for indigenous people, how those pageants function as a place where ethnicity and politics are discussed (Borland 1996: 76), and where authentic tradition is created (McAllister 1996: 106). Both Katherine Borland (1996: 87), who examines an indigenous beauty pageant in New Nicaragua, and Carlota McAllister (1996: 120), who explores a Mayan beauty pageant in Guatemala, finds that these pageants allow space for the participants to explore and represent their notion of beauty and contest the appropriation of their culture. Similar findings have been made by
Colleen Ballerino Cohen (1996) and Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk (1996). Teilhet-Fisk (1996: 185) investigates how beauty is created by political and cultural meanings in a beauty pageant in the Kingdom of Tonga and discovers that it is a place where the traditional Tongan and Euro-American values around beauty meet and negotiate, resulting in changes to Tongan values (Teilhet-Fisk 1996, 199). Cohen (1996: 125) studies how the representations of the participants in a beauty pageant in the British Virgin Islands both participate in the creation of the national identity and simultaneously problematizes this creation. She goes as far as to argue for the importance of beauty pageants, because they show negotiations of differences among the participants, and consequently the construction of national identity (ibid: 144).

On the other hand, Penny Van Esterik (1996: 216) and Richard Wilk (1996: 231) show how beauty pageants can essentialize beauty and ethnicity. Van Esterik (1996: 203, 216), in her investigation of how international beauty pageants intersect with local gendered beauty practices in Thailand, finds that Thai women probably are more influenced by beauty pageants than feminism, and consequently, that beauty pageants have a strong impact on how Thai women are evaluated and how they evaluate themselves. Wilk (1996: 218, 231), in his study of how differences in femininity in a Belize beauty pageant, claims that beauty pageants take differences, for example, ethnical or biological, essentialize them and make them seem measurable. Both of them stress that global beauty ideals affect local beauty pageants, in terms of who is seen as the best candidate to win (Van Esterik 1996: 210; Wilk 1996: 226-227).

While these studies are some years old, newer studies cover similar issues. For instance, Mattson & Pettersson (2007: 243) demonstrate that Swedish femininity is essentialized in the Miss Sweden pageant, because the participants all look similar to each other. Daniela Carolina Sierra Becerra (2017: 86) shows that a black winner of Miss Colombia did not change any structures in the society or the pageant. Michael Wroblewski (2014: 75) finds that an indigenous Amazonian Kichwa beauty pageant both reproduces and contests gendered Kichwa norms. Juliet Gilbert (2015: 516-517) concludes that, while participants in a Nigerian beauty pageant reproduce a respectable femininity, which supports the patriarchy, the pageant also opens up a space from where women can empower themselves. Aro Velmet (2014: 91) discovered that French beauty pageants 1920-1939 were places where different discourses of femininity, nation, and race were battling. Marcia Ochoa (2014: 5) shows that in Venezuela, cisgender and transgender femininities are created by the same discourses. These discourses are produce by, among other things, beauty pageants. Thus, beauty pageants can both govern
and essentialize norms of gendered nationhood, and challenge and negotiate new meanings of the same.

As shown above, there are many studies of beauty pageants, and they use a wide variety of approaches. However, there are few investigations of beauty pageants in Japan specifically. Jennifer Robertson (2001) studied the first Miss Nippon pageant in 1931. She shows that the purpose of the pageant was to find girls that could both represent the new ideal woman, who looked more Western, and who could produce offspring for the Japanese race’s survival (ibid: 11). Thus, already in the first national pageant in Japan the purpose was to regulate women’s bodies and make them symbols of the state itself (ibid: 18). Next, Jan Bardsley (2008) investigated the media coverage of the first Japanese winner of Miss Universe in 1959. She argues that the winner, Akiko Kojima, became a symbol of the nation, and that by winning she showed that Japan had fully recovered from the Second World War and was again a nation to be reckoned with in international context (ibid: 388). Thus, Kojima, like the participants in the first Miss Nippon before her, became a symbol for the new Japan.

These two studies concern beauty pageants almost 90 and 60 years ago, and presumably, much has changed since then. Therefore, it is interesting to see what a Japanese beauty pageant looks like today, and if Miss Nagasaki, like the winners of national beauty pageants in Japan 1931 and 1959, is a symbol for yet another new Japan. As Stoeltje (1996: 18) claimed, the participants in a beauty pageant become symbols of the ideals they are measured against. In a national beauty pageant, women are measured against the national ideals, and therefore, I must understand the ideals of the Japanese woman in contemporary Japan to recognize which ideals the top five participants are expected to follow.

The ideal Japanese woman

In a discussion of ideals for the Japanese woman, the ideal of “good wife, wise mother” must be mentioned. This ideal sees women as caretakers of the home and the family, and as educators of their children (Koyama 2013: 11, 53). Countless scholars have shown an interest in this ideal and, consequently, the studies concerning “good wife, wise mother” have various approaches. Some historically attempt to narrate how the ideal came to be (Freiner 2012; Koyama 2013), while others describe how it was and is implemented in real life (Holloway 2010; Iwao 1993; Lebra 1984; Tokuhiro 2010), and others still investigate how the ideal have lived on in contemporary Japan (Charlebois 2014; Uno 1993). Since my study concerns ideals
in contemporary Japan, and not the reality of women in Japan or their history, I base my analysis mainly on studies which investigate “good wife, wise mother” in contemporary Japan.

Kathleen S. Uno (1993: 294) investigates whether the ideal “good wife, wise mother” remained in the state and social movements after World War II. She argues that the idea of motherhood has remained almost unchanged while wifehood has become less important (Ibid: 303-304). She is cautiously optimistic about future changes in terms of women having options outside “good wife, wise mother”, even though the ideal is still present in Japan (Ibid: 319-321). Justin Charlebois (2014: 28, 31) studies dominant discourses about gender in interviews with women and finds the two discourses “women as domestic” and “women as caregivers”, which have many similarities with the ideal “good wife, wise mother”. Like Uno, he sees a change in the way his informants view the ideal. The older generation unquestioningly accept the discourses of “women as domestic” and “women as caregivers”, while the younger informants broaden the ideal to also include “women as workers”. However, this does not mean that the old discourses are disappearing completely, simply that new ones are being added to the old, and that women have to negotiate between them (2014: 67).

Aside from the studies explicitly about “good wife, wise mother”, there are a handful studies about representation of gender ideals in Japanese media more generally, which I will also use. Iwona Merklejn (2013: 236, 238) examines how the women in the national volleyball team, who won the Olympics in 1964, are represented in Japan today. According to her study, they are portrayed as hardworking housewives, who are frugal, dedicated to their families, and who do not care much about their appearances (ibid: 243). A similar study done by Michelle H.S. Ho (2014: 179) on the 2011 national women’s soccer team, shows how the team members are represented as not following the ideal “good wife, wise mother” to the same extent as the volleyball players.

Correspondingly to what Charlebois found, Hiroko Hirakawa (2011: 141-142), in a study on an etiquette book for women, makes clear how the book reproduces norms about women as responsible for the home and family, while simultaneously instructing women to dedicate themselves to work. Janet S. Shibamoto-Smith (2011: 179-180) finds changing ideals in advice columns in newspapers. In earlier columns women were supposed to suffer in silence, but today they are advised to take matters in their own hands (ibid: 192).

The ideal Japanese woman has of course not just inner qualities, but she is also mindful of her appearance. Kyō Chō (2012) examines beauty in Chinese and Japanese texts and images.
ranging in age from ancient to modern. She shows how, in earlier times, beauty ideals from China influenced Japan (Ibid: 159), and how Western ideals later came to influence all East Asia (Ibid: 215). Laura Miller (2006: 5) investigates the beauty industry in Japan and discusses how beauty ideals are not just influenced by Western ideals, but also by ideas about different cultures and local ideals (Miller 2006: 37). Ashikari (2003: 10-11; 2005: 75-76) investigates the whiteness ideal among Japanese women and finds that, even though Western ideals have influenced the Japanese whiteness ideal, white skin is a marker of Japaneseness. In studies of beauty ideals in media, like in the studies about “good wife, wise mother”, the findings are conflicting. Fabienne Darling-Wolf (2006: 194) examined one Japanese beauty magazine for young adults and found narrow gender representations. On the other hand, John Clammer’s (1995: 218) investigation of several magazines found more diverse representations, which he claims is partly due to Western influence on beauty ideals.

Returning to white skin as a marker of Japaneseness, some studies show that to be included as a Japanese national subject, not only is it necessary to have white skin, it also is necessary to be ethnically Japanese. For instance, Koichi Iwabuchi (1994: 74-75) examines how, even though Japan is not homogeneous, Japanese nationalism both historically and today, is built upon ethnic belonging. Likewise, Hwaji Shin (2010: 340), in his studies of colonial legacy on immigration policies in Japan, finds that the Japanese homogeneous self-image has led to a division between Japanese people and immigrants, even for those who have lived in Japan a long time.

In conclusion, there are many different, often conflicting, ideals which women in Japan are expected to live up to, and just by looking at Miss Nagasaki it is possible to see that she does not follow all of them. The analysis will show more ideals, which Miss Nagasaki and the other top five participants in Miss Universe Japan challenge and reproduce, but first I will present how the analysis was conducted.
Methodology

Material

The material of this study consists of recordings of the Miss Universe Japan 2015 pageant and interviews with the contestants, which were recorded before the pageant. I have chosen to analyze the representations of the top five participants Miss Nagasaki (Ariana Miyamoto), Miss Oita (Rina Inoko), Miss Chiba (Hikaru Tsuchiya), Miss Aichi (Mao Kaneko) and Miss Tokyo (Tamao Tada), here presented in the order of their placement in the pageant. I chose to analyze the top five participants because, according to earlier studies, the winner should be a symbol of the nation. Therefore, the higher the place, the worthier they are of being a representative of the nation. In other words, they are the participants who are the most plausible to be the closest to the ideal Japanese woman. Since all participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015 are present on stage during the entire show, the other 39 participants will sometimes be used as a group to which the top five participants will be contrasted. I will refer to the participants by the Japanese prefecture they are representing, since this is how they are referred to in the pageant. This study does not analyze the media coverage of the pageant, but I will use examples of it to strengthen some of my arguments.

Miss Universe Japan 2015 consists of four sessions, presented in the same order as in the pageant: the dance, the swimsuit, the dress and the speech session. There is also an announcement ceremony which presents the top four participants. My analysis will include the presentation of the winners and all sessions except the speech session. This is because the audio quality in the speech session is bad and as a non-native Japanese speaker my Japanese ability is not good enough to hear what they are saying with noise in the background. I choose to instead include the interviews of the participants which were recorded before the pageant, to include some part were the participants talk. In total, the recorded material is 43 minutes and 34 seconds.

I watched the recordings of the pageant at the official Miss Universe Japan channel on YouTube the 27th of April 2017. The recordings were never broadcast on national television. This affects who watches the pageant and, in turn, who will be affected by the ideals which are produced and reproduced in the pageant. When uploaded to YouTube only the people who are interested at the video will look at it. However, today even most TV-shows are available online and the number of people watching videos online is steadily increasing (Uricchio 2009: 26-27). Moreover, the clips are available for everyone with a computer to watch, they can be viewed after the pageant has taken place, and they can easily be shared, all of which increases
the number of people who watch them. If Miss Universe Japan 2015 had been broadcast only on TV, the show would probably have had fewer viewers, because the pageant did not get attention until after Miss Nagasaki won.

The materials have up to 27th April 2017 had the following numbers of views:

Table 1. Number of views of the material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Number of views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The dance session (Miss Universe Japan 2015a)</td>
<td>11:28</td>
<td>10 237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The swimsuit session (Miss Universe Japan 2015b)</td>
<td>7:45</td>
<td>142 055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dress session (Miss Universe Japan 2015c)</td>
<td>5:49</td>
<td>1 318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presentation of the winner (Miss Universe Japan 2015e)</td>
<td>9:04</td>
<td>177 976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Miss Nagasaki (Miss Universe Japan 2015h)</td>
<td>1:37</td>
<td>1 586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Miss Oita (Miss Universe Japan 2015i)</td>
<td>1:21</td>
<td>957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Miss Chiba (Miss Universe Japan 2015g)</td>
<td>1:02</td>
<td>172 708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Miss Aichi (Miss Universe Japan 2015f)</td>
<td>1:45</td>
<td>3 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Miss Tokyo (Miss Universe Japan 2015j)</td>
<td>0:43</td>
<td>1 963</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The swimsuit session and the presentation of the winners have considerably more views than the other two sessions. The presentation of the winners has probably many views because it is the first hit on YouTube when searching for “Miss Universe Japan”. Why the swimsuit session has many views is interesting to speculate around, but nothing I will do here. The video of Miss Nagasaki has also had numerous more views than the other participants’ videos, and than the video of the winner of the 2016 pageant, which has had 6 859 views (Miss Universe Japan 2016c). This is yet another indication of how much attention Miss Nagasaki has received.
There also exist recordings of the full pageants in its continuous form. They also include the Mister Japan pageants. These videos of Miss Universe Japan and Mister Japan the last four years, also available on YouTube, have up till 18th of May had the following number of views.

Table 2. Number of views of Miss Universe Japan 2012-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Number of views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015 (Miss Universe Japan 2015d)</td>
<td>1:33:31</td>
<td>490 094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 (Miss Universe Japan 2014d)</td>
<td>1:26:32</td>
<td>132 228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 (Miss Universe Japan 2014f)</td>
<td>1:38:48</td>
<td>7 320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 (Miss Universe Japan 2014e)</td>
<td>1:53:28</td>
<td>9 305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this table, it is possible to see that the whole 2015 pageant drew unusually high attention.

It is not the individuals, Ariana, Rina, Hikaru, Mao and Tamao who are being analyzed in this study, but the representations of them in Miss Universe Japan 2015. By representations I am referring to the depiction of the participants in the pageant, and how the depictions are coded in the cultural and historical context, not how the contestants really think and feel. How representations work will be elaborated on thoroughly in the theory section of this study. Because I study the representations and not the people, there are no ethical dilemmas to consider concerning power relations to the people examined.

Method

To examine the material, I use textual analysis. “Text” here is used in the broad sense and includes images, videos, and more (Hall 2013a: 4). Since the context of the representation is important in a study of representations, my analysis will focus on contexts in three levels: the intratextual, the intertextual and the extratextual. The intratextual level analyzes the videos in themselves (Ganetz 2008: 55), such as what the participants are saying, and how they look and act. This level answers the questions of how the top five participants are represented in Miss Universe Japan 2015 and how the pageant represents the ideal Japanese woman. The intertextual level analyses how Miss Universe Japan is related to its genre (Ibid: 55-56), that is, beauty pageants, other beauty practices, and to some extent popular culture in a broader sense. The extratextual level analyzes the social context around the pageant (Ibid: 56), for example, Japanese politics. The intertextual and extratextual level answer the questions of how the representations of the top five participants in Miss Universe Japan contribute to
challenge and reproduce the image of the ideal Japanese woman and what mechanisms were in action for Miss Nagasaki to win the pageant.

When conducting the analysis, the levels are not examined in order, or analyzed separately, instead they are analyzed by association to the texts. Moreover, since the different levels all affect each other, it is neither possible, nor desirable to separate them. To understand the different levels, I have used earlier studies about beauty pageants and ideals of beauty and womanhood in Japan, which I read before and during I did the textual analysis.

Since a textual analysis consists of interpretations, what I have read and studied will affect how I analyze my material (Dyer 1993: 2). I am a student of Japanese and Gender Studies, thus I have experience in both fields and have a fairly good understanding of the situation for minority women in Japan. However, most of my studies have taken place in Sweden and therefore most of the studies I have read have been based on Western theories, which sometimes might not fit the Japanese context. One example is Michael Billig (1995), who examines nationalism in everyday discourses. He finds that politicians use “we” rhetorically when talking about the nation to create a feeling of belonging. However, in the Japanese language pronouns are not often used (Cipris & Hamano 2002: 13) and thus, I cannot use that part of his theory in my analysis. I have tried to use as many scholars as possible who are from Japan or outside the West to get a broader picture.

Moreover, I am a white Swedish woman who lives and studies in Sweden, a nation which is often presented as being inclusive of minorities and immigrants (cf. Borevi 2014: 719). However, I am aware of that racism in different forms exists in Sweden, and that because Sweden is part of the Western world we also have our share of culpability for colonialism. Thus, I am sincerely not trying make Sweden or the West look better by showing racist and xenophobic structures in Japan, as Mitzi Carter and Aina Hunter (2008: 196) claim often happens in studies about black people in Japan done by Westerners. Instead, I want to deepen our understanding of racist and xenophobic structures generally by studying national ideals in relation to race and gender.
Theories

Representation
To explain what representation are, I quote the cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall. “Representation is the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning” (Hall 2013a: 45). Here “language” is used broadly and includes not only written or spoken language, but also images, facial expressions, clothes, music, and more (ibid: 4). To represent something, thus, is to give an object a meaning through language (ibid: 3). Furthermore, meaning is not created in a vacuum, but in relation to the meanings of other objects and the wider social context (ibid: 4, 29). The meaning of an object is never finally fixed and differs both historically and geographically (ibid: 9). A culture often shares the same meaning of an object, and therefore, by studying representations in a culture we can learn much about that culture (ibid: 8). However, since meaning is never fixed, we cannot find a universal meaning, only the meaning for the specific time and place which we are studying (ibid: 27). In a society, it is the groups with power who decide how people and objects are represented (ibid: 32-33). For example, black skin was not different from white skin until white people gave meaning to the black bodies.

Moreover, oppressed groups are often represented in a stereotypical manner. Stereotypical representations temporarily stabilize meaning of objects and people (Hall 2013b: 259). This is done by reducing the representation of a group of people to a few characteristics which are simplified and exaggerated. This leads to an essentialized image of differences among groups. The meaning of the group is temporarily fixed. Furthermore, included in the act of stereotyping is the division between normal and non-normal, where what is seen as normal is decided by the views of the groups with most power (ibid: 247-248). Since meaning is not fixed, these stereotyped representations are going to change over time (ibid: 259). However, what looks like a change of meaning is not always only that. Today more black people than before are visible in media, but according to Hall (2013b: 269), new images of black people do not always erase old stereotypes, they just add more images, which means that negative representations of black people are still prevalent. To actually change the meaning, the representations need to also actively challenge the stereotypes.

In this study, I will examine how the top five contestants are represented in Miss Universe Japan 2015. In other words, I will study what meaning the Japanese culture ascribes to their appearance, words and behaviors in the videos, and also how meanings in other cultures affect
the representations. This will make visible norms, and challenges to norms, in representations of femininity, nation, and race in contemporary Japan. In the following sections I will present the theories about gender, nation, and race, which I will use to understand how the representations of the top five participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015 are constructed.

**Performative gender**
As shown by studies on women and femininity in Japan, there are different ways of being a woman in Japan, some more desirable than others. However, while there are norms which govern how Japanese women ought to do femininity, there are no true ways of doing femininity. Judith Butler (2007: 77-78) argues instead, that gender is performative. It is something we do continuously with our behavior, speech, clothes and more, and these continuous acts makes gender seem natural. Hence, our actions are not biologically decided by our sex, but our acts decide what sex and gender we are prescribed. Further, Butler (2007: 58) claims that our bodies are not marked by sex before we are given genders and thus, that sex also is performative. The performative feminine and masculine bodies and behaviors are maintained by the heterosexual matrix. The concept of the heterosexual matrix assumes that the human desire comes from the reproductive organs. Therefore, the woman with her vagina and the man with his penis become two opposites which must desire each other, and since we see the body as something natural, heterosexuality also becomes natural (ibid: 133-134). In this, the heterosexual matrix creates and recreates the ideas of two genders and sexes as two stable binaries, which are each other’s opposites, and which must desire each other (ibid: 74-75).

In Japan, the feminine and masculine ideals follow the heterosexual matrix strongly. Charlebois (2014: 22) describes the ideal Japanese masculinity as hegemonic, and the ideal femininity as emphasized. Hegemonic masculinity is the masculinity which legitimizes hierarchies between women and men in a certain society (ibid: 21). In Japan, this is a masculinity which dictates that men should be breadwinners and women caretakers. The women in this situation therefore become dependent on the men for their economic survival (ibid: 22). The emphasized femininity is practiced in harmony with hegemonic masculinity and often does not feel like subordination (ibid: 14). Many early studies of women in Japan assert that women are not subordinate because they have domestic power (Iwao 1993: 3-4; Lebra 1984: 133-137). However, Charlebois (2014: 14) claims that this is not true, showing
that men have the last word in big decisions even at home, on top of having the important economic power.

The heterosexual matrix is also defining features of beauty pageants, where women are judged on their ability to do femininity in the way that the heterosexual matrix dictates. For example, when writing about the first Japanese beauty pageant Robertson (2001: 11) claims that the contestants were displayed as future good wives and wise mothers, which was how women should be represented to submit to the heterosexual matrix.

I use these theories of performative gender as a cornerstone for how the construction of gender works, and to understand that there are various ways of doing gender, out of which some are coded as more correct than others, all depending on the context. I will not explicitly examine how the top five participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015 do gender, but instead how they do gender in relation to the national ideals, because as I will explain next, gender is one category which is affected by national norms.

**Nation and nationalism**

According to Cynthia Enloe (2014: 94-95), who applies feminist theories to international politics, a nation is based on the idea that a group of people share a common past, and thus, are destined to a common future. Nationalism promotes these ideas in order to keep the nation intact. Michael Billig (1995: 5-6), claims that the term nationalism has been mostly applied to groups who want to establish their own nation, or for right-wing extremist. This concept of nationalism, he writes, misses the fact that established nations also perform small, often unnoticed, actions every day to keep the notion of their nations intact. Billig (1995: 6) believes that we should distinguish between the more extreme kind of nationalism and the everyday-kind of nationalism, and he suggests that the latter should be called “banal nationalism”.

Billig (1995:93-94) gives newspapers as one example of where banal nationalism is present, and I argue that banal nationalism is present in national beauty pageants as well. Many scholars who study beauty pageants have pointed out the nationalistic elements in the pageants. For example, McAllister (1996, 123) claims that, while pageants in no way compare to "marching in a civil defense patrol", they are still a medium for producing and re-producing images of the nation, and Ochoa (2014: 30) posits that “beauty pageants creates nationhood as
much as other, more sober practices, such as reading newspaper”. Thus, there is no doubt that beauty pageants can include elements of banal nationalism.

To imagine our nation as a “we”, we also must imagine a “they”. A they, who are not like us, and who do not belong to our community (Billig 1995: 78-79). In other words, we must imagine a group which we can create our group in contrast to (Creighton 1995: 136; Hall 2013b: 228, Yuval-Davis 1997: 46-49). This can be foreigners, but it can also be other ethnic groups inside the nation. Japan has a strong group identification built on ethnic grounds, which excludes both minorities and immigrants (Iwabuchi 1994: 74-75; Shin 2010: 340).

In nationalism, there are not only ethnic or racial ideas of who belongs to the group, but also gendered images of how a man and a woman of the nation should act and look (Yuval-Davis 1997: 67). Women and femininity in a nation, more often than men, become symbols of the nation and bearers of tradition and honor, while men often are seen as the creators and upholders of the nation. As symbols of the nation women are required to, for instance, discipline their sexual behavior to be respectable and frugal, in order to not shame the nation (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1989: 10; Yuval-Davis 1997: 45-56). Because women are symbols of the nation, values relating to women in a nation are closely connected to the image of the nation as a whole, which makes the image of women in the nation interesting to study. I will examine the gendered norms for women in Japan, and study how they are used in Miss Universe Japan 2015 to show and reproduce Japanese values.

The gendered norms in a nation are not only created based on the values of a nation. As shown, nations and their citizens are always also contrasting themselves to other nations. The increased media exchange between nations has led to increased exchange of ideals in the world. When different ideals meet, global ideals are created. These global ideals have impact on all nations in the world (Thompson 2001: 202-205). One of these global ideals is whiteness.

**Whiteness**

One of the first to write about whiteness as a norm was Frantz Fanon (2008), in *Black Skin, White Masks* 1952. Although he discusses mostly “the black man”, whiteness is present in almost all racial relations (Bonnett 2002: 100), and therefore Fanon also deals with whiteness. Fanon (2008: 73) explains how white people, when they colonized the world, changed the way humanity was defined. From that moment humanity become white, and therefore, black people can never become humans, no matter how hard they try (Ibid: 178). Furthermore,
Fanon (2008: 113-114) shows how white people have spread their culture, wherein white people are described as good and black people as bad, to the colonized nations. Consequently, non-white children are exposed to this culture from their early years and learn to see themselves as inferior. Today, the effects of whiteness as prevailing norm are studied by Critical Whiteness Studies and Postcolonial Whiteness Studies.

Between Fanon and Critical Whiteness Studies and Postcolonial Whiteness Studies there were numerous years of Postcolonial Studies which focused on the colonized subject (López 2005: 24). What both Critical Whiteness Studies and Postcolonial Whiteness Studies want to do is to shift the focus away from the colonized to the colonizer and make the construction of whiteness, which allows white domination, visible (Levine-Rasky 2002: 2; López 2005: 24).

The difference between the studies is, according to Alfred J. López (2005: 5), that Critical Whiteness Studies mostly focuses on the US and sometimes Europe, while Postcolonial Whiteness Studies focuses on other parts of the world, mainly former colonized nations. These examinations of the whiteness ideal in different contexts is necessary because global ideals do not affect all nations in the same way (Thompson 2001: 215). I add a third group of theories of whiteness – the Japanese Whiteness Studies - in this study, because the context of this study is Japan. When I investigate the whiteness ideal in Japan I use these theories about whiteness developed in Japan, and when I investigate Western whiteness I use theories from Critical Whiteness Studies.

As Fanon claimed in 1952, and as scholars of Postcolonial Whiteness Studies claim now, assimilation into the white culture and aesthetic whiteness has become a necessary precondition for black people to advance socially and economically. This is because whiteness is a strong norm (López 2005: 17-18). The concept of whiteness does not just describe people who happen to have a certain skin color, rather it is an identity which empowered groups adopt, and which includes establishing economic and cultural hegemony over other groups on racial grounds (Levine-Rasky 2002: 4-5; López 2005: 17). However, Richard Dyer (1997: 25-26), a Critical Whiteness scholar, argues that race is also a bodily concept, thus that race also is always about bodies. He shows how whiteness as an aesthetic ideal is not only about skin, it is also about the shape of the nose, eyes and lips, the color and setting of the hair, the body shape, and more. For example, East Asian people are called yellow even though their skin tone is almost the same as Caucasians’, only their eyes are different, and Jewish people are sometimes seen as non-white people because of their noses (Ibid: 42). Similarly, many scholars have found that people with lighter black complexions
can be included in the whiteness ideal as long as the other ideals, which Dyer writes about, are followed (Banet-Weiser 1999: 130; Hall 2013b: 260).

To be white, both outside and inside, is an ideal which, according to theories of Postcolonial Whiteness Studies, has spread all over the world because of colonization. However, scholars in Japanese Studies do not always agree with this explanation. For example, Laura Miller argues that the whiteness ideal in Japan is not only a Western influence but that the ideal of white skin has existed in Japan for a long time (Miller 2006: 37). Mikiko Ashikari (2003: 11), is more nuanced and argues instead that the Japanese whiteness ideal and the Western whiteness are somewhat different, and that the Japanese whiteness only remains in traditional Japanese practices. However, she also posits that Japanese people see themselves as possessing white skin, but of a different quality than Westerners and therefore today Japanese white skin is a marker of Japaneseness (Ashikari 2005: 80-82). Alistair Bonnett (2002: 97-99) studies not only white complexion, but the whole whiteness ideal, and he claims that Japan was at first very eager to follow the Western whiteness ideal. This was to be part of the modern world. However, they also have created their own notion of whiteness wherein the Japanese whiteness is superior to that of the Western. Bonnett (2002: 99) asks if it is possible that whiteness has become detached from its European background, but he concludes that this is impossible because the symbols of whiteness, such as modernity, civilization and progress, are too strongly connected to Europe. Hence, according to Ashikari, Bonett, and Miller, Japan’s own notion of whiteness have been intertwined with the Western whiteness ideal, and created a new Japanese whiteness ideal which is somewhat similar but also somewhat different from the global ideal. For instance, white complexion appears to be more important in Japan than in the global whiteness ideal.

In the analysis, I will use these theories of performative femininity, nationalism, and whiteness as a filter through which to look at the Miss Universe Japan 2015 pageant and see how the representations of the top five contestants are formed by norms of gender and race in Japan and globally.
Analysis

The homogeneous and diverse beauty pageant

Music on, lights on, then a mass of long, white legs, black hair, and red, white, and black outfits in minimal size spill out in on the stage. I get nervous. What have I gotten myself into? How will I ever find the top five participants in this mass of women? However, I find Miss Nagasaki instantly. I cannot tell if it is because of her darker skin, her red top (few of the contestants have chosen to wear red), or that I have seen her many times before. After some time studying the show, I can at least say that it is not her darker complexion which makes it easier to see her, because in this session, the dance session, her skin does not look remarkably darker than the other contestants. Dyer (1997: 90) has examined lightings and makeup in American movies, and he argues that lights and makeup are used to make the actors look closer to the white norm. I would say that, although it most certainly is not the purpose, it is the lights, or rather absence of light, in the dance session which makes Miss Nagasaki’s skin look more similar to the other contestants’ whiter skin. In other sessions, the difference is more visible.

Banet-Weiser (1999: 78) writes that the swimsuit session is the session which depicts the Miss America pageant at its most homogeneous, but in Miss Universe Japan 2015, it is instead in the dance session the contestants appear the most alike. According to Banet-Weiser, in Miss America’s swimsuit session, the participants are only displayed for a short while, and only one at a time, and therefore, the audience do not have time to place the contestants in groups based on racial belonging. It is also harder to measure complexion when the contestants are not displayed next to each other. In the swimsuit session of Miss Universe Japan 2015, on the other hand, the contestants are displayed for approximately 30 seconds, which is enough time to group the contestants according to skin color. Moreover, the contestants who did not make it to the top 16 (only the top 16 are presented in the swimsuit session) are standing in the background in bikinis during the entire session. Therefore, the complexion of participants who are walking on the catwalk can be contrasted to their complexion, which makes it even easier to measure the complexion of the contestants.

Different beauty pageants have different purposes and therefore display different beauty ideals. Participants become symbols for the pageants and its ideal (Stoeltje 1996: 18), and consequently, contestants are represented differently depending on the pageant. In a national beauty pageant, respectability is always important, because the participants become symbols of the nation and bearers of its honor (Mattsson & Pettersson 2008: 238). However, in for
example the first Miss Nippon in 1931, the contestants were supposed to be role models for women who could maintain and improve the Japanese race (Robertson 2001: 11). I have not found this purpose in Miss Universe Japan 2015. Miss Universe Japan has, for example, no talent session as Miss America has. Miss Universe Japan 2015 surely does want to show a respectable femininity, but most importantly, it wants to show the most beautiful woman in the country. Banet-Weiser (1999: 44) narrates how the Miss Universe pageant was established as a response against Miss America’s self-constructed prudishness, and, at least in the beginning, the Miss Universe pageant did not construct itself as anything else than a beauty contest. This was in contrast to the Miss America pageant, which claimed to also judge the participants’ talents and other inner qualities. If the purpose of Miss Universe Japan differs from that of Banet-Weiser’s Miss America, this would explain why the contestants are on stage for a longer time in the swimsuit session in Miss Universe Japan 2015 than in Miss America.

In Miss Universe Japan 2015, it is in the swimsuit session which the contestants’ difference in complexions become the most visible. In the dance session, there is no time to look at the participants’ skin, since they are moving all the time, and the dark light blurs the differences between them. In the swimsuit session, on the other hand, the contestants are relatively static, and thus, all their different shades of whiteness become visible, from Miss Nagasaki’s darkest complexion, to Miss Aichi’s fairest. What in the dance session looked like a homogeneous group of light skinned, black haired, thin, tall, Japanese women, are in the swimsuit session revealed to be slightly more diverse. Especially since Miss Nagasaki’s blackness is more visible.

Yuval-Davies (1997: 67) argues that there are gendered norms for how men and women in the nation should behave and look. From earlier studies, I have found that ideally, a Japanese woman in contemporary Japan is a middle-class woman who wants to have a family, wherein she takes care of the domestic and her husband is the breadwinner (Ashikari 2003: 5, 7; Charlebois 2014: 22; Merklejn 2013: 244-245). She loves to take care of others (Hirakawa 2011: 147; Shibamoto-Smith 2011: 192-193). She is allowed to have a job, even one which she is passionate about, but she should not expect her husband to help her at home or with the children (Charlebois 2014: 71; Hirakawa 2011: 141-142). While she is respectful, gentle, and submissive (Hirakawa 2011: 148; Itakura 2014: 457), she does not have to suffer in silence and she is expected to take her problems in her own hands (Shibamoto-Smith 2011: 192). She also thinks of her appearance (Miller 2006: 27), but does not draw too much attention to it
Her skin is white, and always covered by foundation, her eyes are big, almond shaped, and have double eyelids, her nose is straight, and her face oval. Moreover, the hair on her head is black, long, and straight, the hair on the long white legs is nonexistent, and the body is thin, clean, and dressed in sophisticated clothes (Ashikari 2003: 8; Ashikari 2005: 89; Chō 2102; Clammer 1995: 205, 212-213; Darling Wolf 2006: 190-191; Miller 2006). She also has to think of having sex appeal, but, at the same time she should not present herself as too sexy (Chō 2012: 248-249; Darling-Wolf 2006: 191-192; Merklejn 2013: 242).

While the diverseness represented in the swimsuit session most of the time follows these norms of ideal Japanese femininity, Miss Nagasaki’s complexion is conspicuous. However, as we have seen, the ideal Japanese woman is not only supposed to have white skin, there are also other norms she should live up to. In the following sections, I will examine the individual representations of the top five participants to see which Japanese gendered norms they reproduce and which they challenge.

**Miss Aichi**

Miss Aichi is the one of the top five participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015 who conforms the most to the ideals of the Japanese woman. Firstly, her inner characteristics conform to emphasized femininity, which Charlebois (2014: 22) shows is the ideal femininity in Japan, and she also appears to identify strongly with being Japanese. For instance, one inner quality she chooses to highlight, and which is part of the emphasized femininity, is that she wants to help other people and make life easier for them. “Ato, nani yori mo, hito no yaku ni tatchitai, hito no tame ni naritai, to iu omi da to omotte imasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015f) (Moreover, more than anything I want to be of use to other people, I want to exist for other people.) Helping others is a very feminine characteristic which is highly valued, especially in Japan, because it conforms to the emphasized femininity. Charlebois (2014: 32) found that a discourse about women as natural caregivers was strong among his informants. I read this discourse as being a wise mother, because a large part of caregiving is taking care of children. It can also be included in being a good wife, since, according to Lebra (1984: 131-132), being a wife in Japan, at least traditionally, includes taking care of one’s husband. Helping others is part of the emphasized femininity since it indirectly enables the hegemonic masculinity of the man as the breadwinner (Charlebois 2014: 22). In this type of relationship, a caregiver who can take care of other parts of men’s lives is needed. The woman provides this practical care because she is financially cared for by the man. By expressing that she wants to exist to help
others, Miss Aichi implicitly says that she wants to follow the traditional Japanese feminine ideal of emphasized femininity and be a good wife and a wise mother.

In terms of identifying with being Japanese, Miss Aichi is noticeably nationalistic. She proclaims that what she wants to do, if she becomes the winner of Miss Universe, is to show the kindheartedness of the Japanese people. “Watashi wa, nihonjin no motsu, omiyari no kokoro no subarashisa o, sekai ni, hasshin shite ikitai to omoimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015f). (I want to show the splendor of the Japanese people’s kind heart to the world). This might not seem especially nationalistic, because it does not say that other nationalities are not kindhearted, and it is not a threat to other nations. However, as Billig (1995: 6) shows, nationalism is not always openly hostile to other nations. Nationalism can be banal and part of our everyday life. Saying that one’s nation’s people are kindhearted is one type of banal nationalism. Miss Aichi is still saying that the Japanese people are one group united by a common characteristic, which Billig (1995: 87) shows is one type of nationalism. Most obviously nationalistic is that she says something good about her nation and that she wants to show it to the rest of the world. From the point of view of nationalism then, Miss Aichi is a perfect representative of the Japanese woman and Japan. She does not only take it on herself to be a bearer of Japanese traditions (or, in this case, it is Japanese characteristics which she bears), she also praises the nation and spreads the values of Japan to other nations.

Miss Aichi claims that she has a characteristic, which, as we will see Miss Chiba, Miss Oita, and Miss Tokyo also claim that they possess, and which is not necessarily an ideal for only women in Japan, but applies for all Japanese people. That characteristic is to never give up and to always do one’s best. In Japan, there is a word called “gambari”, which is used to encourage someone to work hard to achieve their goal, or to say to others that one will work hard and not let them down (Davies & Ikeno 2002: 84). Many scholars claim that there is no equivalent of “gambari” in any other language (ibid: 85). While this could be discussed, it is widely considered as immature in Japan not to try one’s hardest at everything (ibid: 86). Miss Aichi displays this characteristic by saying the following: “Watashi wa nanigoto ni mo isshokenmei ni, majime ni, torikumu shisei o motte iru koto” (Miss Universe Japan 2015f). (Whatever obstacle, I will, with all my power, diligently tackle it.) It is almost as if Miss Aichi has read the definition of “gambari” in a dictionary and memorized it. Accordingly, this is another of Miss Aichi’s characteristics which conforms, not specifically to the ideal of the Japanese woman, but to a general Japaneseness.
Miss Aichi’s appearance unambiguously follows all the traits of the ideal Japanese woman. She is tall, tallest among the top five, and therefore also has long legs, is very thin (she has approximately the same body measures as the others even though she is taller), has an oval face, straight nose, big eyes with double eyelids, long black hair and the whitest skin of the top five contestants. While there often are different nuances of whiteness which are popular in different periods and it is not always the whitest skin which is the most popular (Ashikari 2003: 13), it is fair to say that in Japan fair skin is viewed favorably and darker skin is viewed less favorably (Ashikari 2003: 5). Therefore, Miss Aichi’s extremely fair skin, is always, at least to some degree, desired and admired among Japanese women.

According to Clammer (1995: 212-213), Japanese middle-class women are often represented wearing sophisticated clothes, and Miss Aichi effectively follows this ideal. In the dance session, she shows neither cleavage nor stomach, in the dress session she does not have any see-through parts of her dress, as some of the others have, and she does not wear jewelry. In the interview, she is wearing simple, black clothes and her only accessory is one big simple earring, which, due to being simple, looks classier than some of the other participants’ big and glitzy jewelry does. The only session where Miss Aichi is not the most sophisticated out of the top five, is the swimsuit session.

In the swimsuit session, she wears one of the smallest bikinis and when she stands in the front of the catwalk, she pulls her hand over her hair, a move which enhances her sex appeal. This challenges the ideal femininity in Japan. Darling-Wolf (2006: 191-192) explains that in a Japanese fashion magazine she has studied, the models were represented as innocent and childish, however, they were not for that reason desexualized. The models themselves do not need to show their sex appeal with sexy poses, it is enough for them to have feminine bodies to show that they are women. In Miss Universe Japan, Miss Aichi is already showing off her perfect feminine body in a bikini, she does not need to enhance her sex appeal by also posing sexy for her to show that she knows how to attract men. This is, however, the only thing she does in the pageant which does not seem innocent. Looking at the way she poses alluringly, I am reminded of Banet-Weiser’s (1999: 82-85) study of the Miss America pageant. She shows that black participants in Miss America must follow the norms more carefully than white participants to even be allowed in the pageant, because they are already challenging one norm. Miss Aichi is white, and follows, as shown, most norms for Japanese femininity, therefore she can afford to deviate in this one way still be chosen as the top five.
Miss Aichi also possess one personal trait which are slightly less Japanese. She is straightforward. "Watashi wa yoku, Mao-chan no sunao de, massuguna tokoro ga ii ne to iwaremasu" (Miss Universe Japan 2015f). (People often tell me that my gentleness and straightforwardness are my good sides.) The Japanese language is in itself not very straightforward, and there are many rules for how to talk about oneself and others to not seem impolite (Davies & Ikeno 2002: 146-147). Nevertheless, although straightforwardness is not typically Japanese, people have told her that it is a good side, and Miss Aichi also thinks it will help her win the competition. The fact that she reached the top five supports her supposition. Moreover, Miss Aichi appears to have mastered the ability of being both straightforward and gentle at the same time, two seeming contradictory characteristics. Not only does she say it herself, but her way of expressing her good sides shows this. She does not directly state her strength, rather she quotes other people. Since modesty and gentleness is desirable in Japan, Davies & Ikeno (2002: 143) explains that Japanese people must learn how to express their good sides in appropriate ways. To do as Miss Aichi does here, and say that other people have complemented her character, is one appropriate and gentle, way of bragging in Japan.

Whether Miss Aichi’s length is ideal Japanese is debatable and will be elaborated further in the section about Miss Chiba, but at least it makes Miss Aichi to an ideal participant in a beauty pageant. This because global ideals have impact on local beauty pageants. Nevertheless, staying with Japanese gendered ideals, aside from some few deviations, Miss Aichi conforms to many of the ideals of a Japanese woman, and most importantly the one of Japanese white skin, which makes her to a certainly good representative of Japan.

**Miss Nagasaki**

In contrast to Miss Aichi, Miss Nagasaki is the top five contestant who is furthest away from the ideal of the Japanese woman, both in terms of character and appearance. In her interview, she says that she cannot choose between being Japanese and American. “Sō desu ne, motomoto watashi wa hāfu to iu koto de, Nagasaki taikai ni shitsuyou shitan desu keredomo, naishin, watashi wa shōjiki hāfu na no de, erberarenai na te omoi nagara mo, kō chōsen shite mitan desu yo ne” (Miss Universe Japan 2015h). (Hmm, in my heart I am mixed-race Japanese, and I said this also in the Nagasaki pageant, but honestly, I am mixed-race and therefore, even when I try to choose, I cannot.) To stress that she is mixed-race Japanese can at first appear, if not strange, at least unstrategical in a competition where one are supposed to
represent one’s nation and stress one’s nationalistic belonging. Banet-Weiser (1999: 106) says, regarding Miss America, that the contestants are more than welcome to show their multicultural side, as long as they also represent themselves as first and foremost American. This is not what Miss Nagasaki is doing when she says that she is as much American as she is Japanese. On the other hand, by saying that she is mixed-race Japanese, she is also saying that she is Japanese, and she cannot take away that from her either.

Miss Nagasaki not wanting to make her American side less visible is remarkably controversial in Japan, where individuals with non-Japanese heritage who have the option to hide their heritage often do (Murphy-Shigematsu 2008, 299). This happens because the absence of anti-discrimination laws in Japan has led to much discrimination of minorities (Creighton 1997: 227; Iwabuchi 1994: 73; Shin 2010: 337-339). In the case of Miss Nagasaki, she cannot hide that she is mixed-race Japanese, however, she could downplay her American sides. Instead she plays on being mixed-race.

She says that the message she wants to spread if she becomes Miss Universe is that race does not matter. “Moshi, watashi wa sekai ichi ni nattara, kō yatte hāfu toka, jinshu nano, kankei naku, ironna hito ni yūki to jishin o aterareru yōna, sutekina josei ni naitai na, to omotte orimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015h). (If I become number one in the world, I want to be a great woman who shows that things like mixed-race and race does not matter. A woman who encourages and strengthens self-confidence among different people.) Here, she elegantly pulls off criticizing the ground that the Japanese, and many other nations are built upon – that race does matter and is what makes a nation into a nation (Anthias & Yuval-Davies 1989: 3) – while simultaneously representing herself as a woman who wants to help people overcome their troubles, which takes her back to being a good representative of Japan.

Banet-Weiser (1999: 43) finds that having an issue platform, something the participant want to change and work for, is important in Miss America, and Gilbert (2015: 505) similarly explains that the Nigerian beauty pageant, Carnival Calabar Queen, was founded with the sole purpose of doing charity work. Have we not all heard the typical stereotype of the beauty pageant contestant who wants peace on earth? The reason for this is that the pageants are creating role models for how women in the nation should be, and the nation needs women who selflessly help others in order to keep the nation together (Banet-Weiser 1999: 103; Gilbert 2015: 504-505). By displaying her self-sacrificial side, Miss Nagasaki is forgiven for criticizing the nation in her interview because she shows that she is a good role model. A role model who will represent Japan as a nation where good, inclusive people live. Thus, in the
same sentence she manages to challenge the ideal Japanese femininity, reproduce global norms of femininity in a Japanese context, and represent Japanese people as good.

Additionally, I would say that Miss Nagasaki’s way of helping others, although in tune with the global norms for a beauty pageant, is a bit different from the traditional Japanese notion of women as caregivers. We can look at Miss Nagasaki’s exclamation that she wants to show the world that race does not matter, and Miss Aichi’s claim that she wants to exist to make life easier for other people, as examples. Miss Nagasaki here wants to help others help themselves, which is more about motivating others to action than helping them directly. Miss Aichi, instead, wants to help others hands on, which is closer to the Japanese ideal femininity.

On top of showing characteristics that are not following the ideal femininity in Japan, Miss Nagasaki also sexualizes herself in the pageant. In the swimsuit session, when Miss Nagasaki stands at the front of the catwalk, she moves her hips to the side and places her hand on her lower hip, almost on the bottom, a movement which connotes sexuality. She also waves to the audience when walking on the catwalk. The swimsuit session is the most disputed part of a beauty pageant because the participants should represent the ideal woman of a nation, which includes respectability (Mattsson & Pettersson 2008: 238). However, Banet-Weiser (1999: 77) argues that it is also an important session. This because it is the session which, after all talk about inner beauty and intelligence which de-feminizes the participants, feminize them again by showing that they have a feminine body.

The swimsuit session represents the participants in such way that they do not become reachable sex-objects. The contestants are in this session not talking, and are not supposed to interact with the audience, so that their inner characteristics are separated from their bodies. Hence, in the swimsuit session, it is only the bodies of the contestants which are displayed. This reduces the sexual tension and enhances the feeling of objectively watching a body rather than a person to which it is possible to feel sexual attraction (ibid: 80). When Miss Nagasaki interacts with the audience by waiving, she becomes a person who can be desired, not just an abstract body, and already this interrupts the respectability. By also doing a sexy pose, Miss Nagasaki illustrates that she is aware of her sexuality and able to act on it, and this makes her even more reachable to the audience. More reachable, and less respectable than the other participants. Since Miss Nagasaki is black, and already beforehand seen as unrespectable (Benet-Weiser 1999: 130), her sexualization of herself becomes a larger challenge to the norm of being respectable than Miss Aichi’s sexualization of herself.
Miss Nagasaki does not only show resistance to Japanese ideal characteristics, she also does not talk about qualities of Japan she wants to show to the rest of the world. She declares that it is important for a winner in Miss Universe to be able to communicate the good things about her nation, but she never mentions what is good about Japan. Thus, Miss Nagasaki does not, unlike Miss Aichi, show that she identifies strongly with Japan and therefore, is not as good a representative and symbol for the nation’s values as Miss Aichi is.

In terms of Miss Nagasaki’s appearance, her skin is the darkest among all participants in the pageant, and as we have seen, Japan has a strong whiteness norm, which is intertwined with the racial norm of only including ethnic Japanese people as members of the nation. Therefore, her complexion is her largest problem. Moreover, Miss Nagasaki has long fake nails. In beauty contests the outer beauty is seen as a reflection of inner beauty. Thus, to maintain the illusion of natural beauty the bodies of the beauty contestants should not look as disciplined as they really are (Banet-Weiser 1999: 72). Miss Nagasaki’s long nails are breaking this illusion because they do not look natural. Furthermore, it is especially important for lower class and non-white women to look naturally beautiful, since they are often stereotyped as overdoing femininity with too much make up or clothes that are too tight (ibid: 82). I include the long fake nails in this overdone femininity.

Some of Miss Nagasaki’s other features are ambivalent in terms of following gendered norms of the nation. Miss Nagasaki’s mouth is relatively big, which was seen as unattractive in Japan in earlier times, but Chō (2012: 249) argues that because of Western influence, big mouths are not seen as unattractive anymore, as long as they are not overly big, which Miss Nagasaki’s is not. Miss Nagasaki herself even mentions her smile as an asset. Neither does she have the “extreme thinness” which Miller (2006: 161) argues is trendy in Japan, and the other top five have. Lastly, Miss Nagasaki’s hair is straight, but put up in a ponytail, which makes the hairline visible. The hairline hints that Miss Nagasaki’s hair could be naturally curly. I know from pictures of Miss Nagasaki from when she was younger that she has afro hair. However, she always straightens her hair in official contexts, therefore, how her hair is coded depends on how closely one looks.

On the other hand, Miss Nagasaki’s other facial and bodily features follow the Japanese ideals. Her eyes are almond shaped with double eyelids, her nose is small and straight, her face oval, she is tall, has long hairless legs, and her clothes are perfect for the occasion.
Gilbert (2014: 511) explains that, to be successful in a beauty pageant, the clothes should show the body but not be too tight. This is an almost perfect description of Miss Nagasaki’s clothes. She wears neutral clothes which do not show anything that should not be visible, but they do not hide too much either. For example, her evening dress follows her body quite closely, but it is not see-through, except on her shoulders and a part of her back, and it is not too tight. It looks as it was made especially for her. This also goes hand in hand with the earlier mentioned ideal of the Japanese woman as wearing sophisticated clothes.

In summary, Miss Nagasaki is the participant out of the top five who challenges the ideal Japanese femininity the most, but she also conforms to some ideals. Interestingly enough, while it is Miss Nagasaki’s appearance which has gotten the most public critique, her appearance conforms more to the Japanese ideal woman’s than her inner characteristics do.

**Miss Tokyo**

When comparing Miss Aichi and Miss Nagasaki to each other, Miss Aichi’s few deviations from the norms become almost invisible, and Miss Nagasaki becomes an anomaly. However, compared to Miss Tokyo, Miss Nagasaki does not seem to deviate as much, since Miss Tokyo also resist many of the ideals of the Japanese woman. Firstly, Miss Tokyo is studying at an advanced level at a very famous university in Japan. The subject she studies is poverty in undeveloped nations and she says that she wants to erase poverty. “Sōshite sekaijū no hitobito o makikonde, sekai kara hinkon mondai kakete shitai to omoimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015j). (Then, I want to involve all the people in the world to erase the problem of poverty.) This can be coded as feminine, because it is to help others, and as mentioned above, having an issue to work for is an important part of many beauty pageants. Nevertheless, most beauty pageant contestants do not study at a university to work with the issue. Rather, they start non-profit organizations, or help already existing organizations, as in the case of the Nigerian beauty pageant Carnival Calabar Queen (Gilbert 2015: 505). Thus, Miss Tokyo is taking it one step further, and at the same time one step further away from Japanese femininity.

To study at the university as a woman is not remarkably unusual in contemporary Japan, neither is having a job. Both studies on recent etiquette books (Hirakawa 2011: 141-142) and interview studies with Japanese women (Charlebois 2014: 106) show that the ideals are slowly coming to allow women to work. However, the old ideal of women as caregivers is still prevalent. If women want to work, they can, but they should also take care of the home.
and children, and this can be extremely stressful. Therefore, it is still common in Japan that women quit their jobs when they get married, or when they have children (Tokuhiro 2010: 81). To study at an advanced level, as Miss Tokyo does, most often means that one are deeply engaged in the subject, and want to work with something related to it even after having children. Therefore, to study at advanced level and aim at continuing to work after having children still challenges the ideals for the Japanese woman, even though the subject Miss Tokyo is studying is coded as feminine. Maybe not as challenging as saying that one does not want to have children, but it is still hard for Japanese women to continue to work after having children.

Miss Tokyo also says that one of her strong points is that she can present her opinions to others, which could be equated to Miss Aichi’s straightforwardness. “…[I]ken o shikari to omotte yori sore o hasshin suru chikara o motte iru koto” (Miss Universe Japan 2015j).

 “…[R]ather than only having an opinion, I have the strength to present it to others.) As shown above, being straightforward and presenting one’s opinion is not a Japanese characteristic. At least if one do not do it in the correct way. Still, as we saw earlier, straightforwardness was seen as a strength by people meeting Miss Aichi. Whether this is because Miss Aichi is straightforward in a good way, or because this ideal is also changing, I have not found any studies about. Since the studies I have found represent straightforwardness as a challenge to Japanese norms, I interpret it as such.

Another strong side Miss Tokyo claims that she has, is that she knows how to maximize her charm. “Sōshite, jibun no miryoku o saidaigen ni ikidasu hôhô o shitte iru koto da to omimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015j). (Then, I know how to maximize my charm.) This is also rather straightforward, and therefore, again not at all following the humble Japanese style of how one should talk about oneself, which Miss Aichi manages to a higher degree.

Like Miss Nagasaki, Miss Tokyo also does not talk about Japan or what it means to be Japanese, and she presents few characteristics which are considered Japanese. Saving the world is an ideal which can be coded as feminine in Japan, but the same has been shown for other nations also. She also talks about her good sides in a rather un-Japanese way. The only thing she says that can be coded as truly Japanese is that she has the “gambari” spirit. “…[N]anigoto mo egao de doryoku suru shite o mita to omimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015j). (…[W]hatever obstacle, I try to meet it smiling, and with my full strength.”) Thus, in character, Miss Tokyo challenges many ideals of the Japanese woman, but not all of them.
Miss Tokyo’s appearance is extremely similar to those of Miss Aichi, Miss Oita and Miss Chiba, with her white skin, tallness, thinness, big eyes with double eyelids and long, black hair. The biggest difference in looks is that her nose is visibly larger than the others, and this goes against the ideals for the Japanese woman. Chō (2012: 20-21) has found that a straight, long, and small nose is preferred in Japan. The size of Miss Tokyo’s nose is different from most of the other contestants in Miss Universe Japan 2015, and also from the global, and Japanese ideal. However, it is not as outstanding as Miss Nagaski’s skin, and Miss Tokyo’s racial belonging still allows her to be included her in Japaneseness. There is a bigger acceptance of different noses than of different races in the notion of Japaneseness. That Miss Tokyo made it all the way to the top five, despite her large nose, therefore challenges the ideal of Japanese femininity, but not the Japaneseness in itself, as Miss Nagasaki’s skin does.

Miss Tokyo’s clothes also appear cheaper and somewhat less classy than the others’. She is neither following the sophistication which Clammer (1995: 212-213) finds among middle-class Japanese women, or having perfectly fitted clothes, as Gilbert (2015: 511) argues is necessary for a beauty pageant participant. In the dance session, most other participants wear tight clothes, while Miss Tokyo’s top is loose fitting. In the interview, she wears a white dress which wrinkles when she sits down and she also wears large, flashy earrings. Lastly, in the dress session the see-through part in her dress, which starts from the middle of her thighs, is so see-through that it almost looks like her dress ends at the middle of her thighs, and thus almost does not look like an evening dress at all. The difference between Miss Tokyo and the other top five contestants in fashion is not big, but it is noticeable. While there is nothing specifically un-Japanese in dressing imperfectly, class is important, both for beauty pageants and for the women who are supposed to represent the nation (Banet-Weiser 1999: 40-41; Faison 2009: 38). Miss Tokyo’s clothing style, with cheap, ill-fitting clothes, makes her look less feminine and less middle-class than the other participants, which in turn makes her a less good representative of the nation and its femininity.

Although we see here that it is not only Miss Nagasaki who does not conform to all ideals of a Japanese woman, Miss Tokyo still has the advantage of white skin, which, means that she looks much more Japanese than Miss Nagasaki because, according to Ashikari (2005: 80-82), white skin is a marker of Japaneseness. Besides, Miss Tokyo was placed number five in Miss Universe Japan 2015, which per se is an indication of that she is not as good a representative of the ideal Japanese woman as the other top five participants.
Miss Oita

The other two participants Miss Oita and Miss Chiba, both also follow some ideals of the Japanese femininity, and reject some. Miss Oita, however, who also was the runner up to Miss Nagasaki, conforms slightly more to the ideal Japanese woman than Miss Chiba. Regarding appearance, none of her features stand out in a non-Japanese way. She has big eyes with double eyelids, oval face, a straight, long nose, black, long, straight hair, long hairless legs and is thin. In other words, an ideal Japanese beauty. Miss Oita’s clothes also follow the sophisticated, well-tailored fashion, which, as I have explained above, is appropriate in the pageant. Because Miss Oita is embodying Japanese femininity, she is the perfect spokesperson for the Japanese nationalism, whose goal is to spread the values of the nation, so that the nation will stay intact (Enloe 2014: 94-94). At least when it comes to analyzing her appearance. However, her characteristics do not differ much from the norms either.

In her interview, Miss Oita talks excessively about Japan and what it means to be Japanese. “Sekai ichi ni naru tame niwa, mazu, nihonjin no sei no ii tokoro wa, kenkyōsa to, sōshite, uchi ni hiemeta tsuyoi chi da to omotte orimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015i). (To become number one in the world, firstly, the Japanese people have two good characteristics, healthiness and something which we have kept to ourselves – that we have strong minds.) Kimura (2011: 213-214), analyzed official documents from the government concerning food and health in Japan and found that Japanese food was represented as good and healthy, while Western food was depicted as unhealthy. In some cases, Western food was even blamed for illnesses which exist in contemporary Japan. Furthermore, the documents suggested that the people should eat more traditional Japanese food to build a strong and healthy nation. Correspondingly, Goto et al. (2014:55), discovered that Japanese mothers also believe Japanese traditional food to be the best for their children’s health. Thus, the Japanese nationalism is strongly connected to health and the idea of traditional Japanese lifestyle as healthy, just as Miss Oita claims. She is so nationalistic that she claims that this healthiness, which she possesses because she is Japanese, is what will facilitate her victory, not only as Miss Universe Japan, but also as Miss Universe.

That the Japanese people take pride in having a strong mind is something I discussed above when talking about “gambari”. Later in the interview, Miss Oita talks even more explicitly about her “gambari” spirit. “…[M]ō 26 sai de, kotoshi girigiri na no desu ga, yume wa akiramenakeraba, kanarzu kanau to iu koto o, hai, watashi no appiru pointo da to omotte orimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015i). (…I am already 26 years old and this year is at the
limit for me, however, I think if one do not give up one’s dream, it will definitely come true, well, yes, that my strong side.) Here she is talking about the fact that the age limit for Miss Universe Japan 2015 was 18-26 years, as stated on a homepage for a local pageant (Miss Universe Japan Aomori 2016). She does not only talk about the Japanese people as strong minded, she also gives an example of her own strong mindedness, which explicitly includes her in the Japaneseness and shows that she conforms to one more ideal of the Japanese woman.

Moreover, Miss Oita understands that she is going to be a representative of Japan, a job which she seems more than happy to have, because she says that she wants to show how beautiful Japan and her home prefecture are. “Berii dansā toshite, nihon no utsukushisa o berii dansu de hyōgen shite, sekajū no hito ni tsutaetai desu. Sōshite, jimoto, Oita no subarashii tokoro mo takusan tsutaete ikaitai desu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015i). (As a belly dancer I want to express all of Japan’s beauty with my dance, and show it to all the people in the world. And I also want to show the many great things about my home, Oita.) Thus, she depicts herself as a patriotic person who would be a perfect representative of the nation. Not only is she an ideal Japanese woman, she also praises the nation.

The only un-Japanese statement Miss Oita makes is that she can make herself look good. “…[J]ibun o apiiru dekiru josei da to omotte orimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015i). (…I am a woman who can make myself look good.) This challenges the ideals for the Japanese woman because she, similar to Miss Tokyo, does not try to be modest about her talents and strong points. This is not how an ideal woman should behave according to Japanese standards. However, as discussed above, all the other participants promote themselves similarly. The competitive moment of the pageant puts the participants in the awkward position of having to promote their femininity and their Japaneseness, even as self-promotion is seen as both unfeminine and un-Japanese, and only Miss Aichi manages to promote herself in a more appropriate manner.

In appearance, Miss Oita is, according to my analysis, no less Japanese than Miss Aichi. However, Miss Aichi manages to be almost “perfect”. Her skin is extraordinary white, and she is tall, but still has smaller waist and bigger breasts than Miss Oita. Correspondingly, Miss Aichi manages to do the only thing Miss Oita does un-Japanesely in a more Japanese way. She has found a way to promote herself while being humble. Thus, as we can see, Miss Aichi and Miss Oita are extremely similar. They both have, in body and mind, occupied the
Japanese spirit and taken it on themselves to represent Japan and the good things with the nation which they seem to love.

**Miss Chiba**

Compared to Miss Aichi and Miss Oita, Miss Chiba is less Japanese, even if it only is to a small degree. In her interview, she is almost only talking about how she overcame her shyness. It was, predictably, by not giving up. She had a problem and did something about it, something which, according to a study about advice columns in Japan, the advisers today frequently advise both to men and women. The same study also found that women today are not expected to suffer in silence and be patient in their marriages, or anything in life, as was expected of them before (Shibamoto-Smith 2011: 192). Thus, Miss Chiba follows the new ideal of the Japanese woman who takes her life into her own hands. This is also in line with the “gambari” ideal in Japan of not giving up, which Miss Chiba explicitly talks about. “…[S]ōshite akiramenai koto no taisetsusa o tsutaete ikitai to omotte orimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015g). (…[M]oreover, I want to teach the importance of not giving up). She is here, similarly to the others, expressing a Japanese ideal, which appears to be very strong and present in contemporary Japan, since almost all of the top five participants talk about it. Miss Chiba even thinks that this Japanese ideal is so important that she should tell the world about it.

Miss Chiba also looks like the other participants with her thin body, long black hair, oval face, and thin long nose. Her eyes are slightly smaller than the others and she is also the shortest out of the top five. Length is important in beauty pageants, especially in international pageants, and it has also become a beauty ideal in Japan (Chō 2012: 239). However, there has been controversy about length in national pageants in Japan. The first Japanese winner of Miss World, in 1959, was accused by some Japanese critics of being too tall to represent the Japanese woman (Bardsley 2002: 384). In light of this, Miss Chiba would fit the criteria for the ideal Japanese woman better than the other participants. Nevertheless, ideals change, and Robertson (2001: 11) observed an ideal for taller women in Japan already in 1931. It appears that both ideals exist in Japan, but that the tallness ideal is somewhat stronger than the ideal to be short. Thus, Miss Chiba here follows a weak ideal for the Japanese woman who might be disappearing, which makes her somewhat less of an ideal Japanese woman.
Miss Chiba’s clothes are somewhere in the middle of the participants in respectability and class. In the dance session, she shows much of her midriff. In the dress session she has an open triangle on the stomach and the back, and the dress is partly see-through fabric from the middle of the hips and down, but it is not as see-through as Miss Tokyo’s dress. Therefore, it still looks like an evening dress, but a less sophisticated one. Furthermore, Miss Chiba’s dress is red. Red clothes are, in Japan, traditionally seen as too bright and conspicuous for adult women to wear and are therefore not used by many Japanese women (Creighton 1995: 145). Miss Nagasaki also uses a red top in the dance session, which only seven of the other participants did, and none of them reached the top five. Thus, wearing red is a bold move, and one which might not be in Miss Chiba’s favor. While the participants wearing red are easier to see in the homogeneous blur of women in the dance session, in the dress session there are only five contestants left, and therefore, the need to stand out is not as prevalent as in the dance session. Instead Miss Chiba’s dress, in comparison to the others’ paler colors, appears less classy.

Miss Chiba, like the others, presents her strengths rather bluntly. “Kimochi dake wa, darenimo makenai koto da to omotte orimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015g). (In my attitude, I am not losing to anyone.) This declaration is unfeminine and un-Japanese, because it is straightforward and boastful. Japanese femininity is often associated with gentleness, politeness, refinement, non-assertiveness, submissiveness, and powerlessness (Itakura 2014: 457), thus giving oneself compliments is not included in this ideal femininity. However, it is necessary in a beauty pageant to show one’s good sides, and therefore, women competing in beauty pageants have to hide their wish to win to be feminine enough (Banet-Weiser 1999: 51). Bardsley (2002: 377) shows that the first Japanese Winner of Miss World, hid her wish to win by asserting that she had to win to be able to take care of her poor family. Miss Nagasaki hides her wish to win by saying that she wants to show that race does not matter. Miss Aichi by claiming that she wants to show the kindheartedness of the Japanese people. Miss Oita by saying that she wants to show the beauty of Japan and her hometown, and Miss Tokyo by saying that she wants to erase all poverty in the world. Miss Chiba also has something that she wants to show the world if she wins. “Misu yunibāsu ni erabaretara, watakushi wa, yume o motsu koto no taisetsusa, sōshite akiramenai koto no taisetsusa o tsutaete ikitai to omotte orimasu” (Miss Universe Japan 2015g). (If I am chosen as Miss Universe I want to show the importance of having a dream and not giving up.) Not giving up is a Japanese characteristic which Miss Chiba herself has, and she therefore exclaims that she wants to show a Japanese
ideal, like Miss Oita and Miss Aichi. However, for me, this alibi does not come across as particularly convincing, especially compared to the other contestants. The reason to why Miss Chiba wants to show the value of having a dream and not giving up on it, she says, is that she was extremely shy when she was younger, but she fought very hard and managed to overcome it. It is, of course, hard being shy, but it is not as hard as being a black person in a white world or being poor. Neither is she clear about that it is a Japanese ideal which she wants to show, since she never talks about Japan or being Japanese. Thus, I would say that although she makes some attempts to frame her motivations and strengths according to feminine and Japanese ideals, she does not succeed to the same extent as the other contestants, coming across as unfeminine and un-Japanese in comparison.

While Miss Chiba’s appearance is very similar to the others’, except maybe her length, which is ambiguous in relation to Japanese beauty ideals, it is mostly in her interview that she challenges Japanese ideals. Only in her not-giving-up attitude does she show that she identifies with being Japanese.

The ideal Japanese woman meets the world
I argued above that even though beauty pageants appear to be nothing more than pop cultural spectacles, nationalistic elements are often prevalent in them. In the analysis of the five top participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015, it has become clear that all of them to some extent, reproduce gendered norms of the ideal Japanese woman. They use ideas about Japanese people, identify with them, and share them with the rest of the world, which is exactly how nationalism works, according to Enloe (2014: 94-95).

However, it is equally clear that the top five participants also resist Japanese norms and values. There could be numerous reasons for this, one being the impact of global ideals. Many cultural norms that are spread throughout the world are American or European, but these parts of the world do not provide all globally circulating ideals (Thompson 2001: 209-211). In Miss Universe, for the last ten years only one winner has been from The US and one from France, but five have been from South America, two from Asia and one from Africa (Miss Universe). Thus, South American ideals could also be spread through beauty pageants. Nevertheless, it is still possible to see the global whiteness ideal among all of the winners the last ten years. All of them have small, thin noses, large eyes, straight hair, and relatively light skin – all the

Other global ideals of a beauty pageant contestant are a smooth, hairless body, a light tan if you have white skin, straight hair, light colored eyes, broader shoulders than hips, not too large and not too small breasts, and a long neck (Banet-Weiser 1999: 72, 135; Van Esterik 1996: 215). They should also be tall, slim, and have the measurements of 90-60-90 (Sierra Becerra 2017: 72; Wilk 1996: 227). The participants do not only have to look perfect, they also have to behave perfectly. They have to be intelligent, have their own opinions, and be able to sound both clever and witty at the same time when they speak (Banet-Weiser 1999: 69, 93).

Many of the studies that examine global impact on beauty pageants have found that global ideals have affected the ideals which the participants are measured against in national beauty pageants. Van Esterik (1996: 120) shows that Westernized beauty ideals are favored in national Thai beauty pageants. Teilhet-Fisk (1996: 199) argues that Tongan expats, coming back for the Tonga national beauty pageants, changed not only the criteria for beauty in the pageant, but in the whole nation. Wilk (1996: 226-227) finds that, in the Belizean national beauty pageant, local and global ideals compete. As evidence, Wilk cites how light skin and straight hair, Western beauty ideals, are favored, whereas wide hips are preferred over narrow hips, which is a Belizean beauty ideal. Furthermore, Ochoa (2014: 22, 37) argues that the Miss Venezuela pageants are both nationalistic and transnational because they do not only want to create a role model for the women of Venezuela, but also create a woman who can be successful in the world and who can promote Venezuela. Thus, the participants in a national beauty pageant not only have to live up to gendered norms of the nation, they must also live up to global gendered norms. Hence, this is one process which could have affected the outcome of Miss Universe Japan 2015

Out of the top five participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015, Miss Aichi and Miss Oita follow the Japanese gendered ideals the most. Therefore, if the pageant wanted to only create a role model who could reproduce Japanese tradition and values, either one of them would have been the perfect winner. However, since Miss Universe is not only a national matter national pageants must accommodate the global ideals if they want to win the international pageant. This means that contestants from other countries than the West have to differ enough from other nationalities to be exotic, but not be too exotic because people globally should be able to identify with her (Ochoa 2014: 85). Exotic, here is used to mean “something unusual
and exciting because of coming (or seeming to come) from far away” (Cambridge Dictionary). Ochoa (2014: 45) shows that, among other benefits, it is good and easy publicity for a nation to win an international pageant, consequently it would be unwise not trying to win. It is here Miss Nagasaki comes into the picture.

Consider how Sierra Becerra (2017: 72) presents the first black Miss Colombia as the perfect beauty pageant participant. The same can be said about Miss Nagasaki. In the global context, her skin is not especially dark, she is tall, she is very close to the ideal 90-60-90 measures with her 87-60-87 (the other top five is slightly smaller), and she has delicate features and straightened hair. Moreover, she has the best knowledge of how to dress in a beauty pageant with her classy style. However, the impact of global ideals is visible in all the top five participant’s appearances. Except for Miss Chiba, the contestants are all tall. Tallness, as we have seen, has become a norm in Japan due to Western influence (Chô 2012: 247-248; Robertson 2001: 11). All of them also have big eyes with double eyelids. While their eyes are almond shaped, something which Dyer (1997: 42) argues is outside the whiteness ideal, their eyes are not small, which used to be norm (Chô 2012: 15). They also have straight hair, all except Miss Tokyo have straight, small noses, and all except Miss Nagasaki have white skin. Thus, the Japanese norms are close to the global norms and all of the top five participants could in appearance be good global representatives, but doing femininity correct globally is not only about looks. Miss Nagasaki also acts very professional. For instance, when she talks, she does it with self-assurance and does not stutter or sound insecure, and neither does it sound rehearsed, even though it most likely is.

According to Banet-Weiser (1999: 95), many things in a beauty pageant are rehearsed, even though they appear to be spontaneous. The sense of spontaneity is important for the contestants to show that they naturally are the right kind of woman according to the heterosexual matrix. This is to hide that femininity is, in fact, as Butler (2007: 77-78) has illustrated, a performance. Sierra Becerra (2017: 76-77), shows that many black women who participate in Miss Colombia fail because they do not have the education or the training necessary to be a beauty pageant winner. Moreover, in the Nigerian Carnival Calabar Queen beauty pageant the participants go to a camp before the ceremony to learn the necessary things, both in terms of information and manners, to be able to behave as a respectable Nigerian woman (Gilbert 2015: 508-509). At the Miss Universe Japan homepage I have found that a similar camp also exists for Japanese Miss Universe 2015 (Miss Universe Japan 2016b),
but there is a limit to how much it is possible to learn in two weeks, placing contestants who have not been training on the right kind of femininity earlier in life at a disadvantage.

It is clearly visible from Miss Nagasaki’s performance that she is not a beginner at performing the correct type of femininity, in fact, none of the other participants are even close to her level. They all stutter in their interviews, and even though Miss Aichi says that she speaks “easy Japanese” it is still hard to understand everything she says because she speaks very fast. (Easy Japanese means using words and grammar which kids understand.) Apart from Miss Nagasaki it does not sound like any of the top five participants have rehearsed their interviews. They surely have, especially Miss Oita, since it is her second time participating in Miss Universe Japan, they just have not rehearsed as much as Miss Nagasaki. Miss Nagasaki also walks confidently on the catwalk and she even waves in a relaxed manner to the audience in the swimsuit session, which is the session where the other participants’ inexperience is the most visible. They all seem to have some experience walking the catwalk, because in the evening dress section they do not seem as nervous, but in the swimsuit session none of them manages a relaxed smile, and their nervousness is visible in their stiff movements. Even Miss Nagasaki has a forced smile sometimes during the show, however the other four appear much more nervous in most of the sessions. Thus, it is clear that a large part of Miss Nagasaki’s victory lies in her skills as a contestant, which includes doing femininity in the way desired globally. Moreover, her appearance also conforms to the global whiteness ideal. That she reached top ten in the Miss Universe pageant only makes these arguments stronger.

Furthermore, she is not only international, she also is Japanese enough, which means exotic enough for the international pageant, because of her Japanese cultural knowledge. She speaks perfect Japanese, bows when she should (Ota et al. 2016: 46), which none of the others do, and although she does not talk much about Japan in her interview, she says that a part of her is fully Japanese, and thus, she does not deny her Japanese part. That Miss Nagasaki is mixed-race Japanese and therefore simultaneously both Japanese and international, could at first appear as a disadvantaged, but as I have showed here, it is to her advantage in Miss Universe Japan. Miss Nagasaki is the perfect mix-raced woman who could come from any nation and has all the delicate features demanded of a beauty pageant participant, while at the same time, embodying Japanese values and traditions, because she is Japanese. By choosing Miss Nagasaki as a winner, Miss Universe Japan manages to be simultaneously nationalistic and transnational, exactly as Ochoa (2014: 22, 37) found was a winning concept for Miss
Venezuela. However, if Miss Nagasaki is as perfect as I have argued, why did she provoke such commotion?

A problem with global ideals is that they might conflict with local ideals (Thompson 2001: 221). As seen from the numerous people commenting on Miss Nagasaki’s appearance after her victory, there is one Japanese ideal especially that clashes with the global ideals—whiteness. Global aesthetic whiteness includes other features than white complexion and it is therefore possible to be included in it if you follow all of those features and have as light brown skin as Miss Nagasaki. In Japan, on the other hand, white skin, or Japanese skin, is very important because many Japanese people still see Japan as a homogeneous white society.

In the 19th century when Japan was forced to open their borders for trade, Japan had to define themselves more explicitly in contrast to the Western nations, just as many other nations and societies had to (Creighton 1995: 142). Japan used the tactics of self-orientalism, which means that they themselves claimed that they had different characteristics than Western people, before the West could make them into “the other” and ascribe Japanese people characteristics which benefited the West. The Japanese people created a special, unique “Japaneseness”, and used being “the other” as something positive (Iwabuchi 1994: 51-52). This Japaneseness included not only qualities based on character, but also ethnic belonging, which led to the belief that only ethnic Japanese individuals could inherit this Japanese uniqueness (Ashikari 2005: 76; Iwabuchi 1994: 53). Many studies show that white skin is one important trait included in the Japanese ethnicity (Ashikari 2003; Ashikari 2005; Bonnett 2002; Chō 2012: 24; Miller 2006: 37).

This notion of Japanese people as consisting of only one ethnicity exists also in contemporary Japan. This can be seen in, for example, how the largest group of immigrants which has been accepted in Japan is the so-called “Nikkejin”. Nikkejin are descendants of Japanese emigres born in South America (Shin 2010: 327). They were accepted because they, as ethnic Japanese people possessed the unique Japaneseness, which was believed to facilitate their integration into the Japanese society (Shin 2010: 338).

Not having the Japanese white skin, even while conforming to all other ideals of the nation, and even despite having as light skin as Miss Nagasaki, makes one into “the other” because it ascribes one another ethnicity. Numerous twitter users commented about Miss Nagasaki after she won that she does not look like a Japanese person, and accordingly, should not represent Japan in Miss Universe (sbkazu-san 2015). While none of them commented on her skin color,
most of them commented on her appearance, and as I have showed above, Miss Nagasaki’s appearance, except for her complexion, follows the norms of Japanese femininity. Therefore, I argue, implicitly it is the complexion they are commenting on. For them, Miss Nagasaki’s skin is so prominent that they cannot see that her other features can be coded as Japanese. Thus, even if her other features conform to Japanese ideals, it will not be enough, since the notion of the unique Japaneseness, based on skin color, is strong. It is also visible in all the other participants of Miss Japan 2015 how important whiteness is. Although their colors are somewhat different compared to each other, they are all in the lighter spectrum of complexions.

Wilk (1996: 227), when analyzing Belezian national beauty pageants, argues that while the pageants have room for local ideals, it is always the global ideals which are the strongest. I have shown the same to be true in Miss Universe Japan 2015. With Miss Nagasaki’s victory, a winner that follows more global ideals of a beauty pageant winner than ideal Japanese femininity and, most importantly, challenges the notion of Japan as homogeneous, global ideals have proved to be stronger than national.
Conclusion
In this thesis, I have investigated how the top five participants are represented in Miss Universe Japan 2015, and how the representations relate to the image of the ideal Japanese woman, in terms of which ideals they challenge and which they reproduce. I have also examined the relations between global and Japanese norms in the pageant.

I have found that the top five participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015 both reproduce and challenge the notion of the ideal Japanese woman. Hence, their representations are not only stereotypical, but they also show the negotiation of gender, nation, and race, which is necessary for new meanings of gender, nation, and race to develop (Hall 2013b: 259; Murphy-Shigematsu 2008: 301; Stoeltje 1996: 28). This is in line with the findings of several other studies made on beauty pageants in different parts of the world and in different time periods (cf. Cohen 1996: 125; Teilhet-Fisk 1996: 199; Velmet 2014: 91; Wroblewski 2014: 75).

In this study, all of the top five participants in Miss Universe Japan 2015, except Miss Nagasaki, say that they follow the ideal of the Japanese “gambari” spirit. Miss Aichi and Miss Oita show their dedication to the nation by saying that they want to show the good sides of Japan and the Japanese people, which is that Japan is beautiful and that the Japanese people are kindhearted. Furthermore, Miss Oita also represents the Japanese people as healthy and implicitly includes herself in the healthiness.

However, no one of the five participants analyzed talk about being a good wife or wise mother, which is a representation that challenges the tradition. According to Bardsley (2008: 377), the winner of a national Japanese beauty pageant in 1959 talked about being a good wife and a wise mother, and Robertson (2001: 11), shows that the participants in the first Miss Nippon in 1931 were presented as future good wives and wise mothers. Furthermore, an article in a magazine about former winners of Japanese beauty pageants published in 1979, represented the women who had become housewives as the most successful (Bardsley 2008: 379). Even in other contexts where Japanese women represented Japan, such as sport, the women were represented in media as good wives and wise mothers (Merklejn 2013: 244-245). Therefore, this finding was rather surprising. However, Miss Aichi is an exception to some degree, since she implicitly shows that she wants to conform to this ideal when she says that she wants to exist for other people. Existing for other people is literally what good wives and wise mothers do.
Aside from the absence of good wife and wise mother, the top five participants also challenge other ideals for the Japanese woman. For example, they all, to different degrees, resist the Japanese ideal of humility when they talk about their strong points. Miss Aichi manages to sound the most modest, while Miss Chiba talks only about herself during the whole interview, and thus is the least successful in this respect. Miss Tokyo also challenges the ideal of being a housewife by implying that she wants to have a career, and Miss Nagasaki challenges the notion of the Japanese as one race by saying that race does not matter. Consequently, they do not simple reproduce Japanese gendered norms, but they also take part in creating more diverse ideals for the Japanese women.

Their appearances are somewhat less diverse. They all look extremely similar, and exceptionally close to the ideal Japanese femininity. The only notable deviations are Miss Nagasaki’s skin, Miss Tokyo’s nose, and Miss Chiba’s length. However, except for Miss Nagasaki’s skin, their variances are only visible when comparing them closely to each other. As I mentioned above, I at first had a hard time separating them from each other. Thus, in appearance, the Japanese gendered norms appear to be stronger than in character. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Japanese white skin is an important norm in what is seen as a homogeneous nation, and that therefore Miss Nagasaki’s resistance against this norm is extraordinary.

National beauty pageants are practices where women are reduced to symbols of the nation (Banet-Weiser 1999: 7; Mattson & Pettersson 2007: 237-238). This includes being bearers of the traditions and honor of the nations (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1989: 10; Yuval-Davis 1997: 45-56). In Japan, being a good wife and a wise mother is an important part of Japanese tradition and therefore it was unexpected to find that only Miss Aichi implicitly follows this ideal. Moreover, since respectability is said to be one important norm for women who are symbols of a nation, it was even more unexpected that both Miss Aichi and Miss Nagasaki sexualize themselves.

One reason to why the top five participants do not display many characteristics which can be traced to the ideal of “good wife, wise mother”, as participants of beauty pageants in Japan have done before them, could be that, as many studies show, the ideal of “good wife, wise mother” is not as influential today as it has been (Charlebois 2014: 67, 99, 106; Uno 1993: 319-321). Today, although the ideal of being a wise mother is largely intact, the ideal of being a good wife is less important, and women are not expected to suffer or be patient towards their husbands to the same extent as they used to (Holloway 2010: 34; Shibamoto-Smith
2011: 192; Uno 1993: 303-304). Also, Japanese women today are allowed to have a profession, or at least a job, as long as it does not interfere with taking care of the house and children (Hirakawa 2011: 141-142). Moreover, Miss Universe Japan 2015 is a beauty pageant and even though studies have shown that inner beauty is said to important, it is after all the appearance that matters (Banet-Weiser 1999: 70). Hence, it is not remarkably strange that the top five participants conform more to the ideals of the Japanese woman in appearance than in character. It is important to also stress that global ideals affect the pageant and that Japanese beauty ideals for appearance largely have been influenced by global ideals (Ashikari 2003: 10; Chō 2012: 247-248), therefore it might be easier for the contestants to combine local and global ideals in appearance than in character. There are also studies which show that inner beauty has given some place to external beauty as an important marker of femininity in Japan (Miller 2006: 27; Charlebois 2014: 66). Thus, the participant’s representations could be yet another sign of “good wife, wise mother” slowly disappearing in Japan, giving room to new ideals.

The purpose of Miss Universe Japan can also have a part in how the participants are represented because participants become symbols for the pageants and its ideal (Stoeltje 1996: 18). In Miss Universe Japan, there is no session where the participants show their talents as in some other beauty pageants, thus being symbols for all the traditions in the nation might not be as important in Miss Universe Japan as showing a Japanese feminine body. This can also explain why Miss Nagasaki and Miss Aichi could sexualize themselves in the pageant.

In the introduction, I mentioned that representations can only have effect on the norms if they really question the norms and do not only reproduce stereotypical images. From this perspective, I argue that the representations of Miss Aichi and Miss Oita do not resist enough norms to contribute to any change of ideals. Miss Aichi is only a bit too sexy one time and Miss Oita is somewhat too sure of her own ability to show off her best sides, and apart from this, the representations of them in Miss Universe Japan are normative. The qualities they have which challenge Japanese femininity are also qualities that are not always a disadvantage to have in a beauty pageant. The case of Miss Chiba is more of an ambiguity. She only resists less important norms, such as her clothes not being classy enough or her only speaking about her own experiences. However, at the same time she shows with her story that she possesses Japanese characteristics and her appearance are Japanese. Therefore, it is hard to decide what her representation contributes to. Miss Tokyo and Miss Nagasaki contribute more towards challenges of the ideals. This is because they challenge more than one norm, making their
representations nuanced and not stereotyped. Miss Tokyo contributes especially to make the discourse of “women as workers” stronger in Japan, and Miss Nagasaki’s contribution is to show that the outside does not decide who is Japanese. Moreover, since they are represented together, it is possible that Miss Aichi’s and Miss Oita’s challenges to the norms become more visible and therefore, together, their challenges contribute to the slow change away from seeing women only as housewives. A change which has been found in several studies (Charlebois 2014: 67, 99, 106; Hirakawa 2011: 141-142; Ho 2014: 179; Uno 1993: 319-321).

I have found that this deviation from some of the Japanese ideals can be due to the impact of global ideals for beauty pageants on Miss Universe Japan, since, while the representations of contestants, especially Miss Nagasaki, challenges some ideals of the Japanese woman, they do not challenge many global beauty ideals. Rather, they are closer to the global ideal beauty norm than the Japanese. Hence, they might contribute to making global ideals stronger in Japan. Moreover, it is important not to forget that this also means that Miss Nagasaki’s challenge of the Japanese whiteness ideal is not a challenge of the global whiteness ideal. She is exactly like the first black winners of Miss America, Miss Venezuela, and Miss Colombia, who Banet-Weiser (1999: 135-136), Ochoa (2014: 35), and Sierra Becerra (2017: 72) find fit perfectly into the whiteness ideal because of their bodily and facial features and their light brown skin. Thus, the representation of the top five participants contributes towards essentializing the global notion of beauty and race.

This finding is in line with Clammer’s (1995: 218) finding that Japanese representations of women in magazines are getting more diverse due to Western influence. The contestants in Miss Universe Japan are consequently more diverse than studies of earlier beauty contests in Japan have shown beauty pageants participants to be (Bardsley 2008: 377, 379; Robertson 2001: 18). However, Miss Nagasaki’s victory was still received negatively by some people (sbkazu-san 2015). The question is therefore if this trend with more diverse representations of women will continue, if global beauty ideals will be the only visible ideals in Japan, or if this trend will be pushed back by nationalism, which sometimes focuses more on traditional national ideals when meeting other cultures (Thompson 2001: 240). My study is one of the few intersectional studies of gender, race and nation in Japan, and thus, alone it cannot say much about how intersections of gender, race and nation are represented in Japan. More studies of representations of women which focus on intersections with other categories are needed in order to answer this question. Especially investigations of Japanese black women are interesting, since I have not found any newer studies which examine how they are
represented in Japan. However, studies of other mixed-race people, minorities, and immigrants in Japan also are important to see if this more nuanced representation of Miss Nagasaki was just a one-time occasion or a change away from the image of Japan as homogeneous.
Literature


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