

# **Semogenesis of a Nation**

**An iconography of Japanese identity**

Ken Tann

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to model the discursive construction of identity in a way that retains its multifaceted dynamics within a coherent framework. It focuses on a key aspect of the linguistic construction of collective identity known as identity icons, and proposes a model of iconography for the study of the mechanisms underlying the discursive tropes in identity discourses. The study seeks to map out the potential space of this iconography, drawing on both the identity theories in social sciences and the analytical tools developed in linguistic frameworks.

The data is drawn from a well established tradition of discourse on Japanese identity known as *Nihonjinron*, and four representative texts from different phases of its development are selected for analysis in this exploratory study. The thesis takes the social construction of national identity (Anderson 2006 [1983]; Hall 1997) as its point of departure, and is informed by critical readings of *Nihonjinron* (Dale 1986; Yoshino 1992; Befu 1992; Aoki 1999). The present study contributes to the current debates in identity research by providing a detailed, empirical account of the process of identity construction in actual texts, to make a case for bringing concepts even as seemingly slippery and intractable as identity into a rational and systematic linguistic inquiry.

The present study draws on the framework of discourse analysis developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics (Martin 1992; Martina and Rose 2003; Martin and White 2005) and the methodology of Membership Categorization Analysis (Jayyusi 1984; Antaki and Widdicombe 1998) for the analysis of the data. It is part of the growing interest in identity and bonding icons within SFL, and has been developed to bring these two current threads of research together. The proposed iconography therefore represents an initial step in mapping out this space, by building on some of the latest research in SFL, including bonding icons (Martin and Stenglin 2006; Maton 2008), legitimation (van Leeuwen 2007) and commitment theory (Hood 2008), and provides an integrated model for further linguistic research into identity.

This thesis also addresses the methodological problems that discourse analysis must face to engage responsibly with identity as an object of study, and provides a rigorous linguistic approach that both acknowledges and is informed by the insights gained from the debates within identity studies. It thereby contributes to the development of the Systemic theory by engaging it in dialogue with the current understanding in the field of identity research.

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