

Hambleton, Alexandra, University of Tokyo, Japan

The Gender of Difference: Japanese Media Depictions of Female Foreign Residents

This paper focuses on recent Japanese television programs, magazine articles and advertisements featuring non-Japanese women in order to examine the significance of a discourse which frequently depicts foreign women as emotional, irrational and, most commonly, overtly sexual. Women are commonly understood to be ‘signifiers of traditional culture’ (Yuval-Davis 1997) and the ‘key actors in the transmission of the community’s values’ (Freedman 2001). Drawing upon a variety of Japanese media in which foreign women appear, this paper finds that issues of race, gender and nationalism are all of great importance. The ways in which the Japanese mass media contrasts traditional images of women with those of a ‘foreign other’ and how such depictions feed into a greater discourse of ‘us versus them’ is of enormous significance at a time when the foreign population of Japan is increasing at a rate greater than at any other time in the post war period.