

■ 査読付論文

Art as a Mechanism for Spreading Alternative Narratives about Minority Communities

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Abstract :

Despite having over 120 years of presence in Peru, Japanese descendants still struggle to be seen beyond stereotypes that picture them as a homogenous and closed group. The Nikkei community is set apart from the Peruvian national identity by most non-Nikkei. This situation is not adequately addressed by the government. The Ministry of Culture barely acknowledges the Nikkei community's claims against discriminatory stereotypes on TV, nor includes Nikkei representatives at national diversity events. However, a recent trend of young Nikkei is asserting their voice to address this situation. Nikkei artists, in particular, are creating narratives centered on showing the dynamism of their minority group, that challenge society's stereotypes towards the Nikkei community. This article introduces the incongruences between how artists from minority groups experience their identity and the stereotypes society pushes on them. Here, it will be discussed how Nikkei artists and their cultural production can challenge stereotypes and open the discussion about the elements that define Peruvian identity. The present study analyzes the responses of three young female Nikkei artists and their perception of art as a valuable instrument for addressing the multiplicity and plasticity of Nikkei identity. The main findings of this study are the following: 1) When referring to stereotypes, these artists dialogued with two reference groups: the Nikkei community and the broader Peruvian society and identify that, in both cases, the official discourse about the characteristics of belonging should be broaden employing art; 2) These Nikkei artists understand art as an initial meeting point between the Nikkei community and the broader society, which helps to reduce prejudice and spread a more diverse image about the Nikkei community contributing to social cohesion. This article can shed some light on the situation other Peruvian minorities with an international background might be facing, such as Tusan community or the currently growing community of Venezuelan immigrants.

Keywords : Nikkei, Art, Stereotypes

Introduction

Peru is a culturally diverse country that struggles with discrimination, lack of social cohesion, and the difficult task of creating a national identity that includes all of its diversity. Researchers have identified a “desire for community” or a “desire to be a nation” among Peruvians, but a representation that integrates all of Peru’s citizens has not yet been accomplished (Hamann et al., 2003, p.10). Within this context, all minority groups in Peru deal with different kinds of stereotypes that affect them. For instance, the Afro-descendant community are given the stereotype

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of being an untrustworthy group, while Andean communities are related to backwardness (Espinoza et al., 2007, p. 312) based on the socioeconomic situation of their members. Thus, they are constantly facing discriminatory situations. The Nikkei community, comprising Japanese emigrants and their Peruvian descendants, also struggles with stereotypes that alienate its members, giving the perception that it does not fully belong to the Peruvian identity (Takenaka, 1999, 2004; Fukumoto, 1994).

With the creation of the Ministry of Culture and its Vice Ministry of Interculturality in 2010, the Peruvian State reaffirmed its aims of recognition of diversity, the construction of intercultural citizenship, ending exclusion, and ensuring the construction of a national identity (Ministry of Culture of Peru, 2013). However, it was not until 2020 that, for the first time, a document on the national cultural policy, the National Cultural Policy Until 2030, was released. In this document, the participation of representatives of minority groups such as the Nikkei community in the design and development of cultural policies is not clear, showing that the Peruvian government still needs to acknowledge the challenges, including stereotypes, that these groups endure.

As a result, younger generations of Nikkei are currently addressing some of these issues. Being more politicized and more explicit about their belongingness to Peruvian identity than their elders (Vargas, 2021) makes them feel more entitled to speak up. For instance, in 2021, the *Bloque Asiático Peruano* (Asian Peruvian Group), formed by Chinese and Japanese descendants, asked the Ministry of Culture to act against offensive representations of Asian descendants in a famous local TV show. This discomfort regarding the spread of stereotypes about the Nikkei community is also manifested through social media initiatives, such as the YouTube channel *No Somos Chinos* (We Are Not Chinese) and the Discord community *Sin Retorno* (No Way Back). *No Somos Chinos*, created in 2016, introduces comedy scenes where Peruvian stereotypes toward Japanese descendants are questioned. Meanwhile, the *Sin Retorno* Discord community, created in 2020, is a virtual space where young Nikkei are welcome to share their experiences, which includes dealing with stereotypes.

In the art field, interesting proposals have appeared, especially from the *Young Nikkei Art Hall* (YNAH) project by the Peruvian Japanese Association. One result of the YNAH project has been the creation of visual and plastic art pieces that expose a varied image of Nikkei, referring to their culturally diverse background as the third and fourth generations of Peruvian Nikkei. This project, which was created in 2017, has so far involved the participation of over 60 artists in six editions. It consists of workshops with young Nikkei artists (mainly in their twenties and thirties) who are encouraged to create an art piece inspired by their thoughts on Nikkei identity. Every year, after some months of group discussions, an exhibition is held with the resulting art pieces. Their works expose the dissonances between the stereotypical perspectives regarding Nikkei identity and the experiences of this minority group members.

There is little literature focusing specifically on racial stereotyping toward the Nikkei community (Takenaka, 2004; Melgar, 2020). While not attending mainly to stereotypes, other studies have acknowledged discrimination issues against the latter (Fukumoto, 1997; Morimoto, 1999; Moromisato, 2019). When it comes to art and Nikkei identity, some researchers have analyzed the ways in which Nikkei artists recreate their identity through artistic production, such as literature (Le Moyne, 2010; López-Calvo, 2013) and dance (Matsumura, 2015). However, there has been no deep exploration of Nikkei identity among those producing plastic and visual arts in the Peruvian context.

Within this context, this article discusses how art can be employed to challenge stereotypes about the Nikkei community. In particular, the responses of three young Peruvian Nikkei artists from the YNAH project are analyzed regarding the possibilities of art as a communicational instrument that generates alternative narratives about minorities. This article aims to answer the following research questions: What are the perceptions of young Nikkei artists about the possibilities of art as a communicational instrument? What are the most common stereotypes that Peruvian Nikkei deal with? How are these stereotypes challenged by the narratives produced in Nikkei artwork?

This study is built on postmodern identity theories that understand identity (personal or collective) as a transitory and partly chosen (Cantle, 2015) dialogic construction in a social context (Bauman, 2011; Hall, 2019; Landowski, 2016). This means that identities are highly complex creations open to influences and never fixed. By contrast, stereotypes are defined as fixed images that simplify the complex nature of identities (Espinoza et al., 2007). In dialogue with these constructs, art is defined as a cultural product and a communicational instrument capable of influencing the identity-building dialogue and challenging fixed notions in society, including stereotypes.

For the data collection, one focus group comprising three female Nikkei artists was conducted. The questions explored artists' perceptions about the capacities of art to influence society and the motivations of Nikkei artists in spreading a more diverse image of the Nikkei community. This article is divided into four parts. The first part reviews concepts such as art, stereotypes, and collective identity and addresses how underrepresented minorities have employed art to defy stereotypical narratives. Additionally, two stereotypes and their possible impacts on society are discussed. The chosen stereotypes considered in this paper are not just the most common but also some of the most detrimental, as they are subtle and can make the Nikkei community's struggles invisible. The second part presents the methodology for the data gathering and analysis. The third part organizes, summarizes, and analyzes some vital data that appeared in the interview responses.

I. Literature Review

In this section, concepts necessary for the subsequent analysis of the interviewees' answers are presented. First, the concept of art is defined as a cultural product and a communicational instrument. Collective identities are discursively constructed, and art, as a cultural product, participates in the strengthening of these constructions or in their transformation. As a communication instrument, art can question fixed conceptions in society through the creation of alternative narratives. The particularity of art as a communication instrument is that it highly involves the viewer in meaning building. These characteristics make art a beneficial tool for minorities' inclusion in a group's belonging narrative. Second, a stereotype is defined as an image that simplifies the complexity of identities. In relation to the Nikkei community, stereotypes are described and discussed, detailing how they harm its members and threaten the inclusion of the mentioned community as a constituent part of the Peruvian national identity.

I.1. Art and Minorities: Challenging Stereotyped Narratives

The consumption of "cultural devices" or symbolic elements such as art is central to social cohesion and identity building in a country (Organization of Ibero-American States, 2016, p. 18). Art can join the negotiation process of creating, transmitting, and reinterpreting the characteristics that identify the legitimate members of a group, and the "values, attitudes, and convictions through which individuals and communities transmit the meaning they give to their lives and their development" (Ministry of Culture, 2015, p. 36). As an instrument for reinterpretation, art can question stereotypes and help develop a more inclusive society by producing new narratives (Vich, 2013).

Part of the reason for the influential impact of art on society is its communicative nature. When creating an art piece, artists decide what is relevant to communicate to others (Mirza, 2012). At the same time, the audience is not a passive spectator but an active meaning builder. Art is a connection point—a bridge where the experiences of artists and audiences find one another in meaning making (Ghani & Fiske, 2020). In addition, the connection that is enabled through art is emotional; thus, it is a mechanism that generates a special bonding.

These characteristics of art have led people to employ art to challenge society's stereotypes that reinforce exclusionary narratives and practices. For example, Ghani and Fiske's (2020) study on Afghan women showed how more complex representations through art challenge naturalized stereotypes that are drawn to justify powerful Western countries' politics of intervention. In countries such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, with a postwar context where local ethnic minority groups were excluded from representation in the national identity, art has become a valuable tool for addressing minorities' participation in society (Naidu-Silverman, 2015). Studies (Naidu-Silverman, 2015; Ghani and Fiske, 2020) have shown the positive impact of art on the healing and

national identity–building processes of these nations.

Along the same lines, art has been used to build awareness about minorities' contribution to their societies, which helps minorities be validated as an essential asset in the eyes of their governments and the rest of society. In the United States, during the late 60s, the so-called Asian American Art served as a “platform for collective representation” that brought visibility to Asian descendants. Until then, “the experiences, history and cultural contribution by Asian groups” remained “obscured, neglected or even actively denied” (Machida, 2015, p. 13).

In the case of Latin America and the Nikkei community, collective transnational art exhibitions have brought Nikkei artists together to discuss the similarities and differences of Japanese descendants around the world. Some of these exhibitions include *Transpacific Borderland* (United States of America, 2017), the international edition of *Young Nikkei Art Hall* (Peru, 2019), *Nippon América* (Japan, 2019; Colombia, 2020; and Mexico, 2022), and *No Ocean Between Us* (United States of America, 2022). Along with the attempt to spread awareness of the art production of the Japanese diaspora, these exhibitions have shown the vast diversity among Nikkei communities.

Most of the art pieces presented in these exhibitions challenged the imposed stereotypical rigid identities that question the validity of the artists' self-identification as Nikkei, Latin American, or Peruvian/Brazilian/Argentinian/Mexican/American. For instance, at the *Transpacific Borderland* exhibition, it was acknowledged that Nikkei artists reaffirm their Nikkei identity as Peruvians (or Mexicans or Brazilians) when dialoguing with someone who forces a Japanese identity on them (Katz, 2018). Similarly, the artists at the *Nippon América* exhibition expressed on the project's website that their aim was “to examine a way to break the barriers that generate prejudices and that pigeonhole Others” (*Nippon América* 日本アメリカ, n.d.).

These artistic productions have opened up an opportunity to rethink Nikkei identity and its place in the construction of Latin American national identities and to highlight the problems these minorities face within these contexts. According to Katz (2018), most Latin American Nikkei artists are currently raising a “discussion of a *mestizaje*” in Latin America that includes Nikkei, so academia has “moved away from fixed notions of bifurcated identity” when analyzing their cultural production (p. 5). At the same time, this is an opportunity to challenge conceptions of minorities' identities as rigid entities and begin understanding them in their dynamic nature (e.g., diverse subgroups negotiating a common identity).

To Alejandra Gómez, Director of the National Museum of World Cultures (Museo Nacional de las Culturas del Mundo; MNCM), upon seeing the *Nippon América* exhibition stated that “we should stop thinking in rigid identities that identify us just as Mexicans or Japanese and conceive other more complex identities” (Culture Secretary of the Government of Mexico, 2022).

Collective identity is “a particular mode of imagining and experiencing social belonging as a communicative public happening” (Delanty, 2003, p. 26). Hence, art can build plausible narratives for influencing the experience of social belonging. In addition, art can be a place of contact and positive interaction for diverse citizens, which is central for reducing prejudice, enhancing knowledge, strengthening social cohesion, and ensuring social inclusion (Zapata-Barrero, 2015).

I.2. Stereotypes and the Nikkei Community in Peru

In the exhibition cases mentioned above, it can be observed that Nikkei artists perceived identity as dynamic and multiple constructions, demonstrating that identity is defined and redefined through history and culture and never a fixed essence (Hall, 2019, p. 112). In fact, “people can have more than one identity at the same time and . . . these are not necessarily in opposition to each other; rather, they . . . represent different aspects of human relations” (Cantle, 2015, p. 81).

Social stereotypes toward the Nikkei community usually hide the complex image that Nikkei artists portray. Stereotypes are social categorizations (Espinoza et al., 2007) that are produced as images that “set a pattern of behavior and/or pattern of perspective in the human mind” (Velarde, 2003, p. 160). Taking Stallybrass’s ideas, Espinoza explained that these images are highly simplified concerning the true nature of the stereotyped group and are also popular images accepted by a large sector of the population (Espinoza et al., 2007). Stereotypes influence interactions and block an accurate understanding of the stereotyped subject. In total opposition to the stereotyping direction, “supporting the positive interaction” (Zapata-Barrero, 2015, p. 7) can enhance social cohesion and ensure “an optimal living situation and social inclusion” (Zapata-Barrero, 2015, p. 7).

A study carried out in 2007 identified that Peruvians of Asian descent were only associated with positive stereotypes, such as being hardworking, responsible, capable, honest, and successful (Espinoza et al., 2007). However, contrary to what some might think, this is only partially beneficial. For example, as Adachi (2014) pointed out for the Brazilian Nikkei community, positive stereotypes make their community’s struggles invisible or difficult to identify, particularly when it comes to racism cases. At the same time, being singled out by these stereotypes generates an uncomfortable feeling among Nikkei, as they do not perceive themselves as “exactly on par with the members of the majority” (Adachi, 2014, p. 65). According to Wilson and Secker (2015), the way persons feel is central to judging how socially included they are. As they pointed out, “individuals are . . . not socially included unless they feel included” (p. 54).

Just like the Peruvian Nikkei community, the Brazilian Nikkei are not considered a vulnerable minority since its members, same as in the Peruvian case (National Institute of Statistics and Informatic, 2018), do not have limited access to economic participation; however, both communities must deal with stereotypes that still label them, set them apart, and hide their negative social consequences. For understanding this situation in the Peruvian case, two stereotypes about

the Nikkei community questioned by Nikkei artists are introduced. These widely spread stereotypes confirm the limited understanding of minorities' identities as rigid structures instead of as dynamic entities. They can conceal the Nikkei community's need for recognition as a national minority and as a valid component of Peruvian diversity. Such recognition is necessary for justifying the design of cultural policies to encourage their more active participation in Peruvian society identity building process.

1.2.1. The *homogenous group* stereotype

Thinking about a community as a homogenous group might come as a default, , because, usually, the concept of community “minimizes dissimilarities and accentuates cohesiveness” (Vo & Bonus, 2002, p. 33). The Peruvian Nikkei community is not exempt from this image. In Peruvian society, it is believed that Nikkei “form a homogeneous social class” (Melgar, 2019, p. 116) and — as it was addressed by the YouTube channel *No Somos Chinos* share stereotypical Japanese behaviors, such as all Nikkei (or Asian descendants) eat rice, know martial arts, and play video games. That channel has even received comments from the audience confirming that some people think that Asian descendants are all “the same.” This partially explains why, in many cases, the Nikkei community is perceived more as a foreign community than as part of Peruvian diversity. These stereotypes of being homogenous and foreign oversimplify what it is to be Nikkei and place the Nikkei community closer to Japan and far from Peru.

Interestingly, some Nikkei institutions may also be fueling this perception. As part of their institutional discourse, they highlight some “Japanese inherited values” as shared ethnic characteristics among Nikkei. With time, some of these values became “symbols of ethnicity to hold the community together” (Takenaka, 1999, pp. 1470–1471), replacing the criterion of blood for membership (Takenaka, 1999, pp. 1469–1471).

1.2.2. The *closed group* stereotype

During the first half of the 20th Century, the Japanese immigrant community in Peru dealt with diverse expressions of discriminatory practices. They were identified as the *yellow peril*, which was related to the idea of the Japanese as a solid and cohesive group that served its empire. This idea, together with their endogamic practices (e.g., arranged marriages between Japanese male immigrants in Peru and Japanese women in Japan) may have led to the image of the Nikkei community as an endogamic and closed racial group that is more related to Japan than it is to Peru.

Takenaka (2004) and Melgar (2020) have analyzed racial profiling as one of the mechanisms for denying Peruvian belongingness. According to Takenaka (2004), Nikkei “continue to be treated primarily in racial terms—as ‘Asian,’ ‘Oriental,’ or ‘Chinese’ . . . [and] treated as foreigners” (p. 94). In a testimony by the Peruvian Nikkei writer Doris Moromisato (2019), the

relationship between the idea of race and the denial of belongingness is recalled: “the characteristics of this Nikkei minority—Asian, no White—have been the causes for the exclusion of the idea and project of the Peruvian nation” (p. 127). Here two ideas are reinforced. First, Nikkei identity is sometimes reduced to physical features, which, to Peruvian society, evidence the Nikkei belongingness to an Asian country. Second, Nikkei culture and the physical features related to it are not considerate part of the Peruvian national diversity to most of the Peruvian citizens.

Even though the Japanese descendant community started a process “to open up and become integrated into Peruvian society after the ‘racial riot’ by Anti-Japanese movements in the 1930s” (Takenaka, 2004, p. 93) and nowadays Peruvian Nikkei citizens have a diverse cultural background, the *closed group* stereotype persists in society, where some even claim that several levels of Nikkei ethnic solidarity, particularly in the political field, exist to this day. Given such a strong image of the Nikkei community, it was not rare that during the presidential elections of 1990, a considerable number of non-Nikkei Peruvians were attacking Nikkei with racist and xenophobic comments accusing the latter population for pushing for ethnic solidarity towards the then-candidate Alberto Fujimori. Facing this context, Nikkei associations had to release public announcements denying official support for the then candidate (Melgar, 2020, p. 176).

These two stereotypes are just examples of a larger list, but they serve to illustrate how the Nikkei community is not fully considered as part of the Peruvian identity. They reinforce an image of the Nikkei community as a separated, racial closed foreign group that does not share the same concerns as other Peruvian nationals.

II. Methods

To understand how Nikkei artists are modifying the image of the Nikkei community, the following research questions are addressed: What are the perceptions of young Nikkei artists about the possibilities of art as a communicational instrument? What are the most common stereotypes that Peruvian Nikkei deal with? How are these stereotypes challenged by the narratives produced in Nikkei artists’ artwork? For this study, a focus group was held with three participants from the Nikkei Art Hall (YNAH) project hosted by the Peruvian Japanese Association in Lima, Peru. The YNAH project is developed in a collaborative space (workshop), and participants consciously express their ideas about Nikkei identity within the Peruvian context through their art. It was expected that the reflections on Nikkei identity by these participants would give some insights into other Nikkei artists’ perspectives.

First, an analysis of the works exhibited was carried out. Artists whose works presented innovative and challenging proposals regarding Nikkei identity in dialogue with stereotypes and who had more than one project focusing on discussing Nikkei identity within Peruvian society were highlighted. From a total of 17 artists, three female artists under 30 years of age who participated

in two (one during 2017 and two during 2019) of the six editions of the YNAH project were chosen for a focus group. A focus group was chosen as a data collection activity to stimulate dialogue between participants.

The topic of the focus group was the artists' perceptions on the possibilities of art to influence society and their motivations as Nikkei artists in spreading a more diverse image of the Nikkei community. The one-session focus group was held in Spanish through the Zoom platform and lasted just under 2 hours. As expected, the interaction was dynamic, and one artist's response triggered others' responses.

To analyze their responses, a content analysis was performed. The statements of the artists were interpreted based on the concept of identity as a multiple and dynamic creation. In this sense, first, the reference groups (the groups where they belong) that they dialogued with when building their identity as Nikkei were differentiated. Two reference groups were identified: 1) the Nikkei community and 2) Peruvian society. Second, the main stereotypes endured by the artists within each group were addressed, including how their Nikkei artworks related to these stereotypes. To understand the impact that the work of these YNAH project artists could have on the Nikkei community and Peruvian broader society, their answers regarding the communication possibilities of art were examined in relation to the theory presented above on art as a cultural product that generates new narratives. The participants are named as follows: "Artist 1" (movie maker), "Artist 2" (sculptor), and "Artist 3" (engraver).

III. Data Analysis and Discussion

The following section provides an analysis of the answers of the interviewees in relation to the possibilities of art to communicate the new narratives they produce within the context of Peruvian national identity building. All excerpts from the responses have been translated into English by the author. The original texts in the Spanish language are provided in the appendix.

III.1. Art for Alternative Narratives That Question Stereotypes Within the Reference Group

These artists acknowledged two reference groups they dialogued with: the Nikkei community and the wider Peruvian society. Within both groups, the artists expressed their faith in art as a transformational tool in society. This perspective was reinforced by their experiences in the YNAH project, where they acknowledged the impact of their art pieces on the audience.

First, art was described as a useful platform for addressing certain topics for the first time. Artist 3 described art as an instrument that "allows the conceptualization of ideas that can later be worked from . . . other media" or connected to other points of view. "It is like a first moment of

turning on the light” (Artist 3). Second, these artists recognized that art was a meeting moment or a contact point of interaction. Artist 3 explained that art had the ability “to unite or allow conversation and verbalization . . . from images” (Artist 3). These statements echoed Ghani and Fiske (2020), who proposed art as a bridge to connect people by sharing similar experiences and building meanings from there.

Consequently, these artists felt encouraged to continue developing art projects related to Nikkei identity. For example, Artist 1 felt encouraged to pursue her enterprise specifically after discovering the impact that her art had on worldwide immigrant descendants, including Okinawan descendants.

III.1.1. Reference Group 1: The Nikkei Community

In the case of the Nikkei community, the interviewees perceived art as a way to create (bring back) alternative stories to diversify the imagination about the Nikkei community among Japanese descendants so that a fixed notion of the Nikkei community could be challenged. By doing this, the artists were challenging old perceptions of the Nikkei community to validate different forms of being Nikkei inside the Nikkei community, so, in addition, more Nikkei could feel represented.

The artists placed their art production in a context where they considered that just “one image” (Artist 2) about the Nikkei community had been spread, so meaningful stories remained unknown, and a rigid monolithic image of the Nikkei was fostered within Peruvian society. The validation of the diversity inside the Nikkei community by artists is part of the reinvention process of the Nikkei community that new young existences are pushing. This could be inferred from the following declaration by Artist 2: “What is really loving your community? . . . criticizing it . . . is a way of showing your interest . . . We also want to improve it, right?” (Artist 2). For this artist, questioning fixed and rigid discourses regarding Nikkei identity to open the opportunity for renewed discourses to step in was a way to build a strong community.

In this context, art allows young artists to participate in identity-building discussions and voice their questionings and disagreements. Artist 1 found her initial motivation to address Nikkei identity through art by spreading anonymous Nikkei women’s stories. This artist described her initial thoughts toward the design of the art piece presented to the YNAH project (a short film entitled Yonseï [Fourth-Generation Nikkei]) in the following way:

So there I realized that through what I was going to create, I could put down this grain of sand [a Spanish expression for “giving a small contribution”] . . . Nikkei women also exist . . . , and they have also been present in all generations and have had . . . their conflicts. (Artist 1)

Moreover, the artists believed that the themes of Nikkei identity had yet to be exhausted and that art could still expose many new approaches. Artist 3 mentioned that the art about Nikkei identity that is being produced needs to address more complex discussions, such as intersectionality in identity formation, to understand that there are different ways to be a Nikkei and no one representation of Nikkei is more valid than the others.

These artists are pushing a broader understanding of the Nikkei community's dynamism and showing an image of the Nikkei community as a diverse group, full of cultural mixtures with a long-lasting presence in the country and in active interaction with other citizens. If, back in the day, highlighting traditions and values over blood-heritage as ethnic symbols was a step forward in keeping the community together (Takenaka, 1999), today, the next step of reinterpretation may be addressing diversity as a valid component of Nikkei identity, which could also impact on the composition of the Peruvian national identity. This image validates the experience of younger Nikkei generations with a highly diverse cultural background.

III.1.2. Reference Group 2: Broader Peruvian Society

In a society where a perspective about the Nikkei community as a homogenous, endogamic and closed group has been generalized, attending to diverse stories about that community and the way it participates in Peruvian society can be a step toward fighting the belief that the Nikkei community is a foreign group not involved in national affairs. The changes in the dominant narrative that appeared in the Nikkei artists' production contribute to avoiding misunderstandings lead by stereotypes and to considering Nikkei as part of Peruvian national diversity. Artist 3 assumed that the so-called "Nikkei artist" should "vindicate" the Nikkei community in Peruvian society.

Regarding the Peruvian broader society, artists believed that art should step aside from the stereotypical physical representations of Japanese descendants. Within a context where a Nikkei person continues to be seen as a "foreigner" (Artist 1) or as "invisible" (Artist 3), these artists thought that communicating Nikkei people's experiences in ways that every human could relate to was a valid path to explore. When participating in the YNAH project, Artist 2 wanted to go beyond the elements or symbols that could formally refer to the Nikkei to avoid the exoticization she faces as a Nikkei artist. In order to do that, she worked on the concept of blood purity, which she felt was a very dominant discussion within the Nikkei community when thinking about Nikkei identity. These concerns were also expressed by Artist 1, who questioned the necessity of presenting Japan-related symbols to represent Nikkei identity while asking herself about the way "Nikkei art" should look.

Artist 1 believed that "inserting these topics [minorities' struggles] without the 'tag' [an

explicit Japanese or Nikkei symbol] also helps other people to get involved” (Artist 1). The art piece could deal with problems common to migrant groups and minorities while fighting stereotypes toward the Nikkei community. Related to this, Artist 2 recalled that, during one of her guided tours, a visitor who was a Venezuelan immigrant strongly identified with her blood-purity-concept art piece. The artist commented as follows:

There are other ways we can also link to other groups, diasporas, and minorities, and . . . it does not have to be the more . . . let us say . . . evident Just because we are Nikkei, it does not mean that . . . when we talk about Nikkei identity . . . we are excluding another type of . . . [unintelligible]. (Artist 2)

In this way, art can function as a starting point to break the stereotypical perception of Nikkei as closed and distant and create narratives that show the similarities (including struggles for proper recognition) that the Nikkei community shares with other minorities.

By highlighting diversity in the Nikkei community, the artists were also challenging the narratives about Peruvian identity; at the same time, they were showing the existence of a vibrant community, such as the Nikkei, which challenged the idea of minorities as rigid identities. Moreover, the mixture of symbols and techniques that echoed Japanese culture, Peruvian cultures, and global influences testified to the dynamism of Peruvian identity and showed the interactions that cultural groups maintain.

As Bauman (2011) argued, the changes in individuals impact the community’s identity. Therefore, the young Nikkei artists’ new experiences are participating in the negotiations for modifying the official narrative of a community (either the Nikkei community or Peruvian society). Young Nikkei reaffirmations of their Nikkei identity in different formats (including art, YouTube videos, and social media pronouncements) and from different approaches are part of the dynamism that questions the fixed official characteristics of social belonging and shows the necessity of a wider narrative of the Peruvian national identity that includes all the diverse stakeholders.

IV. Conclusion

The Nikkei community faces a problematic panorama in Peruvian society. Contrary to what some people might think, the high value accorded to Nikkei in Peruvian society due to the recognition of positive stereotypes does not imply that the Nikkei community is acknowledged and integrated as a peer in mainstream society. Because of stereotypes (closed and homogenous), its identification as part of the national Peruvian identity is still questioned by some non-Nikkei. This situation creates an uncomfortable feeling among Nikkei people, particularly younger generations who feel completely identified with their Peruvian roots. Younger Nikkei are raising their voices to give visibility to this problematic. Among this group of Nikkei, some Nikkei artists have started

creating art pieces that address a context where Nikkei still struggle to be understood beyond stereotypes.

The data collected showed that the artists had a high trust in art as a socially transformative instrument. The artists also manifested a deep interest in diversifying the narrative about Nikkei identity within the Nikkei community and diversifying the understanding of Peruvian identity too. From their declarations, it could be inferred that they were pushing for a Peruvian national identity narrative where they and other neglected communities felt included. In other words, through their artworks, they are modifying the boundaries of the characteristics that define Peruvian identity.

Contrary to the stereotypes, which are barriers to properly understanding the complexity of cultural groups, these artists, through their artistic creations, embodied highly complex identity constructions. Art is mainly a communicative tool and can establish a profound connection among the artist and the audience. Both parties were engaged in a dialogical interaction to build the meanings of the art pieces. Therefore, in this study, art was identified as a bridge that produced contact between the Nikkei community and the audience, enabling the latter to reduce its prejudices and build a new knowledge of the former. According to the social theory of diversity, such an approach can reduce social conflict and produce social cohesion.

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Appendix

Next are the original texts in the Spanish language from the focus groups with Artist 1, Artist 2 and Artist 3 held online on September 19th, 2022.

Artist 1

“Entonces ahí me di cuenta que, a través de lo que yo iba a crear, podía... como... poner este granito de arena de... ummm... así también también existen... como... las mujeres nikkei. También han estado presentes... como que... en todas las generaciones y han tenido... como que... sus propios conflictos, no?” (Artist 1, p. 14).

“Insertar estos temas sin etiqueta ayudan a que otras personas también se acerquen” (Artist 1, p. 15).

Artist 2

“[...] también hay todo un tema de tener solamente una imagen” (Artist 2, p. 13).

“¿Y qué es realmente querer a tu comunidad, no? Si... si... es criticarla y tener que hacerlo para poder mejorarla. También es una forma de poder mostrar nuestro interés y que realmente no es que no queramos ser parte de la comunidad o creamos que hay cosas... Que sí funcionan en la comunidad, sí, pero también queremos mejorarla, no?” (Artist 2, p. 13)

“hay otras formas en las que nos podemos vincular también a otros grupos, otras diásporas, otras minorías y no es la forma más ...y no tiene que ser de la forma más... digamos evidente en el sentido de que ehhh... solo porque somos Nikkei e... no significa que cuando hacemos cosas cuando hablamos sobre la nikkeidad tampoco es que estamos excluyendo a otro tipo de...” (Artist 2, pp. 15).

Artist 3

“[el arte] permite el conceptualizar ideas que luego se pueden trabajar desde [...] otros soportes [...]. Es como un primer momento de prender la luz” (Artist 3, p. 13).

“[...] de la capacidad [del arte] de [...] poder unir o conversar, verbalizar si quieres, pero desde imagen” (Artist 3, p. 13).